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LANDSCAPES IN TROUBLE, LANDSCAPES IN ACTION

Theories and Practices Between Space, Art and Ecology

Edited by
Francesca Berni and Irene Bianchi

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

Scientific Committee

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Grazia Concilio

FOREWORD

This volume represents one of the outputs of the research Project PALIMPSEST,[1] funded by the European Union within the framework of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative. This policy was launched in 2021 support sustainability transition initiatives which are also "inclusive and beautiful, while respecting the diversity of places, traditions, and cultures".[2] The volume contributes to the reflection on the value and effectiveness of the PALIMPSEST approachas a way to experiment in action both NEB principles and perspectives, so contributing to its theoretical foundation as well as to its implementation. PALIMPSEST in fact is experimenting with the synergic effort of multiple forms of knowledge, ranging from environmental and spatial expertise to artistic and creative practices, to investigate to what extent and how this effort can achieve to transform practices within given landscape contexts being threatened by climate change and environmental crises.

PALIMPSEST takes inspiration from the original meaning of the Greek word παλίμψηστος (*palimpsestos*, 'again' + 'scrape'), which describes the process of writing over papyrus: existing text was scraped and washed off, the surface re-smoothed, and the new text written on the saved material. The PALIMPSEST Project adopts this re-writing perspective in how it looks at the landscape as a multidimensional manifestation (e.g., physical, ecological, societal, aesthetical, relational, cultural, cognitive) of the practices which are continuously "rewriting" it, while being an integral part of it. Landscape-related practices, although fragmented, are yet inherently plural and suitable to work as experimental fields for cognitive and material synergies that might allow exploring ways towards sustainability transition as well as generating new systems

1 See: www.palimpsest-project.eu
2 See: https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en

of traces, meanings, memory, signs. Coherently with this vision, the PALIMPSEST Project translates NEB principles by setting "rewriting" initiatives to reinterpret landscapes through artistic languages and landscape design approaches, expanding the field of inquiry and intervention.

The present volume originates from a series of interviews and from a body of research navigating the landscape-creativity-practice interplay. It offers both conceptual reflections and experiment-related insights, pointing toward possible modes of action coherent with the PALIMPSEST conceptual framework and proposing different lenses to look at sustainability transition as socio-cultural-environmental dynamics. It provides a plural and interdisciplinary constellation of perspectives which may inform future actions towards the innovative transformation of landscape-related practices. The rich collection of views and positions gathered by Francesca Berni and Irene Bianchi may suggest alternative and disruptive trajectories for new research and experiments leveraging on the generative capacity of the landscape to: act as a conceptual driver for new imaginaries to decolonise shared representations of both environmental crises and associated responses; make visible how practices may target shared visions and scenario towards sustainability; engage diverse cultural visions and professional abilities in collective action able to generate shared knowledge as a collective good; advocate creativity able to break through the constraints of habit and inertia, in accordance to the view of Marcel Proust.[3]

The landscape, both in this volume and in the PALIMPSEST Project, represents a "boundary object".[4] As being simultaneously concrete and abstract, the landscape (concept) is in fact both plastic enough to adapt to context needs and the constraints of the several agents employing it; yet it is robust enough to maintain a coherent identity across the different actions put in place to deal with it and the problems of which it is a manifestation. Moreover, it is suitable to bridge the gap between different social and cultural worlds as it is prone to host their different concerns and views, overcoming potential conflicts and offering more egalitarian

3 See Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 7 vols (Paris: Gallimard).

4 Star, S. L., Griesemer, J. R. (1989). Institutional Ecology, `Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39. *Social Studies of Science*, *19*(3), 387-420.

mode for communication and interaction. Finally, the landscape is used/adopted by different agents to declare their belonging to a specific sphere of action and, as such, it can arise from situations characterized by a plurality of views. Thanks to the present volume the landscape together with its making and its roles is described under a well differentiated set of views and theoretical approaches able to celebrate its generative power of collective action towards sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume stems from a series of interviews examining contemporary landscape transformations, their relationship with the environmental crisis, and the current and potential role of experimental design and artistic practices. The interviews were conducted within the framework of the Horizon Europe Project *PALIMPSEST*,[1] funded by the European Union under the New European Bauhaus (NEB) Initiative. The Editors acknowledge all those involved in the PALIMPSEST Project, which provided both the conceptual framework and the operational context for gathering the reflections presented in this volume.

We express our sincere gratitude to Grazia Concilio, Scientific Coordinator of the PALIMPSEST Project, for her continuous support. We also thank the members of the PALIMPSEST consortium and Advisory Board for the constant exchange of ideas that enabled shared reflections and collaborative design processes, some of which are documented in this volume.

This book relies on the contributions of scholars, artists, designers, and practitioners who generously shared their research, practices, and reflections. Their diverse perspectives and trajectories constitute the core of the volume and support a polyphonic exploration of landscapes in transformation.

We are also grateful to the Scientific Committee — Daniela Colafranceschi, Katerina Gkoltsiou, Pier Luigi Sacco, and Ilaria Valente for their critical insights, constructive feedback, and sustained engagement throughout the editorial process. Their contributions were essential in strengthening the volume's conceptual coherence and critical positioning.

1 The project "PALIMPSEST — Creative Drivers for Sustainable Living Heritage Landscapes" is funded by the European Union (Grant Agreement No. 101095160). However, the opinions expressed here are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any EU institution.

Francesca Berni, Irene Bianchi

LANDSCAPES IN TROUBLE, LANDSCAPES IN ACTION INTRODUCTION

Contemporary landscapes are undoubtedly "*in trouble*", as the title of this volume suggests. This condition stems from a series of interconnected crises that — in their global reach and local manifestations — profoundly affect how landscapes, as well as the territories they represent and embody as lived experiences transform. Climate change, ecological degradation, the reconfiguration of agricultural and industrial production systems, the redefinition of territorial structures and the erosion of the relationships between communities and their environments all contribute to this complex picture. Equally significant is the cultural shift that has challenged the very gaze through which we observe and interpret the transformations surrounding us. Taken together, these processes expose the fragility of the traditional categories through which landscapes have long been defined, designed and perceived. Building on this awareness, this volume aims to reframe the perspective, considering the landscape as both a *locus* and a *medium:* a privileged ground for questioning how we engage with change, and a testing space where practices of transformation can take shape.[1] If landscapes are the sites — material and immaterial — where the effects of multiple crises become visible, they are also potential laboratories for experimentation: places where new ecologies can be imagined, alternative relational constellations tested and *other* practices enacted that allow landscapes to "stay

1 The PALIMPSEST Project, from which this book originates, has treated the landscape as such a *locus* — both material and conceptual — where artistic, social and ecological practices overlap and challenge one another within the broader framework of the scientific research.

with the trouble".[2] Rather than succumbing to crisis or seeking "generic solutions",[3] this approach entails mobilising resources and envisioning new configurations of possibility. In this spirit, the collection of works turns its gaze to landscapes "*in action*", inviting reflections that extend well beyond the disciplinary boundaries of landscape studies or architecture and opening a broader inquiry into the transformations that shape the contemporary world.

In an effort to offer a *polyvocal* narrative on landscapes in transformation, this volume deliberately embraces a diversity of themes, perspectives and formats. Such heterogeneity is not incidental: it reflects the conviction that contemporary spaces — as Doreen Massey reminds us,[4] relational and contested — demand a plurality of voices and languages if they are to be both understood and transformed. This perspective is considered essential for several reasons. First, the transformations currently reshaping our environments are multiple in nature and scale, producing far-reaching effects on territorial systems as well as on the ecological, social and spatial dynamics that underpin landscape change. Second, this complexity cannot be confined within the disciplinary boundaries of landscape studies, nor approached through a single disciplinary lens or positionality; it instead calls for frameworks capable of connecting different forms of knowledge, as well as diverse ways of knowing. Third, addressing such transformations requires an attitude of listening — one that makes space for multiple perspectives and encourages encounters across domains of theory and practice. As several contributions in this volume demonstrate, there is an urgent need to weave together theoretical discourse and applied research, linking thinking and making, reflection and action. In this sense, the volume resonates with Bruno Latour's invitation: "*Belonging to a territory is the phenomenon most in need of rethinking and careful redescription; learning new ways to*

2 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

3 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

4 Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

inhabit the Earth is our biggest challenge".[5] The essays gathered here respond to that challenge, bearing witness — each in its own way — to the effort of reimagining how landscapes are lived, studied and transformed.

Translating these intentions into the making of this book meant, first of all, bringing together a constellation of diverse voices. The contributors reflect a wide range of backgrounds, generations, sensibilities and domains of practice. Alongside scholarly essays from landscape architecture, urban studies and philosophy, the volume also includes contributions from designers, artists and practitioners who bring embodied, experimental and situated approaches to the conversation. This diversity is not only representative but generative: it enables the encounter of various ways of knowing and making and brings to the forefront the plurality of practices through which landscapes are imagined, shaped and understood. Equally important was the decision to allow for a diversity of formats and modes of writing. The volume therefore combines personal narratives, theoretical essays and accounts of field-based experimentation, each contributing in its own way to a richer and more multifaceted understanding of landscapes in transformation. The structure of the book reflects this intent, unfolding across three interconnected sections — *Dialogues, Perspectives* and *Experiments* — each offering a distinct point of entry into the discussion. *Dialogues* foregrounds encounter across disciplines and practices, opening spaces for exchange and mutual questioning. *Perspectives* advances theoretical and critical reflections, gathering contributions that, through diverse lenses, illuminate key issues in contemporary debates. *Experiments* presents concrete practices and projects informed by the performing arts, design and landscape architecture. Taken together, these sections offer a multilayered exploration of contemporary landscapes, inviting readers to move fluidly among them and to recognise resonances that exceed disciplinary boundaries — echoing the same openness and relational stance that have guided this collective endeavour from the outset.

More specifically, each contribution offers a distinct perspective on landscape transformation. Some address the ecological and climatic

5 Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

crises that are reshaping the material conditions of landscapes; others examine their social, political and cultural dimensions, revealing how communities, practices and imaginaries are deeply entangled with their environments. Further contributions highlight experimental and art-based methodologies that explore new modes of engagement, inquiry and collaboration. These contributions do not claim to define or exhaust the field. Instead, they open multiple pathways for reflection and practice — each grounded in a situated perspective, yet resonating across contexts and disciplinary boundaries.

The *Dialogues* section gathers informal conversations, reworked from a series of interviews curated by the editors between July 2023 and February 2025. Four interlocutors with distinct backgrounds offer their perspectives on transforming landscapes, guiding us through personal, professional and artistic trajectories. Portuguese landscape architect João Nunes offers his reading of the landscape as dynamic, layered and relational. Drawing on agronomy, architecture and art, he argues that design should engage with the energies of each site, fostering fertility, diversity and resilience while involving communities in a collective, ethical and creative process of transformation. Giacomo Borella reflects on architectural design as a situated and relational practice, illustrating it through project examples rooted in reuse, self-construction and improvisation. Drawing on Ivan Illich and Lucien Kroll, he calls for renewed attention to the value of tacit knowledge — often marginalised by professionalisation — and envisions the landscape as a shared world of ruins and possibilities. Francesco Careri retraces some of the experiences emerging from *Stalker* and *Osservatorio Nomade*, focusing on the importance of direct engagement with urban spaces. His reflections on walking as a relational practice invite us to reconsider marginal territories as spaces of experience and design, where the landscape appears as a living and transformative entity, shaped by collective action yet capable of persisting and resisting beyond human presence. Finally, Marta Cuscunà describes how her performative practice explores human–more-than-human relations and introduces *Earthbound*, where she stages hybrid beings — the *Camilles* — imagined as speculative kin born from humans and endangered species. Inspired by Donna Haraway, the performance delves into practices of care, coexistence and multispecies survival in a post-crisis world.

The central section, *Perspectives*, gathers a series of contributions that reflect on the transformations of the landscape, offering interpretative tools and viewpoints that open fertile, action-oriented avenues. Taken together, these essays advocate a deeper integration of knowledge and methods, showing how such "cross-pollination" can generate new ways of understanding, inhabiting and transforming the world we share. Opening this section, Michael Jakob examines the dual meaning of landscape as both an artistic genre and a mental construct, rooted in Eurocentric traditions and shaped by painting and visual technologies. He critiques the reduction of reality to static images and contrasts this with ecology's emphasis on instability and change. His essay calls for moving beyond static interpretations of landscape towards creative and ecological practices that respond to contemporary environmental urgencies. Massimo Venturi Ferriolo offers a wide-ranging reflection on the notion of landscape. Rejecting fixed definitions, he calls for a new language rooted in intuition, myth and lived experience. Landscape is understood as a stratification of relations and practices over time — an open field where humans, nature and culture intertwine, requiring creativity, doubt and practical wisdom to imagine viable futures. Also focusing on the notion of landscape, Annalisa Metta explores it as a metastable, fragile and ever-changing condition shaped by the intertwined forces of nature, society and culture. She highlights the widening gap between theory and practice in landscape design, which is often constrained by standardised procedures and ecological rhetoric. Her essay calls for new alliances between critical research and design, weaving together theoretical reflection and project-based experience. Following this, Sanna Lehtinen addresses how aesthetic values shape human–environment relations and can drive sustainability transformations. Through the notion of "aesthetic choice" she links perception, practice and care across generations. In her reflection, creative and artistic interventions emerge as catalysts for shared meaning, sense of place and collective stewardship, making landscapes culturally vibrant and ecologically resilient environments. Irene Bianchi explores coexistence as a conceptual lens for rethinking human–environment relations in landscape and urban studies. Tracing its evolution from ecological theory to post-human and relational approaches, she places the concept in dialogue with other that, across disciplines, propose alternative

forms of interrelation. This perspective reveals landscapes as hybrid, contested and interdependent assemblages, calling for design practices grounded in mutual recognition and care. Giambattista Zaccariotto traces how conceptual art has engaged with water as both material and metaphor. His essay presents water as a research tool connecting art, science and climate discourse, foregrounding its agency in shaping ecological awareness and creative practice. Matteo Vianello reflects on the Alpine landscape through the melting glacier, a site where material reality and cultural imagination diverge. Drawing on Doreen Massey's concept of "immigrant mountains", he reveals how glaciers — long framed as eternal and sublime — are in fact unstable, animate entities. Tracing their aesthetic and scientific representations, he exposes the temporal rift between their material fragility and the enduring imagery of permanence, urging us to rethink landscape as mutable, performative and deeply entangled with loss. Finally, Francesca Berni investigates how small-scale creative and scientific practices — framed through the concepts of mutual aid, fra-agility and co-agency — expand our understanding of landscape as a living, shared process. Combining theoretical reflection with three case studies, she observes how acts of care, listening and situated collaboration can, even at a local scale, spark broader reflections on how to live and transform the world responsibly.

The third and final part, *Experiments*, gathers a selection of situated practices and projects from the fields of performing arts, landscape architecture and design. Each contribution approaches artistic experimentation as both inquiry and action — exploring how the interplay between creative gestures, spatial practices and collective processes can generate new ways of perceiving, inhabiting and transforming landscapes. Luca Befera and Oriana Persico trace the evolution of *PneumOS*, an artwork by the research centre "HER: She Loves Data", which transforms environmental data into breath, sound and movement. As part of HER's broader exploration of data as a generative and relational medium, this poetic project translates air-quality data into the rhythmic motion of a silicone lung, allowing participants to *experience* pollution as a bodily sensation. By connecting human and non-human forms of breathing, *PneumOS* creates a shared ecology where data, bodies and environments co-evolve — inviting us to reconsider invisible air dynamics as a

collective experience. Natalia Agati presents *Orìbasia Corviale*, a performative project that reactivates the rooftop of Rome's Corviale housing complex — an urban experiment turned symbol of decay — through a collective ritual of ascent. By transforming technical materials into alternative spatial devices, the work invites residents to reclaim their building's *panorama* and rediscover a sense of belonging. Revisiting Corviale's modernist legacy as a "disenchanted" urban monument, Agati proposes re-enchantment as both a cultural and political act — reweaving ties between people, space and the sensible world. Finally, Sergio Rodríguez Estévez, María Salas Mendoza Muro, Francisco José Pazos García (Nomad Garden) and Estelle Jullian present *Songs of Nearby Earth (SONE)*, a project that connects climate adaptation with local flamenco rituals and ceramic experimentation in the Andalusian town of Jerez de la Frontera. Through a bioregional and collaborative approach, SONE seeks to regenerate bonds between community and environment, proposing a "nature–culture-based solution" where adaptation to climate change emerges from the integration of traditional practices, creative experimentation and environmental care.

A transversal reading of the contributions gathered in this volume reveals a set of recurring themes that propose possible directions for future reflection. A first area of convergence concerns the very notion of *landscape* — its multiple meanings and contemporary significance. Far from being a fixed or univocal category, landscape emerges as a plural and polymorphic concept: at once a theoretical construct, a perceived environment and a lived space. It thus becomes a field in which the transformations of socio-spatial and ecological configurations materialise and become visible — a catalyst for understanding the processes that shape our present. In this sense, landscape operates as both a theoretical and material *locus* where design, environment and societal challenges intersect, and where possibilities for action are continuously redefined. Rather than stable backgrounds or aesthetic objects, landscapes emerge as *dynamic*, *processual* entities, constantly reshaped by multiple forces and crises. The contributions collectively suggest understanding landscape not as a static heritage to be preserved in isolation, but as a living, evolving system in which conflicts and opportunities for renewal are inscribed. It also becomes an "environment" of observation and action — a medium through

which diverse dynamics of change can be perceived, interpreted and activated. Another transversal theme concerns the *synaesthetic* dimension of landscape. Engaging with landscapes involves mobilising the full range of senses — sight, hearing, touch, smell and movement. Landscapes implicate the body as a whole, generating multisensory experiences that traverse aesthetic, ecological and political dimensions. This expanded sensorium calls for a richer form of attention, one that acknowledges how landscapes affect and are affected by embodied perception. Finally, several contributions highlight the *political* dimension of acting *with* the landscape. This entails reclaiming and reactivating spaces, nurturing communities and reconnecting with non-human beings. It also requires experimenting with methodologies and tools that resist instrumentalisation, instead cultivating practices grounded in care, reciprocity and shared responsibility. In line with the research framework from which this volume originates, these perspectives invite us to reconnect the notion of *landscape* with that of *land* — or *territory* — as a living *palimpsest*.[6] Following Secchi's definition of the palimpsest as "a stratified warehouse of objects, signs and their meanings",[7] this approach foregrounds the layered, dynamic nature of landscapes as archives of human and non-human traces. It emphasises how every landscape is both the product of historical sedimentations and the site of ongoing transformations — where past and present continually overlap, generating new possibilities for inhabitation and interpretation.

In this sense, a second field of reflection emerging from the transversal reading of the contributions concerns the dynamics through which this palimpsest is transformed, as well as the need to adopt situated, practice-based and experimental perspectives. First, the centrality of *practice*: moving beyond the dichotomy between thought and action, the volume highlights their inseparability, affirming that reflection is itself a form of action, just as every action carries theoretical and imaginative dimensions within it. As Pier Luigi Crosta reminds us, "the territory is the use that is

6 André Corboz, "The Land as Palimpsest", *Diogenes*, 31.121 (1983), 12–34.
7 Bernardo Secchi, "Territorio, pianificazione del", in *Enciclopedia delle scienze sociali* (Rome: Treccani, 1998).

made of it",[8] and, in a similar way, landscape emerges as an arena where the practices that shape it give rise to forms of cultural, social and ecological negotiations we urgently need to consider. A second recurring theme is the importance of *experimentation*. In times of multiple crises, initiating experiments that "play" with the static and dynamic elements that compose these lands — or *landscapes* — as palimpsests becomes crucial. These experiments can help overturn perspectives, reactivate forms of engagement and test alternative modes of collaboration and imagination. In particular, the contributions underscore the value of combining and hybridising different languages, tools and conceptual devices beyond siloed disciplinary boundaries to reframe problems, redefine challenges and open space for new possibilities. This leads to a final reflection on the role of *creative action*, a thread that implicitly runs through the volume. What emerges is the need to embrace a broad understanding of creativity — one that goes beyond the use of specific artistic or codified languages and instead refers to lateral, oblique perspectives that disrupt habitual modes of thinking and acting,[9] expanding the horizons through which new questions and alternative futures can be imagined.[10] In this sense, creativity is not an embellishment with an ancillary role; rather, it can become a critical transformative resource, allowing the *window of opportunity* to be seized (to recall a socio-ecological resilience lexicon) by mobilising open-ended, non-linear ways of thinking and doing.

In summary, this volume presents the landscape as a living entity that opens to the world, not as a passive backdrop but as a continuous process of negotiation with the present. Landscape is heritage, but not in a static/nostalgic sense — it is a heritage in motion, contested and redefined, carrying multiple temporalities and meanings. By exploring these dimensions, the volume invites readers to recognise landscape as a dynamic milieu in the processes of transformation, a field where crises can become opportunities for creativity, care and collective reimagination.

8 Pier Luigi Crosta, *Pratiche: il territorio è l'uso che se ne fa* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2010).

9 Rick Rubin, *The Creative Act: A Way of Being* (London: Penguin, 2023).

10 Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk, Eva Burgering, RADIUS, *Worlding Ecologies: Art, Science and Activism Towards Climate Justice* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2023).

PART I
DIALOGUES

A conversation with João Nunes

LANDSCAPE AS A LIVING PALIMPSEST
Designing Between Permanence and Change in the Human Habitat

João Nunes, Portuguese landscape architect and founder of PROAP (1985), conceives landscape as a dynamic process. At PROAP this vision translates into a practice that treats landscape as a living, transforming field. His professional and academic work are closely connected, fostering ongoing research and experimentation. As a professor and lecturer at international institutions, Nunes advances a relational, process-based approach to landscape that frames the dialogue which follows.

João Nunes, let's start from the beginning: what led you to choose landscape architecture, and how did your personal background and early influences shape that decision?

My relationship with landscape began at an early age, shaped both by family ties to agriculture and by the profound impression of a particular place, precisely the garden of the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. As a child, I experienced this garden as if it were nature itself. Only later did a friend, whose father worked with the landscape architect Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles, reveal to me that it was not 'natural' at all, but entirely designed and constructed. Behind it lay a deep knowledge of plants, wind, soil, and topography. I was fascinated by the idea that something artificial could so convincingly embody nature. Around the age of thirteen, I visited Ribeiro Telles' office for the first time. It was then that I realised landscape architecture was the profession I wanted to pursue. I went on to study at the Instituto Superior de Agronomia in Lisbon, a programme with strong agronomic foundations that had offered landscape architecture since the 1950s. After graduating, I began professional practice in 1985. Five years later, I moved to Barcelona to undertake a master's degree at ETSAB (Escola Tècnica Superior

d'Arquitectura de Barcelona), where I was able to deepen my understanding of architecture, an area I had felt was lacking in my earlier education. In parallel, from the age of sixteen I studied the arts in the studio of painter Joaquim Rodrigo. I have always maintained an informal but continuous engagement with artistic practices, such as drawing, painting, and other forms of expression. Together, these three strands — agronomy, architecture, and art — form the foundation of my education.

What is your definition of "landscape"?

Put simply, landscape is the human habitat, the artificial construct that mediates the relationship between people and their environment, making it inhabitable. I would also like to pause briefly on the project's title[1] — which evokes a concept I consider essential for understanding the layered and stratified nature of landscape tectonics.

How do you conceive the process of making landscape, and what role does professional design play in navigating its inherent complexity?

Landscape is shaped not only by technical processes but also by political, economic, and social forces. Even everyday acts of consumption contribute towards this. Choosing butter or olive oil, for example, sustains very different environments. Since landscape is a collective construction of human habitat, everything — from clothing to transport — plays a part, often unconsciously. More explicit interventions, such as EU agricultural policies, river management, energy strategies, and infrastructure planning, also leave a profound imprint. Design has a role to play, often modest, yet meaningful, within this complexity. Crucially, any design approach must begin with the recognition that landscape is never

1 This statement refers specifically to the Horizon PALIMPSEST project, within the framework and over the course of which this interview took place. (Editors' note)

static. Rather than imposing fixed images, designers should engage with the energies and dynamics of a site, working with them instead of against them. Like sailing, the task is to harness existing flows, intervening lightly to allow natural evolution. Resistance to these forces inevitably results in unsustainable energy waste. The aim of design is to create a dynamic balance, to introduce principles that enable the landscape to evolve, generating forms that respond to its needs and limits. Landscape architecture thus acts as a guide to natural metabolic processes, adding cultural and artistic meaning while meeting functional requirements. Its purpose is to enhance fertility, productivity, and diversity through thoughtful, contextually aware interventions. Intervention is not simply the addition of new elements, but the redefinition of relationships among entities and agencies. Topographical modifications, for instance, have long been essential in agriculture for soil and water conservation, and in urban contexts for infrastructure and accessibility. Good design integrates these demands into a coherent whole, e.g. by balancing agricultural resource management with urban comfort and mobility. Ultimately, every landscape project, whether a park or another form of intervention, redesigns an existing place, guided both by functional objectives and by the unique characteristics of the site.

In your view, what role can creative and artistic practices play in enriching landscape design, and how might they contribute to building more sustainable and resilient environments?

First and foremost, we must acknowledge the ethical responsibility of passing on a world that is not diminished but enriched to future generations. This requires safeguarding and enhancing three core values, namely primary productivity, diversity, and identity. As landscape architects, we can neither afford to exhaust what we have inherited, nor indulge in formal vanity where appearance overrides substance. Our task is to preserve, and where possible increase, these values through pragmatism and efficiency, always with a focus on people and their relationship to place. Creativity should serve humbly. Its true value lies in strengthening these principles and the human connections that surround them. Yet creativity is not limited to human practice. It can be found throughout ecosystems, where

living beings are interconnected by vital functions, continually shaping and reshaping the environments that sustain them. Their presence and activity leave dynamic, sometimes subtle, imprints on the landscape, signals of relationships that influence other communities within the same system. While such interactions are more evident in animals and human cultures, they are no less significant in plants. A tree's shadow, for example, alters light availability, shaping the life beneath it and creating a temporary yet meaningful spatial pattern. Similarly, leguminous plants fix nitrogen through symbiosis with bacteria, chemically transforming the soil and influencing neighbouring vegetation, revealing complex ecological relations and a form of creativity that extends beyond immediate proximity. For millennia, human knowledge and intervention have sought to understand and harness these processes to secure survival and abundance. What once began as the recognition of individual species crucial to food and survival, especially during the hunter-gatherer era, must today expand into a broader awareness of the intricate ecological networks that sustain life. This expanded perspective should guide creative landscape design, ensuring it nurtures and reinforces these vital interconnections.

How does your work — both conceptually and in practice — address the interconnected challenges of environmental sustainability, climate adaptation, and social justice?

Our practice always begins with the site, rather than ideology or personal preference. Each project emerges from a deep understanding of the place, namely its historical, geological, climatic, ecological, and social dimensions. Within this perspective, sustainability should be self-evident as it means designing living systems that endure, not producing temporary images. This responsibility is particularly clear in publicly funded projects. Solutions must be maintainable, functional over time, and embedded within the local environment and culture. Too often, green spaces are conceived as decorative backdrops, prioritising appearance over resilience and community value. True sustainability requires a shift from consumption to cultivation, understanding plants as living beings bound to knowledge and care, rather than as disposable

ornaments. Conceptually, our work is about interpreting and decoding the "landscape code", recognising that every intervention replaces an existing system with a new one. Such substitutions must strengthen the site's ecological and functional autonomy. Shaping terrain — its slopes, orientations, and water flows — can alter microclimates and vegetation patterns, generating new functional and sensory relationships. This process demands minimising disturbance, reusing local materials, and introducing inputs that sustain the system's metabolism. Our aim is to harmonise existing and new orders within the landscape, ensuring that transformation respects and enhances both natural and cultural systems. At the same time, we engage with the emotional and perceptual dimensions of place. Through sensory elements (light, shadow, wind, sound), we seek to create awareness and empathy between people and their environment, reinforcing the landscape's social role as a shared living space. Finally, our understanding of landscape acknowledges that transformation is never purely anthropocentric. Many species shape their own environments through symbiotic processes, offering models and methods that inspire our practice. The landscape is thus a complex web of relationships between the physical territory and its diverse communities, human and non-human alike. Supporting this multifaceted coexistence is central to environmental justice. This shift, from consumption to cultivation, lies at the heart of sustainability and justice in landscape design.

You describe landscape as a layered infrastructure of traces — ecological, cultural, and historical. How does this understanding shape the way you approach collaboration across disciplines and with local communities?

Portuguese culture has been shaped over centuries through contact and exchange with African, Arab, Celtic, Gothic, Latin, Greek, and many other traditions. We are hybrid by nature. By observing ourselves, we realise everything we do stems from a mixture. This cultural condition fosters openness. We embrace hybridity and resist purity. In my practice, this attitude naturally extends to collaboration with other professionals and disciplines. We seek multiplicity, not uniformity. Although this

often generates complexity, negotiation, and occasional conflict, it ultimately enriches and strengthens our work. In this sense, landscape can be understood as the accumulation of traces left on a territory by different communities, layered over its original land features and other transformations, some unrelated to living systems. Landscape is also the web of relations these traces represent, including relations among individuals, within and across communities, and between these communities and the territory that sustains them. It is at once an objective and subjective construct, analysed through ecological and social patterns, yet always filtered by (individual) culture, habits, and perception. Landscape is, therefore, a dynamic process. More than a visible condition, it is a functioning system in which what we perceive is only a manifestation. Human communities are paradigmatic in this regard, not only for their transformative impact, but because they survive precisely by altering their environment to meet needs, reshaping both the world and themselves in the process. Today, however, widespread mistrust of human intervention, fuelled by disillusionment with destructive acts, has given rise to a simplistic moral dichotomy. Untouched nature is deemed inherently good, human-made environments inherently bad. This stance is dangerous. It discourages evaluation based on quality, meaning, or effectiveness, condemning human action by default. It fosters conservatism that resists change, denying humanity's capacity to create value, beauty, or complexity. It sets the "artificial" in opposition to a largely fictional "natural." In Europe, virtually no landscape is untouched by human hands. The Venetian Lagoon, for example, often described as a natural ecosystem, survives only thanks to centuries of human interventions that have shaped its water flows and sediment dynamics. Hence, when collaborating across disciplines and communities, we approach landscape as an evolving infrastructure of traces, where every gesture and choice carries transformative potential. Mixture is not only inevitable but often beneficial. Much of our work lies in understanding the specific "mixture" of a site. Since we cannot be geologists, physicists, meteorologists, climate experts, and engineers at once, we draw on specialists to interpret each place through their own expertise. They reveal its history, social context, hydrogeology, and spatial-temporal relations. Landscape is the visible expression

of these ongoing processes of survival and coexistence. Human communities, through their unique strategies of transforming the environment, remain central to this process. Therefore, we also involve philosophers, sociologists, poets, physicians, painters, and artists, listening to the site as if it were a chorus, each voice revealing a different facet of the place. Sometimes, a hydraulic engineer may provide decisive insights. The challenge is that this approach resists stereotypes. Each project becomes a prototype, rooted in the specific conditions of a site. No solution applies universally, no style or method can be repeated. We must constantly adapt to new circumstances, and I see this not as a limitation but as a strength. From this perspective, infrastructure is not separate from landscape but part of it. Every human intervention leaves traces, and these traces, in turn, shape the landscape. Our responsibility is, therefore, not to deny transformation, but to carry it out with care, humility, and openness to others.

What makes a landscape project capable of "healing" without erasing the memory and complexity of a place?

A good example is our work in Angola, where we sought to counter the transformation of the *musseques*, the informal settlements. We aimed to prevent the displacement of residents by helping the authorities recognise that these organic structures already possess an internal logic. They have public spaces, ties to place, and established forms of functioning. To erase all this and replace it with a design conceived by someone who has never experienced the site is to create something poorer than what could emerge by building on the place's history and sense of public life. The goal was to preserve existing communities while integrating newcomers, who inevitably bring economic and social change, a form of gentrification. The real difficulty lies in reading the site for what it truly is, and in being genuinely interested in its specific conditions. If you arrive with a preconceived image, or with impressions drawn from a superficial glance, you will never reach the right project. The form and structure of the design must emerge from what already exists. These conditions are complex and arise from multiple domains. My academic background, rooted in agronomic studies, opened my eyes

to the natural sciences. It gave me a kind of intuition, a "bell" that rings when I realise I need a specialist's expertise to grasp something crucial, something that might even become the very heart of the project. This might be an issue of drainage, soil conservation, or contamination. We never know in advance where the key insight will come from. It may emerge from any disciplinary corner. The only constant is the need for a deep, genuine interest in understanding the site. Landscape, by definition, is in continuous transformation. It accumulates the overlapping traces of all communities, cultures, and beliefs that have shaped it over time. Every gesture of survival leaves a form, a structure, a trace, whether a medieval castle or a modern highway. In this sense, infrastructure too is landscape. Yet while we instinctively celebrate old aqueducts as "picturesque", we are less inclined to see contemporary infrastructures — highways, power lines, railways — as part of the same living palimpsest. Nevertheless, all infrastructures, past or present, reflect the beliefs of a community and the ways it inhabits the world. They alter not only the land but also our relationship with it by transforming places into passages, while at the same time weaving new forms of connection and meaning. If healing is about reconnection (to place, to memory, to possibility), then recognising these often overlooked traces becomes essential. Like a palimpsest, the landscape is filled with signs. Some are instantly visible, while others remain hidden until we learn how to read them. Once again, what matters most is attentiveness.

How does the unexpected affect your design decisions and the way a project evolves over time?

I count on the unexpected. In fact, I await it, always ready to be surprised. For me, it is tied to the question of what is permanent and what is temporary within a project. Reading the site allows us to distinguish which elements must remain stable and which can be flexible, adaptable, or subject to change. Hence, structuring a project means not only defining its design, but also its structural relationship to time, i.e. its capacity to endure or to transform. Design already implies hierarchy. We decide that this element is more important than that, this one may last five years, another ten.

The history of places shows the same pattern. Some traces persist for centuries, others disappear in a few years. Each trace encodes relationships among individuals of the same species, between different species, and between living communities and the territory they inhabit. Some are fleeting, like the shifting shadow of a tree that modulates light for the plants below; others are enduring, like the chemical imprint left in the soil by nitrogen-fixing plants in symbiosis with bacteria. All contribute to the living memory of a site, and thus to the project's ecology. To design, then, is to enter into dialogue with this system of presences, absences, and interactions. It means recognising that what we call "landscape" is not merely what we see, but the manifestation of processes — biological, cultural, geological, political — some visible, others hidden. A project, I believe, must embrace this same complexity. It should hold together the slow permanence of matter and the sudden irruption of the unexpected. This is why I never try to predetermine everything from the outset. I leave space for surprise, for what cannot be planned, because the life of a place is always more inventive than we are.

Have any books, projects, or personal experiences been particularly influential in shaping your approach to public space, care, and durability?

Visiting gardens and public spaces in poorer countries can be profoundly enlightening. It is troubling to see how many projects celebrated on social media or by international juries are driven more by aesthetics and visibility than by durability, meaning, or contextual sensitivity. We should, instead, be learning from Africa, Brazil, India — and even from Portugal, as it was only a few years ago. These contexts show us how to build public spaces economically, often with astonishing results. I experienced this first-hand with my first submission to the Rosa Barba Prize[2] at the Barcelona Biennial, which

2 *The Rosa Barba Casanovas International Landscape Architecture Prize*, established in 1999 within the framework of the *Barcelona International Landscape Biennial* and supported by the Banc Sabadell Foundation, is awarded biennially to a single built landscape project of outstanding professional merit. Here, the author refers to the submission made in the context of the inaugural edition in 1999. (Editors' note)

cost one-fifth of the cheapest competing entry. That experience was decisive. We have always worked with limited budgets, which forces us to invent, to create quality with very little. It is also a cultural matter. Starting in Portugal in the 1980s, we knew budgets could not be exceeded. If we wanted to build public space, we had to do so economically. This connects directly to sustainability. How do you create something that costs less but lasts longer? How do you shape space not through expense but through intelligent design? And how do you ensure that durability is linked to maintenance, cultural care, and everyday use? In this sense, cities are not only made of space, they are made of time. They are sediments of relationships, encounters, and shared rituals. Cities materialise the desire to be together in streets, squares, and fountains. Public spaces are not neutral containers. They are time capsules of conviction, memory, and care. Parks and gardens are particularly telling. Their matter is ephemeral, yet what endures is the emotional connection. They remain the most stable parts of the city not because of material permanence, but because of the intensity of meaning they hold. So I return to the starting point: visit these places, learn from them. Cities grow from conviction, from accumulated layers of meaning, and from silences that leave space for future possibilities.

A conversation with Giacomo Borella

WORKING WITH WHAT IS THERE
Landscapes of Relation, Resistance, and Repair

Giacomo Borella is an architect and co-founder of Studio Albori. In this dialogue, he shares a critical and committed reflection on architectural practice as a situated, relational, and materially grounded act. Navigating between construction, language, and critical distance, Borella advocates for a form of design that questions the ideology of performance and remains open to political and ecological engagement.

To begin, could you please introduce yourself and Studio Albori? What distinguishes your practice?

Studio Albori is a small architectural practice, founded about 30 years ago. It is a fairly normal, small-sized office that always works on concrete, real-life projects. We are not landscape designers, and we work across a wide range of project types, mostly small-to medium scale, often involving the transformation and reuse of existing buildings. In each project, we also try to incorporate the reuse of materials and components — sometimes successfully, sometimes less so. Another distinctive feature of our practice emerged when, years ago (we were younger at that time), we grew somewhat tired of conventional professional routines. That led us to start building some constructions with our own hands. Sometimes, we manage to construct an entire project in this way. More often, whenever possible, we aim to include at least one element of hands-on work, of something we build directly, even in most “normal” projects where we otherwise play a more traditional architectural role.

Even though Studio Albori doesn't specifically focus on landscape design, your work clearly engages with ideas of place, reuse, and transformation. From your own perspective, how would you define a 'landscape'?

I have chosen a quotation by Ivan Illich — my hero —, written in 1992, around the same time we founded our practice. It offers a quite apocalyptic view of the contemporary landscape: "No matter where you travel, the landscape is recognisable. All over the world it is cluttered with cooling towers and parking lots, agribusiness and megacities". The second part of the quote, though framed in catastrophic terms, carries a kind of hope: "But now that the development ends — earth was the wrong planet for this kind of building — the growth projects rapidly turn into ruins, junk among which we must learn to live". It's certainly not a picturesque description, but I believe it still represents (more than thirty years later) a necessary starting point for anyone working within the human habitat today. It contains at least two crucial insights: first, that for certain forms of constructions, the Earth is not the right planet; and second, that we must learn to live with and build with the ruins, with the remnants left behind by development and modernity.

What defines or constitutes a landscape, in your view? And how do you understand the role that different kinds of practices — creative, professional, or everyday — play in shaping landscapes, and by extension, in the making of architecture?

I'd say we try not to over-conceptualise, at least not in the way that has dominated over the past quarter-century in architecture, where the "concept" becomes a compulsory design tool that comes before anything else. It's an idea that comes from the world of communication and advertising, where conveying a message or selling a product requires a clear, strong, and simple concept. But in the anonymous, vernacular, pre-modern architecture and landscape, which in many ways represent the horizon to which we always refer, you don't find anything of this sort. If we could ask a XII century Japanese peasant building his house, or a Dogon farmer constructing his granary, "what's the concept behind your

construction?", they would probably respond: "What the hell are you talking about? I'm building something with what I've got… I take the stones from up there… the sun is there, the river is down that way, this part gives us shade, that one keeps the insects out, and my daughter is painting these little flowers to make it more cheerful…". He would speak of many different things, all specific, all grounded, but very few that could be recognised as a "concept" in the modern sense. To return to your question: for me, the boundaries between creative, professional and everyday practices are not at all clear. Maybe, the more those lines blur and overlap, the more vibrant and interesting a society becomes. There is often little true "creativity" in what is currently classified as "creative" practices! Just look at fashion or product design. I can hardly imagine anything more formulaic (or less imaginative) than Milan, my own city, during the much-celebrated Design Week. Not to speak of its devastating effects on the city itself. So, what do we mean by "creative" today? And how does all of this interact with what we call "landscape"?

There is an old book by the architect Lucien Kroll, whom I greatly admire, titled "Everything is landscape".[1] It might be a bit simplistic, but it clearly expresses the idea that everything must be seen as part of a whole, part of a shared world. From this perspective, architecture and landscape are utterly merged.

Architectural design processes that engage with landscape often draw on forms of tacit or implicit knowledge — rooted in how people understand and interact with their environment — which have traditionally played a key role in shaping the value of landscapes. How do you view the contribution of this intangible dimension to the way we construct space today?

Not an easy question to answer. Perhaps we can say that the pre-modern landscape emerged from the interplay between the natural environment and a wide range of human activities (work, everyday practices and so on), perhaps the very forms of tacit knowledge you refer to. In modern times, this pattern has been gradually

1 Lucien and Simone Kroll, *Tout est paysage: une architecture habitée* (Paris: Sens & Tonka, 2012)

replaced by a landscape produced primarily by professionals, i.e. individuals formally trained and authorised to design and shape space — engineers, architects, landscape designers, and others. And at the same time, human activities expanded in both scale and nature, producing impacts on the environment that have drastically altered the balance of the biosphere. The main ingredients of this contemporary landscape are thus a plundered, pillaged nature and an artificial habitat, lacking in life. In this context, we often find that landscapes designed by professionals only, what we might call "professionalised" landscapes, tend to appear frozen. Something is missing, and often in our cities such spaces require constant surveillance, even security guards, to be maintained. Under the banner of professionalisation and specialisation, we have dismantled the network of tacit knowledge that once helped to shape the urban environment. This has led to a paradoxical situation: professionals, politicians and experts now realise that something fundamental is lacking. In response, they seek to compensate this absence with a kind of "professional colonisation" of everyday life. We now have consultants for participation, mediators, facilitators, instructors in self-empowerment instructors. A similarly grotesque dynamic is playing out in the countryside. Where industrialisation and automation in agriculture are generously subsidised, while at the same time large sums are spent attempting to mitigate their devastating effects on both the environment and society. At this point, we might go back to Ivan Illich who, half a century ago, defined "counterproductivity" as a structural feature of modernity.

Could you describe how both the conceptual and practical aspects of your work engage with issues such as environmental sustainability, climate adaptation, and social justice? For instance, I would be interested in hearing about your project Geografie Extravaganti.[2]

2 Studio Albori, *Extravagant geographies: places and routes of migration*, workshop and exhibition, Rome, 2010. "The places of migration recounted and reconstructed by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants through miniatures, models and drawings made during a workshop held at the Italian language school of the Asinitas non-profit organization in Rome. The collection of miniatures and drawing produced during a workshop becomes one large installation-landscape in an exhibition at

This series of works is quite different from our usual practice. A group of friends of mine who were teaching Italian to refugees and migrants saw the architectural models in our studio and wondered whether similar miniatures could be used in their classes. They imagined that building models of places central to students' life could help them re-process their often-troubled memories — experiences often felt in the classroom but hard to express in words. They thought model making could also be an effective tool for language learning. We organised workshops with the Asinitas School in Rome and with Asnada in Milan. Each student was invited to build a model of a significant place from their life before migrating, and another one representing their current situation in Rome or Milan. We also asked them to depict an intermediate place from their journey. For this, we proposed a quicker technique: oil pastel on paper. The delicacy of this technique seemed more suited for describing passages that were often painful. Ultimately, these projects generated a large collection of miniature places, between 150 and 200 in each edition. At the conclusion of each workshop we staged an exhibition, arranging all the single models in a shared topography. They were positioned on a geographical basis, creating a strange, warped map of the world. The relationships between geographical areas were quite accurate, but the scale of continents, countries, and cities was distorted by the number of models associated with each area. Thus, Rome or Milan were larger than all of Africa; Oceania disappeared entirely because no participants came from there; or little towns such as Castelnuovo di Porto — home to a large refugee camp near Rome — appeared larger than China, as many people depicted it as their current home. This warped topography was painted on the floor; overhead, coloured woollen strands connected the stages of each biography. Under your feet lay the woven tapestry of geography; above your head, the weft of personal stories. The workshops and the exhibitions were organised on very modest budgets, using leftovers and salvaged materials. We learned a lot from this work, from many points of view: the astonishing diversity of cultures of places and dwellings represented; the care participants took in small details (the vase of flowers on the table, the slippers at the foot of the

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the Portico della Pelanda/Città dell'Altra Economia, in Rome." Excerpt from the Studio Albori website https://www.albori.it/portfolio-item/geografie-extravaganti-luoghi-e-percorsi-della-migrazione/

bed…); the varied interpretations of what constitute a 'place' (one person built a bowl, another a mountain). In terms of representation and imagination, these models were full of life, the opposite of the dullness and frigidity of standard architectural models.

Are we suggesting that architecture needs to adopt a 'landscape dimension'—that is, that architectural practice should extend beyond its own discipline to engage with a broader environment and explore cultural memory?

Yes, but it entails a kind of double movement. You need a wider gaze to see single pieces as a part of a broader whole. But at the same time, you must remain attentive to the specific location; otherwise, you run the risk of producing something too generic. This approach has to operate across multiple scales. In this sense, the classic slogan of Green movements was quite right: "think global, act local".

What characteristics enable a project to initiate processes that enhance a specific context's capacity to address social and environmental vulnerabilities? In particular, could you discuss how your experience with "Murals in the Courtyard"[3] aligns with the need to rediscover an ordinary and non-elitist sense of human creativity in shaping everyday spaces?

Oh, this was another very marginal work. I wouldn't call it a project; it was simply an opportunity for a group of friends to have fun together. It involved doing some paintings on a wall in the courtyard of a housing cooperative in Milan, one of our earliest works. It turned into a very troubled undertaking; nearly ten years passed between the preliminary concept and completion, with numerous setbacks, including the bankruptcy of the contractor. By

3 *Murals in the Courtyard of via Altaguardia*, Milan, 2006, Studio Albori. The work involved improvised mural painting with participation from building residents, using scaffolding erected for plasterwork refurbishment; paint was donated by Artedile2, and brushes and rollers were lent by Dell'orto. For a detailed description of the work, see the project page: https://www.albori.it/portfolio-item/pitture-murali-nel-cortile-di-via-altaguardia/.

the end, the residents became a close-knit community. They began organizing an annual courtyard party (a tradition that continues more than 25 years later), and we became good friends with them.

A few years after the building was completed, an old boundary wall, quite tall and long, had to be replastered. When the work was done, the scaffolding remained in place. We suggested to the residents that we take the opportunity to do some paintings on the wall. Together with a few of them, we did just that. We asked some housepainter friends for leftover paint and old brushes, and we made these paintings, improvising a bit. This work was about embracing the unexpected and improvisation. This is quite important to us, although it is rather discredited in contemporary architecture. Yet improvisation has played a relevant role in the construction of human habitats for millennia. It is about incorporating personal experience of place into the act of building. Today, architecture is often designed and pre-planned entirely from elsewhere, an office often thousands of kilometres away and years in advance. This tends to produce abstract landscapes.

Looking specifically at your construction poetics, how do you face the unexpected along with the design and development of your landscape-related activities?

I must say that we never think about our "poetics". Better to leave someone else to judge if by any chance there is something like that in our work.

Can we say that Studio Albori goes directly to the original meaning of "poetics" that comes from the Greek word "poiesis" that is related to the action of "doing," "making"?

I'm not sure… but if you see it that way, I'm very glad. But this can be said for any so-called "humble" job (for instance, the baker) and bread can be very poetic. Yet, I believe that if the baker tries to add something poetic to bread making, then, in the end, it won't be very poetic at all. What he or she does is already poetic if it's done well. Saul Steinberg once wrote something like "Artistic intentionality is

the worst danger for art". I quite agree. If there is something poetic or artistic in the way you do things, it's better to let someone else discover it. Returning to the topic of the unexpected: as I said, for a long time, architecture was about doing what needed to be done with whatever happened to be there. This included a lot of unexpected elements. It created a kind of 'art of making' with the unforeseen. But today, all the regulations, procedures, and towering piles of bylaws exist precisely to eliminate the unexpected. So here we are, caught in the middle of this clash: we know the unexpected is part of life, part of work, and often, part of its beauty. Yet we are doing this job at a time when humanity (at least in the overdeveloped countries) has decided to erase it.

In your work, you often hybridise perspectives, "wiving" together with diverse professionals and stakeholders. How did this collective wiving begin? What are the recurring dynamics and challenges you encounter?

I think architecture is already hybrid in itself. There is no real need to further hybridise it. We try to place the confrontation with clients, other professionals, and all the actors involved at the very centre of the project, from the beginning. Our method, if you can call it that, is to put everything sensible on the table, and see it from different points of view, with special attention to thermal, energy-related, and environmental aspects. That's where our projects begin. We are more than happy to discover unexpected elements that overturn our preconception about possible solutions. This happens every time we start a project, including the recent one we did in Venice for the Vatican Pavilion at the Biennale. That is a good example: ingredients of the most diverse nature came together in one place, and we were almost overwhelmed. We are only now starting to understand what actually happened with that project.

You are referring to "Social friendship: meeting in the garden",[4] *a project for which you collaborated with Alvaro Siza.*

It was not truly a collaboration. The Vatican Pavilion at Venice Biennale, on the island of San Giorgio, is divided into two parts: one by Siza and one by us. But it was a great honour. I was once a pupil of Siza's; I worked in his office in Porto more than 35 years ago. Back then, I was just a young man, completely in love with his way of making architecture. Now I'm almost 60, and he was almost 90 when we met again for this project — though only online. Our projects were in some way dedicated to two different encyclicals by Pope Francis. Siza's work, inspired by *Fratelli tutti*, is about human relations. It was installed in the indoor Palladian spaces of the Convent and consisted of a series of large wooden human figures, connected to one another through postures and gestures. Our part, referred to *Laudato sii* was more about ecology. It is placed in the convent courtyard and takes the vegetable garden as a concrete metaphor of the possible coexistence of all living beings. The two parts at one point overlap: a final figure by Siza, made in Carrara marble, steps out of the convent and ventures into the vegetable garden. Our project is very simple and modest, but so many ideas and suggestions came together in it that it is impossible to list them all. The first, of course, is Venice itself: a city that, despite overtourism and other calamities, remains one of the most moving places ever built by humans, and the most visionary example of the symbiotic balance between human habitat and nature. The other one was Pope Francis, with his bold call to challenge financialisation and consumerism, the last defender of the poor in the age of the ideology of opulence. His message deeply resonated with our values and work, so it felt natural to build the entire project using only scrap materials. All the small constructions of the garden —

4 *Vatican Pavilion*, *Biennale Architettura*, Venice, 2023, Studio Albori. The project involved the realisation of a temporary vegetable garden in the courtyard of San Giorgio Maggiore Abbey, accompanying Álvaro Siza's installation in the convent's Manica Lunga. One final marble figure from Siza's installation leads visitors from the convent into the garden, which remained open to the public from May to November 2023. For a detailed description of the work, see the project page: https://www.albori.it/portfolio-item/padiglione-vaticano-vatican-pavilion-biennale-architettura-venezia-2023/.

some pergolas, a kind of open-air classroom, a kiosk-greenhouse, a sort of little watchtower with an "altana" — were built by us with materials recovered from demolitions near Venice. The project was organised so we could spend a month there, working with our hands and enjoying that life in Venice. In this sense, it was quite a selfish project. But the starting point was actually the curator's proposal: that half of the pavilion should be a vegetable garden. It was a brilliant idea, utterly contrasting the performative expectations that usually connote shows like the Biennale. A garden moves at its own pace, tied to seasons, weather, and time. At the official opening in late May, after a very cold spring, the vegetation was still timid, just beginning to grow. It was a quiet message: the rules of the show aren't omnipotent: be patient! The garden then changed week by week, until pumpkins, with their huge leaves, started to flourish, and courgettes and tomatoes to grow. The harvest was shared between gardeners, monks and local citizens who came to help. The project was also influenced by our encounter with Cardinal Josè Tolentino, the commissioner of the Pavilion, a great poet and a truly remarkable person.

Can you suggest any inspiring books, podcasts, or experiences related to what we have discussed?

Oh, there would be far too many, I wouldn't even know where to begin. But I have often mentioned Ivan Illich. I believe every one of his books are important for anyone trying to understand the world we live. This "Absurdistan", as he called it.

A conversation with Francesco Careri

TO GET LOST IS TO FIND SPACE
Walking, Resistance, and the Poetics of Landscape

Francesco Careri is an architect, artist, and researcher working at the intersection of urban exploration and collective practices. His work focuses on marginal landscapes, informal territories, and the activation of shared spaces through walking and relational design. In this conversation, he reflects on the practice of dérive *as a form of resistance, and on architecture as a tool for inhabiting the present with care and creativity. The dialogue closely aligns with the volume's theme by exploring how spatial practices can unsettle dominant paradigms and reveal the latent narratives embedded in landscapes in transformation.*

Could you introduce us to the core of your research, and how it challenges boundaries in order to rethink our relationship with the urban landscape?

My research moves across multiple territories. I often say that I *dérive*[1] between art, architecture, urbanism, and activism. What interests me is the act of crossing disciplinary boundaries in an undisciplined way, bypassing the rigid "scientific" borders imposed by academia and ministerial classifications. For over thirty years, I have been working on interstitial urban spaces, abandoned areas, marginal zones, the so-called "urban voids" that, once you enter them, you realise are not empty at all, but rather full of questions.

1 For reasons of conceptual precision, the author retains the French term "dérive" throughout the text. While it can be translated into English as "drift", the French term is preferred here to preserve its specific theoretical genealogy, including its Situationist origins. (Editors' note)

We began to explore these spaces together with Stalker,[2] a collective artistic practice I co-founded in the 1990s. Many of them have proven to be fertile grounds, capable of generating shared actions and projects with those who inhabit them, often outside, and sometimes in opposition to, established power structures. I would say that, to this day, this remains the heart of my practice.

If you were to express your understanding of landscape in a single motto, what would it be? What form of architecture, do you think, is most appropriate for engaging with and transforming it?

I would say that landscape is a living form in transformation, a sentient entity that evolves regardless of human presence or intervention. It will continue to change even in a post-human era. As for the role of architecture within the landscape, I imagine a form of architecture that interferes as little as possible with nature. I consider the path to be the *zero degree* of landscape architecture, an ideal form that is light, ecological, temporary, and reversible. If all architecture behaved like a path, i.e., existing only when in use and disappearing when no longer needed, the world would be a far better place. When we first began walking with *Stalker* in 1996, Emanuela De Cecco wrote an article in *Flash Art* titled "Not Wanting to Add More Things to the World". It described exactly how we felt. At the time, my main point of reference was Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*,[3] a path traced in the grass by the simple act of

2 Stalker is a Rome-based collective of architects and researchers, established in the mid-1990s and organizer of the Osservatorio Nomade network since 2002. Their urban research methodology employs participatory tools, notably collective walking — termed "transurbance" by the group — to activate overlooked urban spaces, document stories, and construct a collective imaginary that informs planning and design interventions across Rome and other European cities. Further information is available at: https://stalkerlab.wixsite.com/spontaneamente. (Editors' note)

3 Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) is a seminal work in the development of land art and conceptual art. Created during his time as a student at St Martin's School of Art in London, Long walked back and forth across a field in Wiltshire, England, until the grass was flattened, forming a visible line. He then photographed the result, capturing the ephemeral trace of his movement. (Editors' note)

walking — his zero degree of sculpture, a line destined to fade with time. Today, I am still drawn to the path, especially in anti-speciesist terms. A path is an architecture we share with the animal world. Indeed, animals too leave traces as they move through nature. It is from those traces that hunting trails, routes of transhumance and, eventually, our infrastructures and architectures emerged. I like to think that every living being produces transformations, each giving rise to its own form of architecture. Many of the infrastructures we use today were first traced by animals.

How does all of this connect to the concept of "dèrive" as developed by the Situationists, which you mentioned earlier?

The *dérive* notion remains a fundamental tool in my work. In my 2002 book,[4] I tried to trace a genealogy that connects *Stalker*'s practice to the thread running through the avant-gardes of the twentieth century, from Dada to the Situationists. The word 'dérive' carries a fertile ambiguity. It is both a technical tool that allows a boat to sail against the wind, and a condition of disorientation, of being at the mercy of the wind, without direction. It contains direction and loss, rationality and irrationality, subjectivity and objectivity, consciousness and unconsciousness, design and anti-design. This ambiguity is essential when entering a landscape and exploring it without cultural preconceptions. The 'urban dérive', first Lettrist and later Situationist, was a revolutionary aesthetic-political project, the art of getting lost, consciously, within the folds of the city, allowing oneself to be carried aimlessly by the prompts of chance. It was a ludic and constructive activity that sought to describe the urban through psychogeography. In other words, through aesthetic-sensory and socio-political experience. 'Dérive' is an action that puts us in contact with the unconscious of the city, i.e., with spontaneous evolutions and projects that emerge independently of urban plans or institutional power. The *Stalker* slogan *Those who waste time gain space* echoes the Situationist attitude inherited from the earliest urban idlers, the Parisian flâneurs Walter Benjamin wrote

4 Careri, Francesco, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002).

about. Wasting time means refusing a productive posture, breaking with collaborationist dynamics of power. In terms of landscape and architecture, it means making space for the indeterminate and the anti-project by placing oneself in an unproductive, or rather inoperative, condition, not seeking to solve problems, but perhaps to generate new ones. It means allowing the project to move forward without a predefined project, or better still, to approach spatial transformation through a non-deterministic, indeterminate mode of design. More than working on the architectures of the landscape, we realise that we must begin to work on ourselves, to critique our tools, our methodologies, our approaches. We need to experiment with the possibility of designing from a place of inoperativity and non-functionality.

Landscape-generating practices usually incorporate a form of tacit knowledge. These practices can contribute to the re-emergence of a possible and latent expression of place. Considering landscape as continuous transformation, how would you describe the contribution to the immaterial dimension of research and design?

The immaterial dimension precedes the path, i.e., it comes before the material project. I interpret it as how to enter and how to be *present* in a landscape, or more generally in an urban context, if we want to undertake a process of knowledge. In this sense, I believe reality always needs to be *provoked*. If we want to understand it beyond stereotypes, we must avoid entering timidly, with the obsession of not disturbing, of not being intrusive, of being respectful and politically correct. If you do not provoke reality, it either does not respond or gives very banal, predictable answers. I am not saying one should be insensitive, rude, violent, colonising or extractive, quite the reverse. I mean a form of artistic-performative provocation, which allows us to look at things from another perspective because it reverses the hierarchies between researcher and subject, between helper and helped, host and guest. This kind of provocation creates playful, ambiguous situations in which meanings emerge relationally. Both research and design can break free from banality and from ready-made, pre-packaged answers. Artistic provocation is necessary to shift our gaze, to trigger real

interaction, to create unexpected and fertile situations from which the latent meanings of places can emerge. In this sense, rather than speaking of participation, I prefer to speak of a relational approach. The project often already exists in places, in people's minds, in the way spaces are used. It is up to us to recognise it, to make it visible and to nurture it. It is like a spontaneous plant that has grown in a crack in the asphalt. Indeed, if we recognise its behaviour as a kind of project, then we should water it and help it grow into a tree.

How would you describe the "project"? To what extent do you see it as an open, collective process, and as a form of resistance? Could you give some examples?

First of all, I should clarify that I am not a professional architect with a studio and employees. I am a university professor and an artist, which means I have the freedom to work only on projects I believe in, with communities I am interested in engaging with and supporting. In Rome, together with the *Stalker* collective, I worked with the Kurdish community from (in a space that we named) Ararat at the Campo Boario in Testaccio, as well as with Romani communities. At the moment, through the university, I am working with migrants and housing rights movements. We always came into contact with these communal spaces by walking. We metaphorically "stumbled" into unexpected situations, where we recognised both the *need for* and the *presence of* a project, like a small plant still struggling to emerge from a crack in the asphalt. By losing ourselves in these territories, we entered into direct contact with communities about which we had only superficial knowledge, often shaped by cultural preconceptions and media narratives. What happens is that, once you break through that veil of ignorance and begin to understand the situation, you find yourself assuming responsibility, you can no longer step back. You realise that something must be done, and that doing it is both meaningful and invigorating. The first of these community experiences, as I mentioned, was Ararat, an occupied building we took over together with the Kurds of Testaccio. It was a project that began almost by chance in 1999, and is still ongoing. It remains the only entirely self-managed refugee centre in Rome, located within the Aurelian Walls. Most importantly, it has

served as a point of arrival for more than thirty thousand people fleeing war and torture. We also developed numerous projects with Romani communities, initially in Testaccio and, later, in *Casilino 900*, an informal settlement that no longer exists. There, in 2008, in collaboration with the Department of Urban Studies at Roma Tre University, we co-created with the Roma a prototype house called "Savorengo Ker – The House of Everyone". We exhibited it at the Milan Triennale, the Venice Biennale, and the Rome Quadriennale. A documentary about the project is still available online.[5] For years, the Roma of *Casilino 900* had been marching under banners reading, "We are Roma, not nomads, we want a house." A house, not a caravan, a shack, or a container in a camp. What we came to understand was that they refused to passively accept the standardised solutions long imposed by public authorities. Instead, they wished to propose their own model of dwelling, one designed for everyone facing housing insecurity. They took advantage of our presence, our attention, and our status as artists, lecturers, and students to turn that slogan into architecture, a three-dimensional slogan that one could walk into, whose technology, aesthetics, and economic rationale could be understood. It was a community self-build site lasting about a month, through which we learned a tremendous amount, particularly about our mutual biases. It was also a somewhat paradoxical project. It was *Stalker*'s first true architectural work, despite the group often being labelled as "anti-architectural". It had been commissioned by the Roma, a population often described as nomadic, and supposedly without need of architecture. It was, in that sense, a contradiction in terms.

5 To view the full documentary on the project, see: https://youtu.be/tRsllzP3Wmk?feature=shared. *Savorengo Ker* (2009). Directed by: Fabrizio Boni and Giorgio De Finis; Produced by: Irida 2009; With the support of: Stalker/ON and DIPSU (Department of Urban Studies), University of Roma Tre; In collaboration with: 11th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice Biennale, and the Milan Triennale; Cinematography: Donatello Conti and Beppe De Lucia; Editing and Graphics: Daniel Mark Miller; Camera operators: Marco Gentili, Frediano Iraci Sareri; Music: Cristina Barzi & Officina Nomade, Cesare Botta, Angelo Losasso; Sound Mixing: Artepoint; Group Photography: Giorgio De Finis; Original Prints: Rolando Corsetti; Duration: 55 min; Colour/Format: HDV. (Editors' note)

Do you still explore the project as a form of resistance even after joining the university?

Absolutely. The university has allowed everything I have described to unfold on a larger scale, but I believe I am still pursuing it with the same uncompromising approach. This became possible through a series of projects commissioned by the Municipality of Rome, developed in partnership with the Department of Architecture. It began with *Porto Fluviale*,[6] a former multicultural housing occupation in the Ostiense district of Rome, occupied by the citywide housing rights coordination group. The building was home to people from thirteen different nationalities, from North Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, and also Italy. Through the PINQuA programme (National Innovative Programme for Housing Quality), we secured eleven million euros to transform the former occupied Air Force barracks into public housing units with social and cultural activities planned for the ground floor. The former occupants have been temporarily relocated to allow for construction. They will return to the building as official tenants in a few months. This is a model we would very much like to replicate in other contexts across Rome. I developed the project together with Professor Fabrizio Finucci and other colleagues. Several other projects followed, such as the masterplan for Testaccio, the regeneration plan for *Monte dei Cocci*, and *Parco Schuster,* though describing them in detail would take us too far afield here.

In a context where regulations are becoming increasingly complex, and natural events are affecting even urban areas previously considered relatively safe, do you think the concept of sustainability *still holds real operational and transformative potential?*

The reality we are living in is unsustainable, and we are becoming increasingly aware of this, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19 and amid ongoing wars. However, language evolves rapidly. Words quickly lose their meaning and need to be reinvented. Like “participation”,

6 For an in-depth overview of the ongoing integrated social housing project, refer to the official page of the Rome Municipality: https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/attivita-progetto/porto-fluviale-rec-house.page.

"inclusion", or "regeneration", the word "sustainability" has been gradually emptied of significance. Institutions now use these terms rhetorically to build consensus, distribute funding, frame calls for proposals, or comply with European programmes that require their inclusion. Behind these words lie the right directions and important visions. They express fundamental trajectories. It is crucial for institutions to set goals aligned with those directions rather than against them. Only recently have I directly experienced all this, and I must say, working with institutions can be dreadful. Procedures are incredibly lengthy and not transparent, and the regulations are often outdated, inadequate, and entirely disconnected from real-world contexts. But this, too, is a kind of landscape. Learning how to navigate it, how to move through it, circumvent obstacles, recognise traps and sometimes ignore certain barriers is a skill in itself. It is a 'normative landscape' where one can occasionally dérive, identify legal loopholes, explore interstices, and find people willing to help. What I have realised is that we can shift the rules through what I call "normo-generative" projects by working at the margins of legality. In short, even within that jungle, it is essential to enter with irony and lightness, but also with determination.

What allows a landscape project to awaken "dormant energies"*, enhancing its capacity to welcome and care for social and environmental vulnerabilities — even beyond the direct presence of design practice? I am referring, for example, to the Amacario,*[7] *created for the association* Spazi Indecisi*.*

Amacario is a textile architecture, a nomadic structure that leaves no trace, except in our bodies and memories. It is a dreamlike, surreal construction that suspends bodies in the air, connecting them through a web of hammocks all linked together, forming a single, continuous fabric. The project dates back to 1998. The first time I built it was in Rome, in the *Passetto del Biscione*, next to Piazza

7 *Amacario* is a public-space installation created by Francesco Careri in collaboration with Stalker, curated by Spazi Indecisi, featuring 700 metres of fabric and rope to evoke a convivial and immersive environment. Presented at EXATR during *Ipercorpo 2023*, it explores architecture as a space of suspended presence and shared experience. (Editors' note)

Campo de' Fiori. Later, with the *Stalker* collective, it grew in scale until it reached 1,500 square metres of fabric at the CAPC Museum in Bordeaux. When I arrived in Forlì at the invitation of *Spazi Indecisi*, I visited their headquarters (an old municipal bus depot with large trusses and spacious interiors). I immediately thought it was the ideal place to build an *Amacario*. A few months later, we made it happen. Actually, we built two of them, one indoors and one outdoors, for a total of 600 square metres of fabric. I consider *Amacario* a path, i.e., an ideal architecture that is nomadic, portable, and reversible. You choose a beautiful place, make use of existing structures, and do not add a single nail. You simply attach ropes to what is already there, using basic knots, in a completely temporary manner. Then you dwell suspended, without touching the ground. When it is time to leave, you dismantle it, untie the knots, and the space is left just as it was found. There is also a strong bodily interaction, as people brush against each other and make contact. There is a kind of promiscuity in the experience. It is a form of dwelling that is playful, comfortable, horizontal, collective, and utopian. Perhaps one day I shall transform it into something more stable and complex, where other functions can also take place, besides lying down. Now, you mentioned *"beyond the presence of design practice"*. But I believe design practice is always present. What should change is the *awareness* of that presence, i.e., the way in which the designer chooses to be present. The first step is not to make a quick site visit, but to learn to stay there for an extended period of time (as long as possible), not just with your eyes, but with your whole body and an alert mind. As architects, when we are called to intervene in a place, we must allow ourselves to spend time there, to inhabit it in a way that is unproductive, inactive, to sleep there, to interact with the residents, to observe non-human forms of life, to see how the landscape behaves by day, by night, in the heat, in the cold, to ask ourselves what happens when we are not there. The mere act of being present is already a form of provocation, it sets things in motion. Someone approaches, sees you, asks questions, and starts a conversation. A relationship begins to take shape. Being present in this way is already a catalyst for transformation. This mode of presence can be learned and taught. I am trying to do just that through two courses at the University. One is called *Civic Arts*, which is entirely itinerant.

We are always out walking, *en dérivant*.[8] We are never on campus. I do not ask students to produce architectural designs as simulated drawings, but to, instead, create actions, installations, and creative interactions. The other course, which I teach with Fabrizio Finucci, is called *Architecture and Emerging Communities*. Over time, we have learned to move the course directly into the places where the projects happen. We ask to be hosted by communities that want to reflect on their spaces and explore possible improvements. After the initial site visit, the students do not return to the classroom. Instead, they move to the site with their laptops, and we organise a workshop to work together with the community. I believe we can no longer design projects from outside the places we intend to transform.

Returning to your idea of landscape, could you describe the role of improvisation and the unexpected in your research? How does the concept of adaptability manifest in your design practice?

I shall pick up the thread of what I was saying earlier. Being present — truly present — but also provoking, means being ready to perceive a message in what is about to happen, to pay attention to the phenomena that begin to emerge. As Deleuze puts it, we must be "*worthy of what happens*".[9] In this sense, it is crucial to improvise and to interact with what unfolds because that unfolding is meaningful. One must be able to recognise its value and follow it, even if it is unclear where it came from or where it is going. These are cues that arise from the context itself. They somehow come looking for you. It is far more interesting to be ready to welcome what happens than to carry on with a preconceived idea, merely out of consistency with one's own artistic or architectural language or authorial identity. "Artistars" and "archistars" always have a project ready in their pockets, and since it works commercially, they go around the world replicating it in every context. Instead, the ability to improvise, to accept and to start from what already exists (even if it was neither planned nor imaginable), and to make that the material

8 Here the English translation is "drifting". (Editors' note)

9 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. by Constantin V. Boundas, trans. by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (London: Athlone Press, 1990), p. 149.

of the project: this kind of trust is something we have to learn. It can only be learned through practice. It is a behaviour, a way of inhabiting situations with one's body, mind, and ethics. Improvisation is a form of listening. It requires inner work on one's own willingness to take a different path, to be surprised, and suspend control.

How do you view the relationship between architecture and creative practices in the construction of new landscapes?

I am trying to build connections between two worlds, precisely the "official" architecture of public administrations, and the world of *dérive* and relational practice. I believe the urgent need is to make space for poetry. I have essentially entered even institutional projects as a poet, playfully, metaphorically attired as a clown. Not as someone who claims to have solutions, but as one seeking to build relationships through play. If that relationship takes root, then we can move forward. We build trust, awareness, and a shared vocabulary through which we can begin to reflect together, and eventually construct shared imaginaries, until they are drawn out in black and white. It is a dissipative process, and a very slow one. Take *Porto Fluviale*,[10] for example. I did not enter that space as a lecturer or an artist, but as a parent. My three children were playing in the courtyard with the children of the occupants. That is how a relationship of trust began. Later, it came out that I was a university professor, and I proposed organising workshops with the university. I then carried out more artistic actions to show that I was not an architect coming in with abstract proposals, but someone genuinely interested in interacting and building something concrete together with them. That is what I mean by the word poet. And I learned to use that word while walking. For instance, when I organise walks around the world and people ask us who we are, we say we are part of an "international seminar of itinerant poets." Because the moment you present yourself like that — especially in informal settings in Brazil, Peru and Chile — it changes the dynamic entirely. Saying "we are poets" immediately alters how people perceive you as a foreigner, particularly a white foreigner who may otherwise be seen through

10 Refer to footnote 6.

a colonial lens. A poet is someone without official tools to change your life, someone who is not threatening. And when you say, "we are poets", it immediately produces a smile, a spark of curiosity. It is a disarming gesture that lowers defences and reduces the potential for conflict. Entering a territory through poetry is the best way to build a relationship based on trust. If, on the other hand, you enter as an academic, a researcher, an architect — or worse, as an urban planner — then things change as expectations arise, or suspicion sets in.

What kind of value is generated through participation, and what role does conflict play in processes of urban transformation and exploration?

Very often, participation, especially institutional participation, is a façade. It avoids conflict and becomes a tool through which capital, via public administrations, reshapes territory for its own purposes. By contrast, when real conflict emerges, it often allows us to see those who carry it forward in a different light, not as professional antagonists (the stereotypical "*dirty, ugly, and bad*" figures opposing change) but as people defending values that concern all of us. Social movements, which bring conflict into public space, sometimes forcefully, are, in fact, defending our rights, our commons, and public property. I believe it is absolutely essential today to help administrations, ordinary citizens, neighbours, and academic colleagues understand this. There is an increasing need for a kind of translation — a creative capacity to make certain realities and perspectives visible to others, realities that would otherwise remain misunderstood or dismissed. Conflict can generate awareness. It can open up new spaces for participation and transformation.

Finally, could you suggest any podcasts, books, projects, or experiences that you think might offer further insight into the issues we have discussed?

Podcasts, no — I do not think I have ever listened to one. Books, yes, although perhaps not directly on these themes. I have been

reading a lot of Tim Ingold of late, and I would certainly recommend *Making* and *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge*.[11] But one book that really opened my mind on the relationship between architecture and nomadism is *The Songlines*.[12]

11 Ingold, Tim, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

12 Chatwin, Bruce, *The Songlines* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987).

A conversation with Marta Cuscunà

EARTHBOUND[1] Theatre Practices for a More-Than-Human World

Marta Cuscunà is an author and performer of visual theatre. Her work combines feminist activism with contemporary playwriting for puppets and mechanical creatures. In this conversation, she reflects on the role of performance as a tool for critical engagement and social commentary, starting from her work "Earthbound". The dialogue connects closely with the volume's theme by exploring how artistic practices can challenge dominant discourses and open to relational understandings of landscapes in change.

The shifting relationship between humans and nature is a recurring theme in your work. How does Earthbound *take this exploration further?*

Earthbound, aka *The Camille Stories* is a performance born from a desire — an urgency — to imagine a possible future in which life, despite everything, continues to bloom. It draws loose inspiration

1 *Earthbound*, or the *Stories of the Camilles* (2021), freely inspired by *Staying with the Trouble* by Donna Haraway (©2016, Duke University Press). Created and performed by Marta Cuscunà. Set design, conception, and animatronic construction: Paola Villani. Assistant director and animatronic construction: Marco Rogante. Animatronic creature sculpture: João Rapaz (Oldskull FX). Dramaturgy: Giacomo Raffaelli. Sound design: Michele Braga. Lighting design: Claudio "Poldo" Parrino. Produced by Emilia Romagna Teatro ERT/Teatro Nazionale, CSS Teatro Stabile di Innovazione del FVG, Etnorama. With the support of São Luiz Teatro Municipal. With the patronage of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Lisbona, i-Portunus, A Tarumba – Teatro de Marionetas, and the citizens who joined the project #iosonoMecenate. In collaboration with Dialoghi – Residenza delle arti performative a Villa Manin (2018–2020). (Editors' note)

from, a work that impressed me deeply for its ability to envision radical yet non-catastrophic futures. At its core lies the idea of "staying with the trouble", not seeking salvation elsewhere — on other planets, or through escapism into an imagined utopia — but remaining on Earth, learning to live with it even when it becomes hostile, contaminated, or irrevocably changed. It is about staying with complexity, without shortcuts.[2] At the heart of the performance is the encounter between the audience and the *Camilles*, hybrid beings born from the genetic fusion of humans with endangered animal and plant species. The name comes from Donna Haraway. Her Camille is a speculative figure, part of the "children of compost", who imagines new forms of multispecies kinship and survival. In the theatrical production, these more-than-human creatures inhabit a rotating biosphere, set in a region of the planet devastated by radiation, climate collapse, and extractivist economic policies. However, this is not an apocalyptic tale. It is a narrative grounded in care, in slow, collective strategies for co-existence. The Camilles are "earthbound", i.e., tethered to the Earth, committed to life in all its forms. For me, this piece is a political, poetic, and technical exercise in imagination, weaving together animatronics, visual theatre, and original dramaturgy. It is an experiment in the possible, a way of exploring how, perhaps, even amidst the profound crisis we face, life — hybrid and unexpected — might still find a path to survival and transformation.

How does the dramaturgical structure reflect the theoretical ideas behind the performance? And how do you guide the audience through this conceptual and imaginative journey?

In general, I always work across long time spans. It usually takes me two, sometimes even three years to reach the premiere of a performance, and *Earthbound* was no exception. I had read "Staying with the Trouble" before 2020. It is a powerful text, in which Haraway weaves together philosophical reflections on the climate crisis with a series of speculative science-fiction stories.

2 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices.

These narratives are deliberately open-ended, intended — as she puts it — to become "collective fabulations." Haraway invites readers to a collective speculative fabulation. *Earthbound* accepts that invitation and, beginning with those narratives, gives shape to a theatrical dramaturgy that seeks to be both an exercise in political imagination and a concrete, sensorial experience for the audience. The *Camilles* became the figures around which the entire performance is constructed. They are not simply characters, but beings that embody a worldview, a way of thinking. Every word they speak, every gesture, every relationship they form is inspired by a fragment of Haraway's theoretical reasoning brought to life on stage. The structure of the piece gradually immerses the audience into this possible and deeply Earth-bound future through the unfolding of a multifaceted ecosystem. In the opening scene, we meet *Gaia,* an anthropomorphic artificial intelligence. In this speculative tomorrow, *Gaia* is part of the Network, a collective AI system conceived as a structure of care and support, perhaps even capable of dreaming.

We then enter the rotating biosphere of the *Camilles*, and through their lives, we explore the key themes of Haraway's thought. These include reducing the human footprint on the planet to allow for true climate justice; understanding reproduction as a political act; cultivating *kinship*[3] over blood ties; and building communities in which bringing new life into the world is a shared responsibility, carried out in symbiosis with other species. Haraway imagines that for the *Camilles*, birth is rare and precious — a collective act that requires each new being to have at least three parents — not necessarily human, not necessarily biological. She also envisions that each new *Camille* is born as a symbiont, carrying within their DNA the genetic code of an endangered species. This is both an act of rescue and an attempt to rewrite the relationship between humans and "nature". During the writing phase, a central question was how to bring these hybrid bodies to life through the languages of visual theatre. We began designing the bodies of the *Camilles,* together with scenographer Paola Villani and Marco Rogante, who

3 In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Haraway redefines kinship as an ethical, multispecies network based on care rather than blood. "Making kin" means forming bonds across species and rejecting traditional, biological family models. It is a political gesture of solidarity and survival in a damaged world. (Editors' note)

co-directed and collaborated on the dramaturgy. We sketched them by blending human and animal features, and then built them, developing a mechanical system that could render them alive and believable on stage.

In this sense, how does the scenographic machine embody the theoretical reflections that Earthbound *seeks to evoke?*

The scenic space was conceived in dialogue with the theoretical premises of this dramaturgy and with the imaginary evoked by Donna Haraway. From the outset, we envisioned an environment that could express a liminal condition that is fragile and post-catastrophic, but also generative. At the centre of the stage is a geodesic dome, chosen not only for its architectural and energetic properties — its efficiency in capturing and distributing light, wind, and heat — but also for its symbolic value. It is a nest-like structure, a refuge and embryonic site within a devastated external world. Lush vegetation flourishes inside the dome — though it is entirely artificial — creating an oasis that allows the *Camilles* to survive. This paradox, in which artificial nature thrives within the dome while the outside world is marked by spontaneous yet dying and polluted ecosystems, prompts reflection on what we consider "natural" or "artificial," and challenges our understanding of the human relationship with the environment. The theatrical space beyond the dome is bare, a stripped-back stage inhabited only by a single tree, symbolising compromised nature, almost extinct at the hands of humankind. The techniques used to animate the figures also played a crucial role in shaping the scenography. Unlike many forms of puppetry or object theatre, where a character is typically animated by multiple performers, I am the sole operator in *Earthbound*. This required the design of self-supporting mechanical creatures capable of maintaining a stage presence even when I am not actively manipulating them. This inspired the idea that the *Camilles* exist in a state of suspended stillness, sustained by light frequencies, their inactivity justified by the toxic world outside. On a contaminated planet, mere survival within the greenhouse becomes a form of vital, re-active agency. Finally, the entire scenographic process followed a rationale of progressive prototyping, quite unlike

standard practice in Italian theatre, where the stage design is often defined from the outset and executed without room for revision. In this case, the construction of the Camilles required multiple stages, precisely from the design of their internal skeletons with Paola Villani and Marco Rogante to collaboration with a Portuguese collective of artists specialised in animation and prosthetics who sculpted the clay models used to cast hyper-realistic silicone skins. The final stage aesthetic is the outcome of a collective, experimental process in which scenic material gradually emerged from the ongoing dialogue between concept, body, and environment.

How is this approach reflected in works like Earthbound *or* Corvidae*?*[4]

One of the aspects that most interests me (and one of the key elements that distinguishes puppet theatre from animated cinema) is precisely the fact that in film, we are used to every kind of special effect, to hyper-realistic creatures and complex digital worlds appearing before our eyes. But in theatre, those same beings can physically materialise and "be there" in front of the audience. They are there. They have weight, skin and mass. That makes a world of difference. To do science fiction in theatre means not trying to imitate cinema, but rather building an autonomous imaginary rooted in the "here and now", in the constraints of physical reality (such as gravity… and extremely limited budgets!). From this perspective, even the movement — or rather, the near-immobility — is a conscious artistic choice. While in traditional puppet theatre a single puppet might be operated by three or four performers, in my work I am the sole puppeteer animating multiple figures. This means the creatures

4 *Corvidae. Sguardi di specie* (2023) featuring Marta Cuscunà and written by her; Animatronic design and construction: Paola Villani; Assistant director and technical director: Marco Rogante; Dramaturgy: Giacomo Raffaelli; Video scenography: Massimo Racozzi; Graphic design: Carlotta Amantini; Costumes: Chiara Venturini; Live operation of lighting, audio, and video: Marco Rogante. Originally written for La Fabbrica del Mondo by Marco Paolini and Telmo Pievani, RAI 3. Co-produced by: Etnorama – Culture for New Ecosystems; CSS – Teatro Stabile di Innovazione del Friuli Venezia Giulia; MUSE – Museo delle Scienze; Piccolo Teatro di Milano – Teatro d'Europa; Tinaos. (Editors' note)

must be self-supporting, able to "exist" and appear alive even when they are not being directly manipulated. This generates a kind of tension between life and stillness. The creatures seem alive while doing nothing, simply "being there", their hybrid gaze turned toward the human audience. It is precisely in that "nothingness", in that gaze, that much happens, especially in those who are being watched. From a directorial standpoint, there is another layer to consider. The animation technique is never fully concealed. The audience can "witness the workings behind the scene", glimpse the mechanics, and realise that behind everything that moves there is always a human engine, my body. There is no automation. The animation system is analogue, fragile, exposed to error, awareness, and uncertainty. Here too, the performance operates on a dual register, intertwining categories and questioning ideas of autonomy and isolation. It creates a particular kind of relationship between illusion and revelation. There is also an almost paradoxical choreographic aspect. Inside the dome, *Gaia* — a character representing an artificial intelligence — is played by me in the flesh, while the *Camilles*, human-animal symbionts, are mechanical creatures that I also control. The challenge was to make these inanimate bodies appear more "human" and more vital than the only real human body on stage, which had to be believable as a non-human intelligence. From a staging perspective, this required subtracting signs of humanity from my own body, while amplifying them in the mechanical creatures. This led to the decision to manipulate the *Camilles* with my back to them and my profile facing the audience, using controllers, joysticks, pedals and cables in an asymmetrical way to dissociate my gestures and the movements they produce on stage. Unlike a video game — where the connection between input and action is intuitive and symmetrical — there is a perceptual gap here. I act, but the scenic effect is not immediately legible. I may move a joystick in one direction, and the resulting movement of the creature happens along a different axis. The manipulation system uses tandem brake cables, which allow the animation control to be located at a distance from the creature being animated. We used similar systems in earlier works, initially with standard bicycle brake cables, but those had a limited length and kept me physically close to the figures. Tandem cables, by contrast, make it possible to increase the distance between puppeteer and puppet. The real

breakthrough came when we found a craftsman who builds custom brake cables for vehicles. This released our scenographic design from standard technical constraints. In *Earthbound*, Paola Villani was able to design a stage space based not on mechanical limitations, but on dramaturgical and narrative needs. This allowed me to perform *Gaia* while keeping my back to the mechanical creatures I was simultaneously operating. So, yes, my theatre is characterised by minimal movements, in the sense that motion does not cover wide areas of the stage. But a great deal takes place within that small radius. The audience's vision and imagination are constantly activated.

Your work not only questions traditional relationships between bodies, but also the language we use to describe them. Words like "bond," "alliance," or "symbiosis" replace more familiar terms like "family" or "procreation," suggesting more fluid, open ways of living and caring. How do you explore these non-biological connections in Earthbound*? In a broader sense, could this shift also reflect a changing inner landscape, one where relationships, identities, and even forms of life are being reimagined? Your AI character, for example, seems to step outside its programmed path to create new kinds of connection.*

As Donna Haraway reminds us, "*it matters what thoughts think thoughts*".[5] It also matters which bodies embody others, which identities we construct or deconstruct on stage. In this sense, theatre is not merely an aesthetic device but a dynamic environment in which dominant categories can be questioned. In *Earthbound*, these categories include human and non-human, real and imagined, masculine and feminine, natural and artificial. The

5 "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories." (Haraway, p. 12). See: Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices. (Editors' note)

performance offers no answers, but instead creates a threshold space, where mixing and hybridisation can occur in collaboration with the audience. When developing the character of the artificial intelligence, we had to confront a number of limitations and failures, constraints that eventually became productive. Take, for instance, the obvious fact that I am a human, bipedal body playing the role of an AI, without the budget of a science fiction movie. That is why we chose not to hide the artifice, but rather to make it visible, and to invite the audience to complete the character through their imagination. The costume is minimal, comprising a close-fitting bodysuit with drawn-on circuitry and a monowheel, which I use throughout the performance without ever touching the ground with my feet. This self-imposed rule of never stepping on the ground led to a rationale of circular movement, partly in response to the small stages I often perform on. This circularity became a central motif of the performance, even symbolically, orbiting, circling, avoiding linear progression in favour of loops, tangents, and interwoven paths. In hindsight, the choice not to conceal constraints, tricks, and limitations but to integrate them, instead, into the narrative, proved to be a strength. It opened a space of shared awareness and transparency with the audience. This shared awareness transforms the stage into something else entirely, thanks to the imaginative complicity created with the viewer. It is precisely within this alliance that we can reframe not only the experience of the performance, but also the world beyond it by imagining that the bare stage is a desolate future landscape, that the backdrop is the sky, and that the passing light marks the turn of the seasons. It is this collective suspension of the believable that fascinates me. This is where theatre becomes deeply political. It asks us to reflect on the relationship between words, thoughts, and meanings as a dynamic process that transforms the landscapes we inhabit.

In your work, you often share your voice with other presences, making it less central and more collective. How does this choice help to move away from the idea of landscape as something fixed, and instead suggest a more living, changing space, shaped by relationships, care, and transformation?

I believe landscape, first and foremost, has served as a tool for questioning the binary distinction between the natural and the artificial. In our work, landscape contains all the tensions and contradictions explored by Donna Haraway in her *Cyborg Manifesto*.[6] Technology is not something external or separate. It is already within us and, as a human-made phenomenon, it too becomes a natural part of the world. This creates a deliberately ambiguous disjunction between the external landscape, which we still perceive as "natural" though it has been devastated by human action, and the interior of the geodesic dome, which appears lush and thriving, yet is entirely artificial. This ambivalence conceals an important point. In the performance, the regeneration of the outer landscape is linked to the phytoremediation[7] abilities of a small tree that survives in this environment damaged by humanity. *Gaia*, the artificial intelligence, is programmed to care for the tree and support its healing process. She does so by forming a deep connection with the landscape through data. She monitors drought, detects pollutants to be extracted, and assesses the condition of deeper aquifers. The AI helps the *Camilles* interpret environmental signals and plant communication, such as, a subtle root-based language that humans would be unable to perceive without technological mediation.[8] In the performance, *Gaia* embodies an alliance between human and non-human, oriented towards a form of technology that allows us to understand ecosystems as dynamic, ever-changing environments. This opens us to a vision of the world as a living, plural organism, one in which humans are no longer the first or final point of reference.

6 See: Haraway, Donna J., 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149–181. (Editors' note)

7 Phytoremediation is an environmental remediation technique that exploits specific plant species' ability to absorb, sequester, degrade, or stabilise contaminants — such as heavy metals, organic pollutants, or radionuclides — from soil, water, and air, through physiological and biochemical processes. (Editors' note)

8 To explore how plants communicate through soil-root networks, see Stefano Mancuso and Alessandra Viola, *Verde brillante: Sensibilità e intelligenza del mondo vegetale* (Florence: Giunti, 2013). (Editor's note)

How does the concept of disconnection, beyond the idea of being "offline," take shape as a new way of being in the world? Is there a particular scene in the performance that is emblematic in guiding the audience towards this new vision of landscape and relationality?

I believe that in this context "disconnection" is closely tied to the idea of relationship, of how we conceive ourselves, the world, and the landscape as a complex web of interdependent relations from which, in many ways, we have become disconnected. The performance attempts to explore the need (and the difficulty) of re-establishing those connections with the environment, now perceived as a horizon of lost or broken relationships that must be restored. One of our greatest challenges was depicting *Gaia*'s vast, alien web of interconnections. After experimenting with spheres and meshes, we chose to represent it solely through light. When I perform as Gaia, a small blue LED on my temple signals her activity. As she dematerialises to join the Network and exchange data with other AIs, my body disappears, leaving only the LED glowing inside the dome, while their voice seems to come from within. A larger blue LED then appears, symbolising the wider AI network, emanating voice from everywhere at once. This layered use of light and dispersed sound generates overlapping dimensions of presence and perception. Whereas the human-animal symbionts and hybrids are embodied through physical stage figures, the artificial intelligences are intentionally disembodied, i.e., represented only through ephemeral elements like light and sound. This choice introduces another interpretative layer. From a performative standpoint, *Gaia* and the AI Network are collective characters. Their presence is enacted live from two different points in the theatre. I voice them in real time on stage, while Marco Rogante, from the control booth, manages the lighting and the spatial positioning of the sound, giving the characters visual and acoustic form. The result is a layered presence spanning visible and invisible, embodied and disembodied, onstage action and offstage technical control. This intertwining gives tangible form to the complexity and interconnection between technology and nature, presenting them not as opposites but as deeply entangled dimensions. Through this layering and multiplicity of forms, the performance invites the audience to perceive a new vision of landscape and world, one made of subtle relationships,

disconnections and constant reconnections, in which technology is not external to nature but a living part of it, a possibility for survival that breaks down the dualism between the natural and the artificial.

Through Earthbound's scenography, how does the idea of "making kin, not babies"[9] *intertwine with the figure of the tree, portrayed as both a tragic emblem and a possible lifeboat for survival?*

The tree, in this context, sits at the intersection between exploitation and collaboration. Haraway's work helps us make sense of this tension. Phytoremediation — where plants absorb toxic substances from polluted environments — reveals how non-human life forms, with their own intelligence and capacities, are often used to serve human needs. This entails the risk of repeating patterns of control and domination. We must ask ourselves: *how sustainable is this kind of relationship? Does it risk becoming another form of ecological colonisation, disguised as care?*

However, Haraway invites us to imagine new forms of alliance. In her vision of "*companion species*",[10] nature, technology, and humanity are deeply entangled, not separate but part of the same living system. Within this frame, the tree that communicates with *Gaia*, the artificial intelligence, is not just a tragic figure. It also becomes a sign of possible renewal.

This is not a story of human survival alone, but of shared transformation. It suggests a model of reproduction that is multiple and decentralised. Other forms of life — plant-based, technological,

9 "I propose "Make Kin Not Babies!" Making — and recognising — kin is perhaps the hardest and most urgent part." (Haraway, p. 102). See: Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices. (Editors' note)

10 "Companion species are relentlessly becoming. The category companion species helps me refuse human exceptionalism without invoking posthumanism. Companion species play string figure games where who is/are to be in/of the world is constituted in intra-and inter-action." (Haraway, p. 13) See: Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices. (Editors' note)

earthly — are no longer passive or secondary, but partners in shaping a different kind of future. This idea of a planetary pregnancy, grounded in kinship and mutual care, offers a way to rethink survival beyond the human. It opens the awareness of a world built on interdependence, whether we are part of it or not.

PART II
PERSPECTIVES

Michael Jakob

FROM LANDSCAPE TO ECOLOGY
A Journey with No Return?[1]

Even today — centuries after the term entered common usage — we need to clarify certain basic aspects when speaking of landscape. The word "landscape" is currently employed in two entirely different ways. The first refers to a portion of the world as perceived by an observer — one might just as well say a portion of "land" or "nature". Indeed, a landscape is a fragment of the world glimpsed at a given moment, the mental image of a part of nature formed under particular circumstances. In this sense, landscape is a *mental* representation occurring in the consciousness of the observer who recognises a phenomenon as landscape. The second meaning, by contrast, does not refer to perception but to *artistic* representation. This kind of landscape is more familiar, a category of artistic works identified within a specific tradition. Its reality is quite distinct from that of the landscape as directly experienced. While the latter raises a series of questions (to which we shall return), artistic landscape seems self-evident. Above all, canvases and paintings, which have been identified in these terms since the invention of the neologisms *landschap* (Dutch), *paysage* (French), *paisaje* (Spanish), and *paesaggio* (Italian). Landscape as artistic representation has a long and distinguished history, analysed in depth in the classic studies of Kenneth Clark[2] and Ernst Gombrich,[3] two essential sources that were revisited, reinterpreted, and expanded throughout the twentieth century. This specific landscape, the pictorial genre, is a specifically

1 The English translation of the text, together with all bibliographical references, has been prepared by the editors.

2 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London: John Murray, 1949).

3 See the classic article by Ernst Gombrich, 'Renaissance Artistic Theory and the Development of Landscape Painting', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 41 (1953), 335–60.

European and, indeed, Eurocentric phenomenon. Its beginnings can be traced to the mid-fourteenth century with the celebrated proto-landscape of the *Allegory of Good Government* in Siena. By the later fifteenth century, it had already become a recognised category. Dürer famously referred to the Flemish painter Patinir as "the good painter of landscapes". The genre developed in original ways throughout the Renaissance before achieving major visibility in the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, landscape painting was transformed and creatively deconstructed to the point where one might even speak of the "death of landscape" and, with it, the advent of a *post-landscape* era. Caspar David Friedrich, the great Romantic master, revolutionised the genre by eliminating human figures to let nature speak. Claude Monet, the most philosophical of the Impressionists, carried this further by creating post-mimetic renderings of observed reality, while remaining deeply engaged with the representation of Nature.[4] Before returning to landscape experienced on site by someone, it is necessary to note a few more essential points. As a Eurocentric phenomenon that emerged in the late Middle Ages, landscape is evidently *not* a universal category. This becomes evident, for instance, in the difficulty of explaining the precise meaning of the term to people from non-European linguistic horizons. Landscape, which first appeared in Europe as a pictorial mode, represents only a possibility among others, the outcome of a specifically European way of depicting the world. In his influential book Land*scape and Power, W.* J. T. Mitchell argues that there are essentially two landscape cultures, the European and the Chinese, and that both articulate an imperial gaze and ideology.[5]

4 Attaching the label "landscape" to a certain type of object (that is, the establishment of the mechanism: *word (landscape) — concept — object)*, became a habitual and obvious practice at one point, and a critical one at another. In the early sixteenth century, painted landscapes were still referred to as "country," whereas by the late nineteenth century, for very different reasons, in the era of the "death of landscape," the term persisted even as the object itself imploded or dissolved. A turn-of-the-twentieth-century canvas depicting Monet's bridge at Giverny already constitutes a *post-landscape*, and so do the *Water Lilies* of the Orangerie (*Les Nymphéas*, in the original French), since with them the very way of "reading" a painting is completely transformed.

5 W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Several factors further attest to the extraordinary role of landscape painting. First, one should recall the remarkable paradox that the lived experience of landscape — the ability to contemplate a landscape *in situ* — emerged much later, and only thanks to painting. We, and first of all a certain type of European subjects, learned to recognise a fragment of nature *as* landscape through paintings that, so to speak, opened our eyes. In other words, landscape painting served as a genuine education of the eye. The aesthetics of the picturesque provides further evidence of the formidable influence of painted landscapes (and, in some cases, drawn or, more recently, photographic landscapes). Following the crisis of the classical category of beauty, partly in relation to the renewed interest in the sublime, certain British theorists introduced the picturesque as a third aesthetic category. A scene was deemed picturesque if it presented a fragment 'worthy of being painted'. In such a fragment, natural features and human-made elements (such as bridges, ruins, or aged structures) combined to create a composition worthy of attention. From the late eighteenth century onwards, much of what came to be known later as 'landscape architecture', together with the art of gardens emerging in the same period, drew on a picturesque vocabulary. Since this trend has continued into the present, European landscape painting — especially that of the seventeenth century — still shapes our aesthetic sensibilities. A particular "way of seeing" what we call nature, a specific mode of selecting objects deemed worthy of attention, a distinct approach to framing what pleases us, was imposed as a seemingly universal practice, when it actually reflects a distinctively European gaze. This is an additional reason why anyone concerned with landscape must first engage in a preliminary phase of *landscape critique*. Building on the contemporary use of the term "landscape", we now turn to its second, perhaps predominant, sense, the use of the phrase "I see a landscape" to denote an empirical reality. To see (*here*, *now*, *myself*, *at this very moment*) *a* landscape in this sense refers to the domain of mental representation. Such a landscape arises within the internal realm of consciousness — *the Mind* — of the self. Paradoxically, this "real" landscape — the pictorial one being only a representation or fiction — becomes real precisely thanks to what occurs *within* me through my perception and awareness. Before discussing the issues posed

by the notion of mental landscape, it is necessary to outline certain conditions that make such a landscape possible. One essential aspect is frontality, and with it, distance. *I see this landscape because I have a visual field in front of me*; *I see it because the relevant distance makes this possible*. In a strict sense, there is no landscape without this *vis-à-vis*, there is something else, a territory, of course, but nothing with the strength required to assert itself as a landscape. Clearly, one cannot demonstrate this *prise de vue* — this act of visual capture — in the very moment it occurs, since once transformed into representation it ceases to be the landscape it *was* a moment before. It should also be emphasised that the phenomenological horizon must remain that of sight. I mention this because, over the past decades, there has been an excessive preoccupation with the idea of soundscapes, which, in this context, seems quite meaningless. Similarly, much has been said about multi-sensory experience; yet, in any case, landscape basically remains a *visual* phenomenon, even the semi-landscape or meta-landscape. (After all, as we can see, even this alone is already complex enough to study). Another crucial aspect of experienced landscape lies in its temporality, in our exposure to the ceaseless flow of time and change. Landscape experience is unsteady, ephemeral, liminal and, ultimately, incommunicable. It possesses these qualities precisely because it reveals itself to us unexpectedly. Such a landscape — *this* landscape given *now* to me — disrupts our *habitus*: "We walk countless times in nature and, with varying degrees of attention, notice trees and bodies of water, meadows and wheat fields, hills and houses, and the thousand and one changes of light and clouds. Yet, because we attend to this or that particular element, or look at several together, we are still not aware of seeing a landscape," writes Georg Simmel.[6] Although it is an intrusion, something that radically interrupts our usual being-in-the-world, the resulting perception depends entirely on the self: "Nature, which in its essence knows no individuality, is

6 "Unzählige Male gehen wir durch die freie Natur und nehmen, mit den verschiedensten Graden der Aufmerksamkeit, Bäume und Gewässer wahr, Wiesen und Getreidefelder, Hügel und Häuser und allen tausendfältigen Wechsel des Lichtes und Gewölkes – aber darum, dass wir auf dies einzelne achten oder auch dies und jenes zusammenschauen, sind wir uns noch nicht bewusst, eine Landschaft zu sehen." In *Die Güldenkammer*, III (1913), 635–44.

reshaped into the respective individual landscape through the divisive gaze of man, who forms, combines, and constructs the divided unity into specific unities." To be exposed in this way to a landscape, co-created by ourselves, is to lose our coordinates and points of reference. According to Henri Maldiney, we no longer belong to a clearly identifiable and mapped geographical space in such a situation: "From landscape, there is no development that leads to geography; we have gone off the path; as human beings, we feel lost".[7] Landscape as a surprise, as that which "grips" us and holds us still — unmediated, yet still dependent on us — is not the landscape of the tourist, the hunter, the park warden, or the scientist. Those who set out to collect landscapes — whether beautiful, sublime, picturesque, romantic, or bizarre — are already steered by the rationale of consumerism, since such expectation heavily influences the encounters that can occur. Admittedly, explaining the mechanism (phenomenological and/or psychological) of the lived dimension[8] is challenging, even in the most obvious and seemingly banal case when landscape is not encountered by surprise, but approached as an object of study. Philosophy provides essential impetus for all those wishing to pursue this radical and unmediated direction, i.e., to study landscape as something that "gives itself" as an event. Concepts such as aesthetic event, aesthetic moment, *momentariness*, or Bergson's notion of *durée* can offer valuable, albeit limited, support. Phenomenology appears particularly relevant in this regard, though not without its limits. Husserl provided an extraordinary analysis of the unity of what we

7 "Du paysage il n'y a pas de développement qui conduise à la géographie; nous sommes sortis du chemin; comme hommes nous nous sentons perdus." Henri Maldiney, *La rencontre du paysage* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973)

8 I am thinking above all of the extraordinary work undertaken by the Romantic poet Coleridge. He demonstrates that even when someone — like him during his *tour* of the Lake District — applies the utmost attention to describing a fragment of nature given at a specific moment, an infinite description would be required to do it justice. Hence, his "notes" are, not by chance, fragments of great density in which pauses, interruptions, flourishes, and the unsaid matter as much as the elements identified. Unlike those who, from the perspective of radical theory, recognise as authentic only the landscape given by surprise, as an *Ereignis*, without any mediation, Coleridge deliberately constructs a sequence of "landscape" situations.

call consciousness, emphasising that "consciousness is the living presence of its current contents".[9] As with any intentional act, the consciousness of a landscape is the consciousness of something in the world that asserts itself upon what Kant terms the "inner sense" (*innerer Sinn*). A certain kind of reality — for instance, the unexpected perception of a sound — occurs "now" in the form of an initial impression. *This* appearance, which "fills" consciousness at the very present moment, is immediately replaced — or, more precisely, incorporated — into a subsequent phase in which what initially appeared must be preserved and shaped into a recognisable unity. Hence, the givenness of an external datum — whether a sound or a landscape — is not inherently unified, but a temporally layered phenomenon, which in one of its phases may acquire the transient form of unity. From a Husserlian phenomenological perspective, what we have called a *landscape-moment* is more a turn of phrase than an actual fact. According to Husserl, all our mental (intentional) acts possess a "momentary" quality, and the consciousness of an object in front of us on a table is no less transitory than a fragment of nature recognised as a landscape. To apply the concept of *momentariness* to landscape with proper discernment thus required a careful and thorough analysis. The difficulty with borrowing a philosophical theory of the "now" and applying it to the landscape-moment lies in the generality of such an approach, whereas what concerns us is a convincing description of a specific phenomenon. Moving from consciousness in general to consciousness as the generator of perceptions and, finally, to consciousness as the generator of landscape perceptions, the key question is whether there exists a specific quality that could be called landscape unity, that is, the *crystallisation* of the landscape, its *becoming-present*. The moment the landscape presents itself most fully, I remember it even if I cannot easily describe it, for it exceeds the details perceived. Its unity lies within me rather than outside. It has enriched me — this moment, though unstable and dissolving into the flow of consciousness (see Husserl), may also disclose a qualitative dimension: for instance, the idea of nature, which, according to Simmel, guides landscape-consciousness. Yet if we accept such an

9 "Bewusstsein ist die lebendige Gegenwart seiner gegenwärtigen Inhalte". Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* (Husserliana XIII, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1928), p. 43.

assumption (that something related to nature affected me in a pre-reflective way), how can we be sure that the original impression was not an act of recognition? At this point, what would be needed is a theory of the *Lebenswelt*, of the actual activity of consciousness, capable of explaining — even if only in very general terms — my lived experience (my conscious life) as continuity interrupted and punctuated by discontinuous moments, with the specificity that in certain cases my experience is interrupted by landscape-moments. Following a certain philosophical tradition (Maldiney, Straus, and others) landscape experience may thus be defined as an absolute surprise, an event, even an existential *swerve:* "*this* landscape changed my life, I will carry it with me forever", and so on. However, one difficulty with this line of thought lies in the weakening of the very quality of landscape itself, since its proponents argue that during such *ecstatic* moments the self finds itself "behind the landscape", in contact with the very conditions that make reality itself appear. For this variant too, the question arises whether a form of pre-reflective attention is already at work (given that everything belongs to the flow of consciousness), meaning that my "storehouse" of images and concepts might intervene unnoticed even at this seemingly immediate stage. However, in a sense more attuned to Anglo-Saxon empiricism, one must continue to stress the constitution of landscape, highlighting that we *see* landscapes thanks to the qualities we "attach" to their respective impressions, and that our very interest in landscape is the outcome of a centuries-long "aesthetic formation" closely tied to painting (see above). At this point, it may be necessary once again to shift perspective. Instead of dwelling on the elusive temporality of landscape experience, we might ask: who was interested in imposing the very notion of landscape and its application to a specific reality? (It is worth recalling that the genre was not easily accepted even within European painting). Who stood to gain from advancing such an unstable phenomenon? The answer seems fairly evident. Indeed, there is a technological tradition — distinctively and originally European — and, more specifically, a tradition of vision-related technologies that developed, not coincidentally, in parallel with painted landscapes. There is an optical–perceptual field, an ensemble of devices, which made use of various objects to impose a particular form of attention to the way of approaching the world,

of "reading" reality, of directing the gaze, of fixing things in place. This manipulation, which assigns the subject to point P, immobilising and abstracting it, creates a visual field, or rather *the* visual field (since from the outset this possibility was imposed as the "legitimate" one), while also producing its corresponding subject, that is, exerting control over it. The technologies of vision that emerged from the fifteenth century onwards thus served a double function. They controlled the subject (by imposing a specific way of being a subject; from that moment onwards, neither Descartes nor Kant would forget that, for them, the subject is self-endowed with the *Übersicht*), and, consequently, they controlled the world. The history of this multi-device is rich and complex. We find an example of this in the central perspective, and in the parallel that can be drawn between Brunelleschi's celebrated experiment of 1425 and Gutenberg's typographic page, devised less than three decades later in 1452. It can be said that both contraptions impose a geometric form (square–rectangular), which demands the subject's attention, while simultaneously enforcing a representation of reality — whether iconic or verbal — defined as correct, legitimate, logical, self-evident, and official. I am thinking of the modern paned window — no longer merely a "ventana" or "window," but a scopic *frame*, a quasi-eye — conceived in direct dialogue with painting as Alberti's "open window," yet also in relation to typography, which, page after page, "opens" new perspectives on the world. The "veil" or "grid" is also a reference, the first static and then portable apparatus, which enabled the precise observation of reality and its correct transposition onto a support. All of these objects belong to a broader field, or family, of devices. Diachronic and synchronic factors intersect and converge within this field. It features both tangible material elements and practices, which together established the conditions of possibility for modern visual representation. The optical chamber, which first appeared in the fifteenth century and endures to this day, also functions as a metaphor for the human brain and its new capacities of vision. Hence, the functioning of these instruments is not purely material; instead, it relies on a system of rules sustained by schemas, narratives, and explanations. What is imposed first and foremost — and the experience of landscape is tied to this very tradition — is the suppression of instability, the denial of change itself. Everything must remain fixed

and stable, like the subject who pauses to contemplate untroublesome fragments of the world. This powerful (Eurocentric) tradition excludes *a priori* any notion of a "living" land, and with it any genuinely "ecological" perspective. Landscape is thus firmly inscribed in the history of a dominant mode of thought — of which it is both an instrument and a casualty — that attributes creativity only to a certain kind of subject, whose activity will always remain confined within the system. The great tradition of landscape painting and the experience of landscape are thus connected to a single discourse that, for centuries, has privileged the idea of control, rationality grounded in the correct distance, and the capacity to gather the most diverse elements within a well-balanced frame. In other words, landscape has always been part of the system. Identifying *in situ* landscapes as beautiful, sublime, picturesque, bucolic, melancholic, but also sad, ugly, heavily humanised, and so on, is essentially reading the world by reducing its variety to make it fit within a coherent image. Seen in this light, landscape appears as a kind of mental postcard, which is why it is so often associated with the origin of aesthetic pleasure. Compared with ecology, this powerful tradition is thrown into profound crisis, as the current situation no longer permits the habitual experience of landscapes. Indeed, the desire to safeguard certain iconic landscapes — those inscribed in the great book of anthropised nature, such as the "world heritage" repertoire of UNESCO — can appear cynical. While every effort is made to preserve the identity of a few selected sites deemed "exemplary" (though according to which criteria?), the rest of the world seems to exist as if the ecological crisis affecting us all did not truly matter. In light of Bruno Latour's reflections presented during the *Gifford Lectures*,[10] it becomes clear that ecological thinking is by no means a luxury; it is imperative. Exposed to our own blindness — Latour precisely asked: "why do ecological questions not seem to

10 The *Gifford Lectures*, established in 1888 by the Scottish judge Adam Gifford, are a prestigious series of lectures delivered at the universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and St. Andrews. Originally intended to explore "natural theology" through philosophical inquiry independent of any specific religious tradition, they have since become a forum for interdisciplinary reflection on human experience, the natural world, and transcendence, with notable lecturers including William James, Alfred North Whitehead, Hannah Arendt, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Bruno Latour. (Editors' note)

directly concern our identity, our security, and our property?"[11] — the charming and pleasurable history of landscape, which once seemed to speak only to the aesthetic sense, takes on a different light. To define oneself as a connoisseur of landscape while ignoring the disastrous ecological situation is to close one's eyes or, more accurately, to fill one's gaze with images perfectly aligned with the establishment and the rational subject. Unlike what the postcard-like landscape promises or pretends to be, reality is perpetual change, instability, and entropy. Even within the briefest instant of a landscape's appearance, the phenomenon is already exposed to mutability. The present critique of landscape, as outlined above, carries at least two major implications. The first is the need to reconsider the phenomenon itself by acknowledging that what seems self-evident is actually the product of a skilful "education of the eye" imposed by a particular Western subject. Besides deconstructing the phenomenon, it is also necessary to act *against* tradition, and to favour creative approaches that transcend conventional schematism. The second implication concerns the need to prioritise creative ways of going beyond the *diktat* of the landscape that is almost always still predominantly "beautiful". While art associated with landscape has historically remained closely aligned with the system, other artistic modes — more attuned to the realities of ecological crisis — can now be imagined. Whereas landscape-based art has traditionally dreamed of idyllic scenarios, art that is genuinely embedded in the world must seek alternative paths. Seen in this light, the work of this volume appears exceptionally timely. To move beyond the conventional way of seeing the Earth — that is, beyond the habit of contemplating it merely as landscape — we need artistic creativity.

11 "Pourquoi les questions écologiques ne paraissent pas concerner directement notre identité, notre sécurité et nos propriétés?". Bruno Latour, *Face à Gaia: Huit conférences sur le nouveau régime climatique* (Paris, 2023), p. 239.

Massimo Venturi Ferriolo

LANDSCAPES
The Search for a New Language

Enough of words.
Let's meet the world.
Tim Ingold, *Correspondences*[1]

When I was invited to contribute to this edited volume, I was asked to reflect on what I consider a landscape. I would, therefore, suggest approaching the question "What is a landscape?" from multiple angles or perspectives, as any single definition is inevitably limiting. Numerous academic disciplines engage with the concept, each assigning it a different name. Yet, there is no shared agreement. As established by the European Landscape Convention[2] in 2000, landscape involves both an object and a perceiving subject. The interplay between these two, along with their differences, leads us to move beyond the definite article — *the* landscape — to embrace multiple places, each with its own specificity and palimpsest.

In a world that is undergoing constant transformation — a state of ongoing metamorphosis — landscape appears as a "liquid space," to use Zygmunt Bauman's term, or as "a space made into an object of aesthetic experience, a subject of aesthetic judgment," in the words of Rosario Assunto.[3] Its complexity was already noted by geographer Lucio Gambi in his *Critique of the Geographical Concepts of Human Landscape,*[4] and it remains a central issue in nearly all landscape treatises, which often begin with the fundamental question of its

1 Tim Ingold, *Correspondences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021).
2 European Landscape Convention (Florence: Council of Europe, 2000).
3 Rosario Assunto, *Il paesaggio e l'estetica* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1973), pp. 5–6.
4 *Cf.* Lucio Gambi, *Critique of the Geographical Concepts of Human Landscape* (Bologna: Patron, 1973).

essence, revealing not only its complexity but also the impossibility of reaching a definition that includes all disciplines. Franco Zagari, for instance, collected forty-eight different definitions in a single volume.[5]

We must take care not to reduce landscape to an abstraction, for it ceases to exist in purely abstract terms. As Simmel argues, there is a transcendent, "ahistorical" landscape, yet one devoid of form: "form means limit, and thus the Absolute, being without limits, cannot be formed".[6] Landscape requires delimitation. It must be understood within a temporal or lasting horizon. What is essential is the space embraced by the gaze, which encompasses the holistic domain of life in its depth, marked by a dual and multiple contemporaneity of temporality and ephemerality. It lies between an original substratum and the grounding upon which lived experience takes shape. We might call this the *tension of existence*, which we understand as *ethos*, the open region where humans dwell,[7] a holistic context in which everything is interconnected. We must move beyond Descartes and his notion of man as *dominus*,[8] and overcome the nature/culture dichotomy that has contributed to the current climate and environmental crisis. It is misguided to believe that technology alone can provide solutions, or to place blind faith in progress — so much so that we have invented the contradiction of "sustainable development",[9] as Morin sharply observes. We need to break free from predetermined dogmas and begin to see certainty — including the certainty of definitions — as a form of weakness, to seek out new approaches.

A renewed interpretation, a new language, can today draw on the mythical and ancient narratives of the human project *in* the world, narratives that acknowledge the sacred in all coexisting elements of nature. This approach invites a more attentive gaze into each landscape and its unique, unrepeatable character across time and space. Thought opens new and compelling perspectives when it

5 *Cf.* F. Zagari, *Questo è paesaggio*. 48 definizioni (Rome: Mancosu, 2006).

6 G. Simmel, «Le Alpi», in *Saggi di cultura filosofica*, tr. it. di M. Monaldi (Milano: Neri Pozza–Longanesi, 1985), pp. 114–120 (p. 117).

7 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 88–89.

8 "Dominus": Latin for "lord" or "master," here referring to Descartes' notion of humans as controllers of nature. (Editors' note)

9 E. Morin, *La via. Per l'avvenire dell'umanità*, translated by M. Ceruti, Cortina, Milan, 2012, p. 14.

considers what is occurring within a given field of vision, prompting an exploration of local and social relationships, as well as the bond between humans and their environment. This reveals a constellation in which the human being is a connected subject. It becomes a matter of engaging with the content of landscapes in order to grasp their essence and to formulate cultural codes and strategies for intervention. A new form of understanding engages with the world without seeking to define or reduce it to sterile abstract categories, "an understanding that reactivates the world as a practice of 'making language'".[10] In a living language — not one semantically fixed within rigid categorical structures, but one that continually recreates itself through the inventiveness of its speakers — words can be as dynamic and fluid as the practices they accompany. We propose a different way of seeing and understanding things, one that enters the world to encounter it with new words, through questions, "not interrogations or hearings; responses, not representations; expectations, not predictions".[11] Tim Ingold urges us to "work words as craftsmen work materials".[12] Thus, we can begin to recognise the implicit correspondences of a landscape with the web of relations that sustain it, supporting a *good life* as both a present and future prospect for the world. This calls for reimagining how we *inhabit the world*, drawing inspiration from Aristotle's ideal of *living well* and the *buen vivir* of Indigenous peoples rooted in Mother Earth, recovering a wisdom oriented toward a fulfilled and joyful life.[13]

Words can be a tool for changing the world, even for redefining it in other terms.[14] They are part of a new, non-definitional language, one that remains mindful of the implicit risks embedded in the very notion of *definition*, and of the limiting power of *defining* as an act of fully enclosing, and thereby placing boundaries on thought (*de-finir*). This verb can move beyond the narrow ontological sense of "completely (*de-*) limiting (*finire*)", and its equivalence with determining, fixing, or setting boundaries. It may, instead, be reinterpreted as *de-finire*

10 Tim Ingold, *Correspondences* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 220.
11 Ingold, *Correspondences*, p. 221.
12 Ingold, *Correspondences*, p. 221.
13 On the theme of living well in relation to economy and the critique of liberalism, see Carlo Sini, *Del vivere bene. Filosofia ed economia* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2011).
14 *Cf.* Gianrico Carofiglio, *La nuova manomissione delle parole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2021), pp. 17, 27.

in the sense of entering the space "in which a thing has reached its fulfilment".[15]

A boundless mode of thinking can thus turn to places in all their forms and manifestations, entering them, and opening up new and compelling perspectives. When we step into a place, the question itself shifts in perspective, as does the significance of definition. It no longer concerns the essence of landscape, as the object of our inquiry, nor does it seek the specific features that make a landscape what it is. The focus moves elsewhere, opening broad fields of investigation. The question becomes: *what is happening in the specific reality in which we intend to intervene?* The emphasis shifts to events and processes, moving beyond metaphysics and the philosophical discipline of pure aesthetics, towards the realm of practical philosophy. To *de-fine*, then, is to locate a place, to bring something to fulfilment, to enter a landscape and uncover its layered history. What takes place thus reveals its network of relations, the individual's *being with the world,* and his/her unfolding project.

What is needed is a language free of certainties, dynamic, open to doubt, and oriented towards understanding the world by grasping its deep social essence. As Ingold argues, "the existential certainties on which the modern era was founded have brought the world to the brink of collapse. We must forge alternative approaches to the question of how to live, to heal the rupture between ways of knowing the world and ways of inhabiting it, between science and nature. This healing is a necessary step towards an open and sustainable future".[16] We must reclaim practical wisdom, i.e., *phronesis*, the ancient and still urgently relevant form of prudence, to anticipate events and plan a truly sustainable future. This means working in the field, alongside inhabitants, not in laboratories, engaging in a continuous dialogue to understand their social fabric and uncover their real needs.

Landscape: both the word and the concept have suffered from overuse and misuse to the point of losing meaning. Recent anthropological studies have embraced the need for non-definition to such an extent that they argue there is no need for a specific theory of

15 Renato Cristin, *Heidegger e Leibniz. Il sentiero e la ragione*, preface by H.-G. Gadamer (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), pp. 41–50 (see especially p. 47, but refer to the whole argument across pp. 41–50).

16 Tim Ingold, *Antropologia. Ripensare il mondo*, ed. by M. Meschiari, trans. it. G. Raimondi (Milan: Meltemi, 2020), p.28.

landscape at all, instead calling for a "theory without theory… an open space to explore".[17] This is an invitation to engage with landscapes while rejecting the slow erosion caused by conceptual rigidity and its predefined categories.

A sharper gaze and a deeper command of the depths of our past reveal that landscape "is not merely the representation of a natural view, but a complex cultural process, a 'making landscape', which presupposes a high degree of self-awareness regarding the problems of perception and the verbal representation of a place".[18]

In Book XI of his *Confessions*, Augustine of Hippo asks what time is. He replies: "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it, I do not know. Yet I say that I know that if nothing passed away, there would be no past; if nothing were coming, there would be no future; and if nothing were, there would be no present".[19]

Landscape, like time, allows for multiple interpretations. We know it, yet cannot fully explain it because of its living, complex, and practical nature, shaped and reshaped by time events. Augustine of Hippo points to the impossibility of fully grasping certain concepts, and landscape may well be one of them. The attempt to define landscape diminishes the true essence of the landscapes we admire or inhabit, producing a reductive abstraction that lacks the ethical richness reclaimed by the European Landscape Convention through the emphasis on inhabitants' perception of their living environments. We are thus invited to turn our gaze toward the panorama that always surrounds us — wherever we are — in order to grasp its depth.

17 Translation by the editors. M. Meschiari, *Sistemi selvaggi. Antropologia del paesaggio scritto*, Selleria, Palermo 2008, p. 53. This study, published at the conclusion of our work, confirms the validity of landscape anthropology as a constructive research hypothesis.

18 Translation by the editors. *Ibid.*, p. 72. The author refers to F. Benozzo, *Landscape Perception in Early Celtic Literature*, Celtic Studies Publications, Aberystwyth 2004.

19 Original Italian translation according to R. De Monticelli: «Che cos'è dunque il tempo? Se nessuno me lo chiede, lo so; se invece voglio spiegarlo a qualcuno, non lo so. Eppure dico che so che se nulla passasse, non ci sarebbe passato; se nulla venisse, non ci sarebbe futuro; e se nulla fosse, non ci sarebbe presente». Augustine, *Confessioni*, XI.14, Italian trans. R. De Monticelli, Garzanti, Milan 1990.

Its depth can be grasped by following the suggestion of Leo Frobenius, who identifies two modes of understanding, namely the mechanistic and the intuitive. The former "seeks to comprehend individual facts and the manifestations of material and spiritual life through laws," yet its weakness lies in the fact that "in the nature of things, there is no true opposition between regular and irregular, normal and abnormal, rule and exception," which ultimately prevents "a comprehensive view of the broader picture". The intuitive mode, by contrast, "is rooted in the conception of a *project*, and as such, it is sufficient for it to identify significant phenomena and determine their position within the overall structure of existence (*Dasein*).[20] Hence, intuition can generate an unlimited capacity to understand every transformation of the real".[21]

Within this context lies the critique of rationalist philosophy, in favour of the inventive approach of Ernesto Grassi. This draws upon a humanistic philosophical tradition oriented toward the possible and the probable, rather than the pursuit of the primacy of truth. This tradition "does not consider the essential to lie in the definition of a first truth and the conclusions drawn from it, but in the 'finding', the 'inventio' of the first principles of our knowledge and behaviour, in the 'inventio' of what is true and what is probable... The fundamental problem of philosophy does not lie in the process of rational deduction, but in the act of 'awakening', 'evoking', and 'discovering' what is original. All the means that assist in this discovery reveal an 'ingenious', inventive, topical character".[22] And yet, "even today, the owls see no landscape".[23]

A *palimpses*t approach may be understood as the act of discovering the original and the resulting process of landscape formation through its multiple layers. As a work of art shaped by an entire community in constant transformation — often with unfathomable depth — a landscape invites us to explore it by moving beyond the rational-

20 '*Dasein*' is Heidegger's term for human existence as being-in-the-world, emphasising situated, embodied experience. (Editors' note)

21 Translation by the editors. L. Frobenius, *Paideuma. Lineamenti di una dottrina della civiltà e dell'anima*, ed. L. Arcella, Mimesis, Milan–Udine 2016, p. 33.

22 E. Grassi, *Viaggiare ed errare. Un confronto con il Sudamerica*, tr. it. C. De Santis, a cura di M. Marassi (Napoli: La Città del Sole, 1999), pp. 195–196.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

metaphysical sphere, entering and locating it through Frobenius' intuitive conception, rooted in the notion of *Ergriffenheit*,[24] a creative stirring or emotional grasp that compels one to act. This is also echoed in Grassi's "ingenious" philosophy. We thus enter a flow of time rich in overlapping events, layered upon an original substratum to form an epochal palimpsest of lived experience, a history that has shaped and reshaped forms, often through superimposition, creating unique figures. If we delve deeper, we discover that every landscape is a receptacle that has welcomed artistic forms and figures of diverse poetics.

The gaze upon a landscape allows us to perceive its processual nature, its *temporality,* the interweaving of art, nature, and history into the flow of time, grounded in a substratum connecting past, present, and future. Within this context, *temporaneity* emerges as the fleeting arc of human life, situated within a broader contemporaneity with different historical epochs. When we observe a landscape, we become contemporaries of the various epochs inscribed in its *palimpsest*. We can then discern cultural codes, broadly understood as a holistic culture of connection that may guide the future of the landscape's unfolding process by helping to identify appropriate design terms and approaches. Every *codex* preserves its own history.[25] Accessibility to this layered structure makes it possible to enter both *temporality* and *temporaneity,* spatial images of time itself. Time, in this sense, scrapes and scours continuously, despite its inclusive character as eternity. It preserves and extends the past into the present, while anticipating the future. In doing so, it generates narration, the readable connection of epochs through their respective stories.[26]

The search for the original and the resulting process of landscape leads us into the depths of Delphi, where Apollo builds his dwelling through an act of palimpsest — "scraping back" the site, once the womb of the Great Mother, the great mouth — superimposing upon

24 The German term 'Ergriffenheit' refers to a state of being deeply moved, seized, or existentially stirred. Following Frobenius, it denotes the intuitive and affective force that drives artistic or cultural creation, marking the moment when one is "grasped" by something greater than oneself — a landscape, an idea, or a vision — and compelled to respond. (Editors' note)

25 *Cf.* Tim Ingold, *Corrispondenze*, trans. it. (Rome: Meltemi, 2006), p. 21.

26 See also our *Paesaggi in movimento. Per un'estetica della trasformazione* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2016), pp. 38–41.

it his oracle and temple, thus establishing a new cultic and cultural code. He does so with the gesture of an architect, as recounted in the *Homeric Hymn* dedicated to him, which narrates his journey from Delos, his birthplace, to Delphi. The *Hymn* traces the path of the god who, wherever he passes, creates his own landscape by layering it over that of the Great Mother.

The *inventio* offers us the appropriate tools for in-depth landscape inquiry, allowing us to uncover the layers of a code inscribed on a parchment that has been scraped clean and rewritten many times. Everywhere we find traces — landscapes upon landscapes — revealing that they never truly disappear. We would like to close this text, though not the reflection, nor the *inventio* itself, for those who wish to understand and to seek, with a significant passage by Shaftesbury. Written in the early eighteenth century, it describes the course of nature in the hymn dedicated to her in the Platonic dialogue *The Moralists:*

> *No Time nor Substance is lost or un-improv'd. New Forms arise: and when the old dissolve, the Matter of which they were compos'd is not left useless, but wrought with equal Management and Art, even in Corruption, Nature's seeming Waste, and mere Abhorrence. The abject State seems only as the Way or Passage to some better. But cou'd we nearly view it, and with Indifference, remote from the Antipathy of Sense; we then perhaps shou'd highest raise our Admiration: convinc'd that even the Way it self was equal to te End. Nor can we judg less of that consummate art exhibited thro all the Works of Nature; since our weak Eyes may, by mechanic Art, discover in these Works a hidden Scene of Wonders; Worlds within Worlds, of infinite Minuteness, tho as to Art still equal to the greatest, and pregnant whit more Wonders than the most discerning Sense, help'd by the greatest Art, or the acutest Reason, can penetrate or unfold.*[27]

27 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *I moralisti. Rapsodia filosofica ossia ragguaglio di talune conversazioni su argomenti naturali e morali* (1709), trans. and ed. by P. Casini (Bari: Laterza, 1971), p. 168.

Annalisa Metta

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
A Performative Perspective

> The contours of this fragile stability, known to chemists as metastability, are broad. In addition to this, they also encompass almost all organic substances, both natural and synthetic, as well as other substances that we see changing states suddenly and unexpectedly, such as a clear sky, secretly laden with vapor, that suddenly clouds over, and calm water that freezes instantly if you throw a pebble into it. However, there is a great temptation to expand these boundaries even further. Our social behaviours, our tensions, and the whole of humanity today, condemned and accustomed to living in a world where everything seems stable but is not. A world where frightening energies lie dormant, waiting to be unleashed.[1]

Thanks to the converging contributions of several disciplines, in recent decades within Western culture, landscapes have increasingly been understood as the outcome of a myriad of interwoven actions, precisely human interventions, animal movements, plant successions, the spread of viruses and bacteria, atmospheric events, climatic agents, and geological forces, beyond the pictorial conception that dominated for many centuries. The need for renewed imagery, capable of properly expressing this emerging awareness, is more urgent than ever amid the shifting terrain of contemporary thought and practice regarding landscape and its design. Nevertheless, we should ask ourselves who this imagery is addressed to, especially at a time — such as the present — when the gap between theoretical research outcomes and design practice continues to widen. Indeed,

1 Primo Levi, *L'altrui mestiere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1985), p. 167. Translated from Italian by Annalisa Metta.

the search for new critical positions within contemporary landscape architecture struggles to take projects as reference points and, conversely, to draw inspiration from them, while projects rarely succeed in effectively translating or even challenging contributions from critical-theoretical debates. Landscape architecture scholars tend to operate within a multidisciplinary dialogue by drawing on philosophy, aesthetics, visual arts, anthropology, biology, and more. However, they often fail or hesitate to engage with projects in adequate depth.

Projects no longer serve as the source or destination of theory or critique. The professional world is, in turn, caught up in standardised procedures, and often complies with the persuasive rhetoric of ecological slogans, which are popular with both public administrations and real estate developers seeking easy consensus.

This trend affects many other design fields; for instance, the gap is enormous in building design, as architecture is largely overshadowed by technocratic ecology with weak connections to advanced critique and scholarship.[2] Thus, when speaking of change and creativity — as this collection of essays invites us to do — we should celebrate opportunities for multidisciplinary exchange but also promptly and vigorously reclaim the need to forge new alliances between theoretical investigation and design. Hence, in this paper, I shall interlace theory and practice, drawing on both my scholarly work and my role as a designer,[3] to trace lines of thought and design about 'landscapes in change' and their mutual dialectic.

Landscape as a sparkling, often invisible, situation

If asked to define landscape in a motto, two images come to mind. The first is that landscape is a 'situation', in the literal sense of an unfolding action that is situated, precisely, a set of actions. This perspective emphasises both spatial and temporal coordinates. Indeed, actions happen somewhere and require time to unfold.

2 Consider, for example, the growing disparity between the views of leading critics and architectural practice, as evidenced by the editions of the Venice Architecture Biennale over the past decade.

3 I will refer to my work within OS/A Open Space/Architecture, a landscape architecture office based in Rome.

The second image suggests that landscape is 'naturally sparkling'. Like mineral water contained in a bottle — not gushing, dripping, or flowing — landscape may appear still and quiet, yet it is animated by subtle effervescence, internal tensions, and invisible forces that ceaselessly produce ongoing transformations.[4] These twin images — situation and effervescence — outline landscape as a performative field, incessantly shaped by both human and non-human agencies, by visible and invisible forces alike.

The etymology of the word 'landscape' in Romance languages reflects the continuous engagement inherent to its very concept. The French *paysage*, Italian *paesaggio*, and Spanish *paisaje* all combine the word *pays*/*paese*/*país* (meaning 'place') with the suffix *-age*/*-aggio*/*-aje*, which evokes a process or operation, much like nouns derived from verbs. Like the English gerund, this linguistic construction refers to something happening and unfolding; thus, it implies that landscape is never fully made. Landscape is always in the making, inherently active — a matter of actions and actors, always entangled in a choreography of transformation, variously balanced between self-direction and external influence.

From this perspective, landscapes emerge as a complex ecology of relations in a field where agency is distributed among countless actors involved in never-ending landscape-making. Accordingly, landscape architecture is not the imposition of a fixed formal setting, but the guidance of this ecology and activation of latent meaningful relations. It is about initiating processes, triggering energies, and accompanying change rather than fixing outcomes. Hence, landscape architecture is not simply the refined geometric composition of both living and inert materials. It is the art of engaging in a never-ending negotiation with time, elements, and meanings, which are often hidden and invisible. The work of a landscape architect is comparable to that of an improvisational theatre director, where improvisation is not haste, carelessness, or lack of preparation, but playing according to the plot as well as the behaviours and conditions of the context in real time.

4 Annalisa Metta, *Il paesaggio è un mostro. Città selvatiche e nature ibride* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2022), p. 158.

592 is an Italian memorial garden created in 2018 in Craonne, France, on one of the bloodiest front lines of World War 1.[5] The tormented topography of bumps and hollows — grenade craters once connected by passages and barbed-wire defences — is the most evident trace of this terrible history. The buried ruins of the city lie beneath the ground; above ground, a dense forest planted after the ceasefire prevents reconstruction, turning the site into a memorial that lacks monumental rhetoric. The ground is, therefore, the key element of the project. We lined the bottom of some hollows with bentonite to retain rainwater and reflect the sky and trees, thus becoming visible. We, then, arranged a dense network of red-tipped stakes evoking battalions of fallen soldiers. We carefully positioned the stakes in regular rows, all standing upright, but sometimes they met resistance when driving them into the ground, because of something buried beneath, a hidden piece of the past pushing back. We took this irregularity not as a defect but as a gift, an accident that deepened complicity and heightened connection to the place. Indeed, the unexpected, messy geometry of the sticks revealed invisible interactions between past and present, between ground and subsoil, between atrocious war and lush forest. All these interactions became active players in our design; actually, they co-designed with us. Finally, we planted bulbs marking seasonal colour variations according to the calendar of wartime events. In spring, the red of large solitary tulips recalled combatants; in autumn, smaller, dense blooms appeared in blue and purple; in winter, the garden quieted, and the hollows filled with rainwater or snow. The time of history is measured through imperceptible events, almost nothing.

At its core, landscape design becomes an act of listening and revealing. Like a seismograph, it registers imperceptible movements, amplifies hidden dynamics, and makes visible what would otherwise escape notice. Furthermore, as in this garden, landscape architecture welcomes the actions of beings or forces beyond the human and beyond the expected — not necessarily considering them disturbances for altering the initial plot or design

5 *592. Jardin de la Paix*, Craonne, France, 2018. Completed work from an invitation-only competition. Client: Région Hauts-de-France. Authors: L. Bartolazzi, L. Catalano (OS/A) and C. Clementini.

scheme, but working with them to include them into a choral ongoing result.

This awareness carries both ethical implications and design potential. Recognising ourselves as part of a performative system allows for a less extractive and more reciprocal approach, precisely because landscape is not a still repository awaiting human arrangements. It is, instead, a field of tensions where multiple desires, needs, skills, requirements, capabilities, and tastes — those of both human and non-human subjects — meet and intertwine.

Landscape comes with construction and disruption

This perspective could undermine some of Western culture's very pillars, such as the moral order distinguishing good from evil, right from wrong, construction from destruction, generation from degeneration, life from death. This moral order still drives us to define nature as either mother or stepmother, seeking reassuring explanations for world events interpreted as either favourable or unfavourable. Yet determining whether an event is constructive or destructive is a judgment based on convenience, tradition, and expectation. Does a river flood devastate fields or fertilise them? Does a forest fire destroy vegetation or enable pyrophilic plants to flourish? Does a volcanic eruption disrupt soil or create it? These questions are poorly framed because they force a choice between opposing positions, either limiting or preventing interpretations that problematise facts beyond dualist polarisation.

Our vision of the world and our position in it would change profoundly, if we allowed ourselves to observe the world with an ethical rather than moral gaze — that is, adopting an approach attentive to understanding events within a complex, dialectical, plural, and relational horizon. We should set aside the comfort of moral judgment and engage, instead, in ethical assessment based on specific relationships between behaviours at stake. This does not mean claiming everything is fine but rather admitting the plurality of ways the world builds and rebuilds itself. To quote Latour, the aim is not relativism but relationalism, admitting that things can be at

once good and bad, birth and death, inseparably, according to the network of facts they create together.[6]

Regeneration was the title of a 2022 exhibit by the American Academy in Rome, addressing the paradox that what we tend to call deterioration is often a meaningful, necessary, and beautiful generative force. How, then, can we distinguish degeneration from regeneration? This intriguing question guided the exhibition. Invited to contribute,[7] we chose the lawn in the Academy's entrance garden. Its constant perfection — thanks to the skilled dedication of gardeners — made it ideal for exploring oscillating relationships between decay and renewal. Upon close inspection, the lawn reveals itself as a living palimpsest, animated by incessant choreography. It hosts insects and varied grasses; its colours and textures continuously change. It records the passage of gardeners and

6 Relationalism, in Latour's sense, acknowledges the multiplicity of perspectives and emphasises that these perspectives are formed through relationships within networks, which contribute to the construction of reality. Latour's relationalism looks at the complexities of the world by focusing on the interconnectedness of things, rather than falling into the trap of simple relativism, which suggests that truth is subjective and relative to individuals or cultures. «(…) Latour and his colleagues presented scientific knowledge as a deliberate construction, a product of various social, political and economic interactions that are in constant competition. This pluralist view of knowledge is at the origins of the field of science and technology studies, which critically analyses the sciences while also trying to build bridges with the humanities — between 'matters of fact' and 'matters of concern', as Latour put it. Latour was a founder of what would become the field's main approach, actor-network theory. This is not so much a theory as a method. It asks us to follow the nonhuman actors doing things to each other, and to not focus on the artificial oppositions we have built between, for instance, subject and object. That opposition is at the heart of positivist science, which tends to insist that facts are just waiting to be discovered in an objective world and, once discovered, become permanent. For some, it is scandalous to doubt this» (Stephen Muecke, 'The generous philosopher', *AEON*, 28 October 2022).

7 *Every Nine Days* is the title of our project, a choral action by Luca Catalano and Annalisa Metta, with countless climatic agents and living beings. It was conceived and created for the exhibit *Regeneration*, curated by Lindsay Harris and Elizabeth Rodini at the American Academy in Rome from 13 April to 12 June 2022. Artists featured in the exhibition include Fabio Barile, Chiara Camoni, Annalisa Metta, Luca Catalano, Sonya Clark, Binh Danh, William Dougherty, Guillermo Kuitca, Jorge Otero-Pailos, Robert Gerard Pietrusko, Georges Senga, Julia Solis and Yeesookyung.

machinery, and bears marks of birds' feet and beaks. We introduced a foreign element to highlight these tiny but crucial lawn events, precisely twelve iron plates placed side by side on the grass, one every nine days.[8] As time passed — the first plate remained about three months, the last only a week — the portions of lawn under the plates decayed proportionally to the duration of the coverage. The plates themselves transformed, oxidising variably, recording leaves, insects, and the passage of small animals, like extremely sensitive photographic film. Even moisture from thin pine leaves left delicate rust marks. When removed, we found bare earth beneath the first plate, teeming with insects that immediately attracted birds as if to a feast. Beneath the more recent plates, grass remained alive but altered in colour. Displayed in the Academy's gallery, the plates invited visitors to walk over them; thus, human traces joined those of rain, air, birds, and pine trees, blurring distinctions between corrosion and decoration, as well as between natural and artificial. The work acknowledged human activity as one ecological event among many — neither privileged nor exempt — placing human intervention on equal footing with atmospheric forces (rain, sun, wind) and non-human actors (grasses, trees, insects). Meanwhile, the plates' outlines faded daily in the garden as the lawn recovered. After two months, at the close of the exhibition, they were barely perceptible, reabsorbed into the emerald continuity of the grass.

Every Nine Days is an inquiry into the uncertain balance between deterioration and beginning, alteration and generation; into consumption as a creative act; and into relationships among many agents involved in making the landscape, including apparently invisible ones — humidity and air temperature — that shape materials without physical extension. It also reflects on the ambivalent meaning of 'leaving traces' at this crucial moment in humanity's relationship with the planet. Ultimately, it is a microcosm of all landscapes' universal condition. If all landscapes are imbued with performativity — constantly becoming and transforming — they also continually dissolve to become something else. Landscapes do nothing but vanish, disappear, and change. This is not defeat but recognition of a fact with proactive potential, opening challenging and exciting new prospects for design.

8 From December 20, 2021, to April 7, 2022.

Landscape design is a matter of improvement, not sustainability

Assuming landscape as a platform of performativity challenges conventional sustainability ideas. Indeed, sustainability is often just about performance, essentially the *ratio* between investments and measurable environmental benefits. In this sense, sustainability becomes a byword for efficiency and profit. Such thinking reduces the non-human realm to a mere service provider that is instrumental to human needs. We plant trees in cities or attract pollinating insects not because trees and bees have rights there, but because they work for us, enhancing our living conditions and businesses. They become our servants, not cohabitants.

Instead, embracing performativity — a construction 'performed' through actions and behaviours[9] — invites a more open-ended, collaborative stance. The notion of co-actions replaces the control paradigm inherent to performance because guaranteeing results demands high control over processes and actors. Shifting from performance to performativity, design becomes collaborative authorship, acknowledging multiple authors at play, and requires accepting unpredictability as intrinsic. Sustainability then becomes less about endurance and more about resonance among mutual transformations.

Even the word sustainability is troublesome. To sustain means to bear, to tolerate, implying that the planet could endure the burden of human presence. In this sense, sustainability should ensure environmental harmlessness of human interventions. But what if design were not a burden but a contribution to improving the world? What if we aspired not merely to avoid harm but to actively improve our shared planet? In this light, landscape architecture should seek not only equilibrium but enhancement.[10] Nobody would be happy

9 Performativity is a concept that originates from language studies to state utterances coinciding with action itself and producing contextual effects, such as, "I bless you", "I swear" and "I take you as my spouse".

10 The word improvement here does not refer to its historical use in Great Britain in the late 1790s and early 1800s, when it became critical in the field of landscape gardening aesthetic, being debated by theorists, such as Payne Knight and Uvedale Price against landscape gardeners including Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and Humphrey Repton. For a wide insight into that debate, see: Rachael Scarborough King, 'Before and After: Landscape Gardening and the Book History of Improvement', Eighteenth-Century

to know that their presence is merely tolerable; rather, everyone wishes to be desired, loved and appreciated, to know their existence is a source of joy, value, and improvement for their context of life. Why settle for mere tolerability? Should we not aspire to make our presence desirable? Indeed, sustainability cannot be a goal, just a prerequisite, a basic condition. Our aspiration should be happiness, ensuring our presence generates widespread, shared, contagious well-being. Being desirable, not just tolerable — that should be every project's goal, certainly every landscape architecture project's goal.

Since its foundation in 1872, Posadas developed as a port on the Paraná River's western bank. For decades, the riverbanks bustled with trade, goods processing, transport, and fishing, lined with houses, warehouses, craft workshops, landing stages, shops, and stores. The riverbanks were places to dwell in and work, in constant negotiation with the Paraná's restless temperament, which often caused floods. One century later, the Yacyretá dam's construction dramatically changed the relationship between river and city. The banks were replaced by Avenida Costanera, a coastal road over a huge embankment elevated by about 6 metres, with concrete slopes replacing unstable banks. This marked the disappearance of the Posadas' river culture, and the Paraná became a distant, unfamiliar backdrop.

In 2011, the city launched the Costa Central Uno ideas competition, seeking proposals for two sites, namely the Ramírez Amphitheatre, a venue for performances and sports, and Bajada Vieja, one of the city's oldest districts. Both are near the river. Paraná was not referenced in the brief, but it became clear that resolving just the two sites' issues meant answering the wrong question, sidestepping the city's most urgent latent issue of its relationship with the river. Thus, we developed a broader proposal by reimagining the entire western coastal stretch, dissolving Avenida Costanera into a dynamic

Studies, Volume 58, Number 3, Spring 2025, pp. 291-315. The word improvement here refers to a broader and more complex notion of 'better', akin to the terms employed by Gilles Clément in *Breve storia del giardino* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2012) and Emanuele Coccia in *Filosofia della casa. Lo spazio domestico e la felicità* (Torino: Einaudi, 2021; English edition: *Philosophy of the Home: Domestic Space and Happiness*, Penguin, 2024).

transition zone between road and river.[11] Long jetties extended into the water, intercepting currents and capturing debris to gradually nourish bathing beaches, integrated with three new protected bays. Wooded wetlands, resilient to periodic flooding, accommodated functions of a contemporary urban park organised on levels with the highest corresponding to the safety threshold, aligned with increased hydroelectric plant productivity. We knew we were not complying with competition rules and would lose, which is what happened. But including our vision in the city's 2022 Strategic Plan ultimately gave voice to the river, and that was our reward.

Performativity as a political perspective

This is a critical moment, demanding radical rethinking of landscape architecture. Embracing landscape as a performative, multi-agent field — woven from human actions, non-human behaviours, and invisible processes — means rejecting the static, scenic tradition, and establishing landscape architecture as a platform for understanding and imagining, thinking and designing places as ongoing, vibrant, sparkling situations. Thanks to the multidisciplinary debate we share, we should now conceive landscape architecture as a choreography in space and time, charged with tension, co-authored by countless visible and invisible actors. This entails replacing control with collaboration and accepting unpredictability not as a flaw but as a resource. It requires dismantling binary moral frameworks (construction/destruction, life/death) in favour of an ethical, relational gaze. Such an approach reframes design as listening, amplifying hidden dynamics, and placing human agency on an equal footing with atmospheric, plant, and animal forces.

Nevertheless, this approach embodies political stances, demanding consistent actions with the awareness that humans are part of a complex, interwoven negotiation network. It is not a call for

11 The full name of the project is 'Landscape Restoration of Costa Central Uno, Redevelopment of the Manuel Antonio Ramírez Amphitheatre and Bajada Vieja, Posadas, Argentina, 2011'. The idea competition project awarded it a special mention. Client: City of Posadas. Authors: M. Acito, F. Benetti, M. Burrascano, L. Catalano, J. Citroni, A. Metta, J. Mendiondo, L. Reale and C. Rogai.

unscrupulous permissiveness justifying anything, but for amplified quality in our sensitive relationships with the world. Awareness of being part of a collective action and choral intelligence — including everything — should lead us to behave with far greater attention and responsibility. This could be the true revolution of the Anthropocene era: not humanity's narcissistic self-image as world ruler, nor contrite guilt doomed to devastate the planet, but a widespread sympathy embracing dialectical, attentive, and responsive relationships. This requires a profound review of relations with the planet's non-human co-dwellers, starting with non-instrumentalization for human ends, but actively enhancing shared well-being and ecological reciprocity. Landscape architecture is the artistic, technical and political art of co-creation. It is about designing with, not for. It is not about just aiming to sustain the world as we know it, but to improve the many worlds we are to share.

Sanna Lehtinen

AESTHETICS AND SUSTAINABILITY IN CULTIVATING A SENSE OF PLACE

Introduction

People inhabit places that become meaningful through a multitude of everyday activities: walking familiar streets, engaging in local routines or cultivating personal attachments to particular sites. Yet meaning does not emerge merely from daily practice. Places also acquire significance through more complex and layered interactions between individuals and communities. These interactions can be material, such as the use of natural resources, or symbolic, such as cultural representation, memory and storytelling. They are shaped by diverse — and often conflicting — interests that reflect the plurality of ways in which people relate to their environments.

To understand these interests, it is helpful to consider the underlying values that inform them. Values guide both individual and collective orientations toward places, influencing what is protected, contested or transformed. Since values are inherently evaluative, they frame how places are appreciated, judged or criticised. This also means that meanings do not arise uniformly: evaluations are shaped by differences in perspective, history and social context. Attending to these differences reveals how the same place can hold contrasting — or even competing — significances, depending on who is evaluating it and from which standpoint.

PALIMPSEST is a project designed to catalyse and amplify drivers of behaviour change by exploring and expanding people's understanding of landscapes and their associated services. The metaphor of the *palimpsest* points to the layered nature not only of landscapes themselves but also our conceptions and lived experiences of them. In this approach, the landscape is not understood as a static backdrop for human activity but a dynamic and continuously reinterpreted setting. Each new interpretation

does not erase the previous ones; rather, it builds upon them, creating a cumulative layering of meanings. This reveals how conceptions of landscapes are malleable and subject to change over time. Importantly, such change can be intentionally supported and guided to enable sustainability transformations and foster positive long-term development.

To understand value creation that relies on the recognition of cultural and social meaning-making processes, we must take a closer look at the values at the core of human–environment relations. These values are not limited to economic or ecological assessments but extend to culturally vibrant, experiential dimensions. Aesthetic value, in particular, emerges as a means of reconnecting with places that have been neglected, overlooked and considered less important. By attending to the sensory, affective and experiential qualities of landscapes, aesthetics makes visible layers of meaning that might otherwise remain hidden. This article draws on contemporary theories of environmental aesthetics, proposing that through increased engagement, we can cultivate sensitivity to the perceptual and experiential dimensions through which landscapes become meaningful to the people who inhabit them.

In philosophy, aesthetics is situated within *axiology* — the broader theory of values. This positioning highlights its potential to illuminate how people attribute significance and meaning to their lifeworlds. In the case of cultural landscapes, this extends beyond mere utility or functional values. Contrary to some common beliefs, aesthetic value is neither decorative nor superficial; it contributes to the ways in which environments shape identities. In this sense, aesthetics becomes a central lens for understanding how memory is part of an emergent sense of place. This perspective is crucial for studying the processes through which landscapes support human flourishing while simultaneously nurturing the ecological resilience of complex ecosystems. By foregrounding aesthetic value, we can attempt to uncover new forms of value creation that do not neglect the aspects of cultural heritage or social wellbeing while maintaining a strong focus on sustainability goals.

Aesthetic value as a driver in value change

Aesthetic value is understood here as an evaluative judgement grounded in multisensory perception, unfolding through engaged experience. In urban environments, places are not experienced as static entities but as dynamic constellations encountered through movement across space and time. The act of perceiving and experiencing the city is inherently processual: it takes place within the rhythm moving and lingering, during which sensory impressions accumulate and shift. This experiential continuum is itself intertwined with the material temporality of the city. Buildings, parks and infrastructures are subject to constant cycles of construction, renovation, maintenance and sometimes decay. Yet these cycles rarely align with the temporalities of individual experience. From the situated perspective of everyday life, urban change is perceived only in fragments, unfolding slowly and partially, often from close proximity.

To further study this dynamic relation between perceiver and environment, I propose *aesthetic choice* as a crucial conceptual tool.[1] It refers to the ways individuals and communities exercise evaluative agency, orienting attention and allocating valuable resources — such as time and money — towards shaping environments. At the individual level, aesthetic choice may involve decisions about where to spend leisure time, which paths to take or which parts of the city to avoid or seek out — each decision reinforcing or transforming the perceived value of specific sites. At the collective level, aesthetic choice manifests in community efforts to reclaim, whether by preserving or redesigning places. This involves cultivating an extended mindset of shared orientations towards the future. In both cases, aesthetic choice links perception and practice, consumption and production of landscapes, creating a mutually reinforcing cycle of value creation.

It is clear that such value creation extends beyond the present moment in its utility. While functional or economic evaluations tend to privilege short-term gains, aesthetic value emphasises continuity and the possibility for future generations to act on their own terms.

1 Sanna Lehtinen, 'Aesthetic Sustainability', in *Situating Sustainability: A Handbook of Contexts and Concepts*, ed. by Risto Toivanen and Pasi Krieg (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2022), pp. 255–268.

Transgenerationally attuned aesthetic choices enable places to be appreciated not only for what they are now but also for what they signify in relation to the past and what they might become in the future. In this sense, aesthetic value operates as a driver of intergenerational meaning-making. By shaping how environments are experienced and cared for over time, it contributes to the transformation of landscapes into culturally vibrant resources. In this way, aesthetic values become aligned with the broader aims of sustainability and long-term, transgenerational urban flourishing.

Creative agency and active formation of aesthetic value

Artistic and otherwise creative practices can significantly enhance the positive aesthetic value that a place already possesses. They not only add new layers of sensory engagement but also direct attention to parts of the landscape that might otherwise remain otherwise unnoticed and outside collective care. The potential of artistic and creative interventions has not yet been sufficiently recognised. Such interventions can highlight the ecological, social or cultural aspects of a site, making visible its potentials and pointing towards active collective care and stewardship. How to integrate these interventions practically into planning and sustainability processes is another understudied area. PALIMPSEST shows the value or transdiciplinarity and collaborations in which art occupies a central position, demonstrating that artistic activity is not merely an additive element but a generative force in a quest to make sense and respectfully reshape already existing landscapes.

These collaborations, however, are rarely straightforward in practice. Definitions of key concepts (e.g. "artistic intervention", "landscape value", "community engagement") must be continuously negotiated through iterative and socially sensitive processes. The outcomes of these negotiations are contingent, emerging from the multitude of interactions among diverse stakeholders, including artists, designers, planners, researchers, local communities and environmental specialists. In the context of aesthetic and artistic agency, art functions both as a lens and as a catalyst: it enables the asking of previously unarticulated questions about the landscape, amplifies certain perceptions and expands collective imagination

in ways that directly influence the material and cultural meanings of the environment and how it is cared for.

The unrealised potential of creative activity is gradually being recognised, yet practical knowledge on how to orchestrate multiagency and multidisciplinary processes remains limited. Unlike conventional planning approaches, collaborations that engage creative agents resist standardisation: there is no universal formula for determining who does what, how to share responsibilities or balance the influence of diverse participants. The conceptual fine lines between artistic, scientific and community perspectives are by necessity situational, dependent on local conditions that emphasise specific objectives and resource constraints. This case-by-case character of creative activity underlines the importance of reflexive adaptability: facilitators are expected to cultivate ongoing dialogue and responsiveness throughout the collaborative process.

Moreover, the evolving nature of artistic practice itself further emphasizes the need for flexible yet context-sensitive approaches. Since the emergence of land art and early environmental art movements, it has become evident that engaging landscapes as sites of aesthetic and cultural inquiry prompts a rethinking of the very definition of art itself. Art is no longer confined to the neutralising gallery space; it is increasingly understood as a processual and context-dependent form of human activity. This shift has profound implications for landscape engagement. By presenting new possibilities for creative interventions, creative activity shows that it is possible to cross over from the aesthetic to the ethical, generating long-term, transgenerational value collaboratively.

Since its development towards a distinct branch of philosophical aesthetics, environmental aesthetics has been puzzled by how to approach art from this new perspective. While providing a useful theoretical basis for examining the aesthetic dimensions of human–environment relations, it has primarily focussed on distinguishing its domain from the philosophy of art. It is possible that this has hindered the potential of environmental aesthetics to address artistic and creative endeavours in various environmental settings. A more comprehensive understanding of the formation of aesthetic value requires approaching artistic and creative practices in a broader sense, moving beyond the conventional application of philosophy of

art to isolated artistic objects and considering their embeddedness within diverse environments.

One of the most promising perspectives for studying the interplay between environmental and creative practices emphasises *engagement* as central to the formation of aesthetic value.[2] Environments, ranging from natural landscapes to virtual or hybrid spaces, are experienced through active agency and participation: one is always part of what one experiences. This interactive component is not merely a byproduct of the temporal unfolding of aesthetic experience but also emerges from the spatial openness or "framelessness" of the environment, which actively extends the process of aesthetic exploration.

Urban greening has become a particularly important topic in recent years, gaining further momentum through initiatives such as the European Union's New European Bauhaus, which encourages researchers, designers and citizens to collaborate in fostering living environments that are not only more sustainable in their conditions but also beautiful and liveable. The drivers of urban greening span more broadly, however: climate change, rising temperatures in urban areas, increasing environmental pollutants and the loss of biodiversity are among the most recognised factors.

In this context, questions of beauty and how to define it sufficiently yet broadly have received renewed attention. Traditional human values, such as beauty and truth, remain significant because they provide a means to translate emerging value frameworks, like sustainability, into tangible and actionable objectives. Recognising aesthetic considerations as integral to environmental interventions helps bridge the gap between abstract principles and concrete practice. This, in turn, ensures that efforts to create more sustainable cities are grounded in qualities that both engage and inspire; we need compelling reasons to motivate human care and stewardship of neglected urban areas in particular.

2 Most notably stemming from Arnold Berleant's work in aesthetics.

Shared value in the sense of place

Traditionally, philosophical aesthetics since the time of Immanuel Kant has defined finding something beautiful as a specifically *disinterested* experience. In the environmental context, this can mean, for example, that the perceived beauty of a landscape does not depend on its ecological health. We might find a place beautiful even if the ecosystem has been permanently ruined by anthropogenic activity. In many instances, it is realistic to assume that human beings operate within complex mental frameworks in which conflicting values can coexist. The friction between ethical and aesthetic value can even further emphasise the aesthetic, as might occur in the case of the sublime.

The discussion on disinterestedness is valuable and interesting, but ultimately, it is how value deliberation manifests in different contexts that determines whether it should even be the focus of attention. In everyday urban environments, the entanglement of diverse and sometimes competing values lies at the heart of how we might think about the sustainable future of these places, rather than the distinction between disinterested and interested beauty.

Fundamental to these discussions is the *sense of place*, a complex web of values that, while difficult to define, can be intuitively grasped through subjective experience. Sense of place serves as a bridge between individual experiences and the potential for a shared understanding of a location. When individuals engage in a reflective assessment of their experiences, they open themselves to the perspectives of others, even those that differ from their own. This reflective process can even foster empathy and contribute to the collective valuation of place.

Caring for a place can take many forms. A shared sense of ownership has been considered central to such care and stakeholdership.[3] Care thus implies prolonged contact and an ongoing relationship with that which is being cared for: the object of concern. It requires sensitivity to changes over time in the place: care is attentive and mindful.[4] This

3 Joan Iverson Nassauer, 'Cultural Sustainability: Aligning Aesthetics and Ecology', in *Placing Nature: Culture in Landscape Ecology*, ed. by Joan Iverson Nassauer (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), pp. 65–83.

4 Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of Care: Practice in Everyday Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

kind of thinking, following Joan Iverson Nassayer and Yuriko Saito, links everyday aesthetics to sustainability through ideas from the ethics of care, emphasising the relationality of care in human-environment relations.

Ownership can indeed be more broadly thought of as stakeholdership, especially in urban environments, where residents are not the only group with a direct interest in the conditions of the place. Citizenship or residential status is not a prerequisite for care; displaced and unhoused groups of people also share a stakeholder position. Stakeholdership also engages non-human agents in the expanding horizon of care, as urban nature demonstrates its diversity through the many species inhabiting landscapes. Historically, some of these species have been considered undesirable (e.g. rats or species deemed invasive) by previous human inhabitants, but current scientific knowledge and a broadened horizon of care can change these preconceptions and implicit species-specific priorities. The liveability of an environment always implies a certain perspective — who finds a place liveable[5] requires case-by-case analysis and sensitivity to the place-specific qualities.

In optimal cases, local knowledge blends with scientific understanding. Experiencing the city becomes a more intense urban aesthetic engagement through increased awareness. This kind of engagement can be described as an *informed aesthetic experience*: grounded in sensory perception as well as in knowledge of the elements that make the object of the experience what it is. This enriched mode of aesthetic perception deepens both appreciation and ethical awareness, linking aesthetic value with sustainable and attentive care for the environment.

Conclusion

The value of a place is not easy to trace. It develops from a delicate and complex mixture of its functions, traditions, activities and practices that have shaped it into what it is today. Historical meanings often conflict with current uses, yet such tensions should

5 Ruut Veenhoven, 'Livability Theory', in *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, ed. by Filomena Maggino (Cham: Springer, 2023).

not determine the way value deliberations develop. Confronting difficult questions concerning the conflict between aesthetic and ethical value, for example, can even enhance a place's shared sense of ownership. Ultimately, what endures are efforts to maintain and care for places which have been shaped through conflicts in intentions and perceptions.

Studying the dynamics of landscapes in transformation — and the potential of these places — requires further analysis of the value dimensions shaping our perceptions and conceptions of them. The pivotal role of artistic and creative agency can be revealed only through temporally extended observation of these agencies in action. Their role in nudging citizen involvement towards a sustained attitude of active care marks a further step beyond acknowledging that creative practices can become drivers of change. Supporting a creative mindset opens perspectival horizons, invites yet unexplored solutions and enables imagination-bending collaborations. All this presents an opportunity not only to reflect on what a sustainable and beautiful landscape *is* but also to speculate on and experiment with what it *could be*.

Irene Bianchi

COEXISTENCE
A Useful Lens for Relational Spatial Research and Practice?[1]

In nature, nothing exists alone.
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962)

The search for new lenses

The early twenty-first century has been marked by an acceleration of processes that destabilise ecological systems and reshape the spatial relations between human communities and their environments. These processes have been examined through various analytical and interpretive lenses. Literature on the anthropocene[2] generally interprets the disruption of long-standing ecological and spatial equilibria as a consequence of humanity's inability to act within horizons that sustain balanced relationships between societies and their environments. Within this framework, (urban) political ecology refers to structural dynamics of extraction, commodification and uneven development,[3] emphasising the inseparability of environmental degradation from capitalist political economy. Post-structuralist critical theories interpret these shifts through concepts such as "deterritorialisation" — first articulated

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *18th AESOP Young Academics Conference*, *"Bridging Gaps: Urban Planning for Coexistence",* held from 19 to 22 March 2024 at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano.

2 From Crutzen, P. J., and E. F. Stoermer, 'The Anthropocene', *Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (2000), 17–18 onwards.

3 Robbins, P., *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edition (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Swyngedouw, E., and N. C. Heynen, 'Urban Political Ecology, Justice and the Politics of Scale', *Antipode*, 35.5 (2003), 898–918.

by Deleuze and Guattari[4] — and "planetary urbanisation",[5] arguing that territorial reconfiguration driven by flows of capital, materials and infrastructure dissolve traditional spatial boundaries and erode material forms of proximity, resulting in a weakening of reciprocal relations between people and place. Transformative sustainability scholarship[6] adds an intangible dimension by highlighting the neglect of reciprocity — whether ecological, social or epistemic — and often adopts ontological reorientations inspired by post-human thought.[7] Meanwhile, environmental humanities further underscore how imaginaries shaping human–Earth relations have also shifted, for instance, through Anthropocene narratives, multispecies perspectives and sociotechnical imaginaries.

In its multifaceted nature, this "rupture" is of particular interest to landscape and territorial studies, as it affects both the immaterial and material components of socio-spatial matrices. Paraphrasing Corboz, one could say it acts upon the continuous layering of signs, meanings, symbols and practices that shape territories as "palimpsests".[8] From this perspective, the *landscape* — understood in its polysemic nature as theoretical construct, interpretive device and material field of evolving relations — offers a privileged *locus* for observing processes through which equilibria between environment and communities are renegotiated. At the same time, it works as a *Spielraum,* — a space of freedom and possibility in which to experiment with alternative geometries of cooperation between

4 Deleuze, G., and F. Guattari, *Anti-Edipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983; orig. pub. 1972)

5 Brenner, N., and C. Schmid, 'Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?', *City*, 19.2–3 (2015), 151–182.

6 For a review, see West, S., L. J. Haider, T. Hertz, M. Mancilla Garcia, and M. L. Moore, 'Relational Approaches to Sustainability Transformations: Walking Together in a World of Many Worlds', *Ecosystems and People*, 20.1 (2024), 2370539.

7 Tsing, A. L., *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Haraway, D. J., *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

8 Corboz, A., "The Land as Palimpsest", *Diogenes*, 31.121 (March 1983), 12–34; Secchi, B., "Territorio, pianificazione del", *Enciclopedia delle Scienze Sociali* (Roma: Treccani, 1998).

human communities and the environment, capable of enacting new forms of coexistence.

Building on these premises, this chapter explores coexistence as a productive conceptual lens for urban and landscape studies. After tracing the concept's intellectual foundations, it places *coexistence* in dialogue with five adjacent notions that have emerged across diverse disciplinary contexts, each offering a distinct yet complementary perspective for rethinking human–environment relations. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the generative potential of *coexistence* — its capacity to reorient imaginaries and practices through engagement with complexity, an ethics of care and the pursuit of shared futures.

Coexistence: A changing concept

Coexistence is commonly defined as the condition in which distinct entities occupy the same space or temporal interval without mutually excluding one another (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Across disciplinary domains, the term was initially employed in a descriptive sense as a passive condition of "living together". In landscape studies, it entered the disciplinary lexicon through landscape ecology, where "coexistence theory"[9] provides a framework for understanding how multiple species persist within the same trophic level through mechanisms of differentiation and adaptation. In urban planning, coexistence has conventionally been framed as a technical and regulatory issue, focused on coordinating land uses, functions and social groups within shared spaces. Although rooted in distinct epistemic contexts, both interpretations express a shared effort to conceptualise how difference — whether ecological, functional or social — can inhabit a common ground. Over the past few decades, however, the concept has acquired both normative and analytical significance as its meaning has been progressively expanded and rearticulated. Contemporary scholarship increasingly mobilises it not merely as a descriptor of simultaneous presence but as an aspirational horizon and a design challenge. Within this

9 Chesson, P., "Multispecies Competition in Variable Environments", *Theoretical Population Biology*, 45.3 (1994), 227–276.

evolving discourse, coexistence has acquired further connotations relevant to urban and landscape studies.

The first major shift arises from post-human and relational perspectives, which invite a rethinking of the very terms through which cities, territories and landscapes are conceived. These approaches emphasise interdependence, entanglement and forms of inhabiting grounded in shared vulnerability and care.[10] In this context, coexistence refers to a dynamic condition through which human and non-human agencies continuously shape one another. This reconceptualisation encourages viewing the landscape as a hybrid and heterogeneous assemblage, produced through the interaction of ecological processes, technological infrastructures and socio-cultural practices.[11] Landscape thus appears as *plural* — embodying overlapping value systems, knowledge traditions and affective attachments, and *relational*, constituted through networks of interaction, dependency and exchange.

Building on this ontological reframing, a second shift concerns the mobilisation of coexistence as a critical lens for interpreting — and potentially governing — complex socio-ecological realities. This understanding rests on the recognition that "living together" is rarely harmonious or neutral; it unfolds as a negotiated and often conflictual process. From this perspective, territories and landscapes emerge as contested arenas, situated at the intersection of ecological processes, planning decisions, governance structures and competing claims over space and resources.[12] Coexistence thus brings to the fore the ethical, political and value-laden dimensions of spatial transformation, functioning as a theoretical and normative scaffold for interrogating power relations, rethinking the ethics of spatial governance and promoting practices attentive to justice and inclusion.

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10 See Haraway, 2016; Latour, B., "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications", *Philosophical Literary Journal Logos*, 27.1 (2017), 173–197; Puig de la Bellacasa, M., *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

11 Annalisa Metta, *Il paesaggio è un mostro. Città selvatiche e nature ibride* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2022); Gandy, M., *Natura Urbana: Ecological Constellations in Urban Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022).

12 This understanding resonates with the idea of relational space, see: Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

A third shift positions coexistence as a conceptual orientation for experimental design practices, building on existing knowledge of strategic and participatory planning, where it is viewed as both a negotiated outcome and a design problem concerned with managing proximity and difference.[13] Informed by intellectual debates surrounding the Anthropocene, this perspective invites urban, landscape and even policy designers to create conditions in which diverse human and non-human actors can inhabit shared environments in ways that are both ecologically viable and socially meaningful. This orientation aligns with theoretical contributions that foreground coexistence as a principle for reimagining landscapes as assemblages of human, non-human, and material agencies,[14] and finds expression in a growing body of projects and experiments across scales that translate these principles into practice.

In short, *coexistence* has become a central concept for articulating the relational and plural character of contemporary landscapes, offering a lens for diagnosis, design and governance while also requiring clearer methodological definition and sustained attention to the inequalities it can conceal or produce.

Looking for new (old) references

The following sections broaden the perspective by placing the notion of coexistence in dialogue with five adjacent concepts originating from diverse historical and disciplinary backgrounds: *mutual aid* (P. Kropotkin), *endosymbiosis* (L. Margulis), *affordance* (J. J. Gibson), *correspondence* (T. Ingold), and *becoming-world* (R. Braidotti). These references were selected for their capacity to articulate distinct registers of interdependence — namely, reciprocity, microbial integration, action-possibility, dwelling and practice, and multispecies becoming — each illuminating a different dimension of what *coexistence* might entail. The following sections

13 E.g. see Healey, P., "Collaborative Planning in a Stakeholder Society", *Town Planning Review*, 69.1 (1997), 1; Allmendinger, P., *Planning Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

14 See Gandy, 2022, but also: Steve Hinchliffe and Sarah Whatmore, "Living Cities: Towards a Politics of Conviviality", *Science as Culture*, 15.2 (2006), 123–138

shortly examine each concept in turn, outlining its key assumptions and exploring how it can contribute to interpreting and informing design practices for landscapes in transformation.

Mutual aid. At the turn of the 20th century, the Russian philosopher and naturalist Pëtr Kropotkin elaborated the concept of *mutual aid* as an alternative evolutionary theory, challenging dominant narratives that framed competition as the sole driver of progress.[15] The theory's central premise is that evolutionary dynamics are sustained through cooperation rather than domination, and that individual survival depends on webs of relations among diverse beings across time. Rooted in biology, yet extended to human societies, his approach foregrounds perspectives of coexistence rooted in reciprocity and solidarity, regarded as fundamental to both collective survival and social organisation.[16] When transposed to landscape studies, *mutual aid* functions both as an interpretive tool and a normative orientation: it might allow us to read landscapes as fabrics of relational practices and suggests design and planning approaches that enable collective stewardship and multifunctional communal spaces. In this sense, Kropotkin's idea of coexistence is not a static condition but an aspirational horizon of solidarity — one that remains strikingly relevant for contemporary reflections on how landscapes can support both ecological functions and diverse forms of life.

Endosymbiosis. Similar perspectives emerged decades later in a completely different field: microbiology. In her theory of *endosymbiosis*[17] Lynn Margulis describes evolution as a process driven by symbiotic integration rather than competition. She held that cellular life, as we know it, arose from internal fusions —

15 Kropotkin, P., *Il mutuo appoggio: un fattore dell'evoluzione*, trans. by G. Borella and D. Engel (Milano: Elèuthera, 2020; orig. pub. 1902)

16 "It is not love, nor even affection […], that drives a herd of ruminants or horses to form a circle to resist an attack by wolves; nor is it love that drives wolves to form a pack to hunt; nor is it love that drives kittens or lambs to play with each other […] It is a feeling infinitely greater than love or personal sympathy, an instinct that has slowly developed among animals and men during an extremely long evolution, which has taught both animals and men the strength they can acquire from mutual support and mutual aid, and the joys they can find in social life." (*ibid.*, p. 42). Translation by Irene Bianchi.

17 Lynn Sagan, "On the Origin of Mitosing Cells", *Journal of Theoretical Biology*, 14.3 (1967), 225–IN6.

organisms incorporating one another to form new, collective entities. This principle of functional integration challenges the notion of discrete individuality, revealing the extent to which life depends on nested relationships and shared metabolisms. The concept of endosymbiosis can also provide valuable theoretical and operational insights for spatial disciplines. It suggests ways of reading that are more attentive to the symbiotic mechanisms already at work — such as microbial interactions, mycorrhizal networks and soil ecologies that underpin visible ecosystems. Simultaneously, it encourages design and behavioural approaches aimed at fostering productive cooperation among landscape elements. Finally, it invites a reframing of design not as external intervention but as a process of co-learning and integration across species and systems. Supporting mutualistic infrastructures — such as regenerative soils, agroecological systems or metabolic loops that transform waste into resources — becomes both a technical strategy and an ethical commitment to sustaining interdependence. Endosymbiosis thus offers a powerful lens for imagining landscapes as evolving collectives, maintained through continuous exchanges of energy, matter and meaning.

Affordance. Developed by James J. Gibson,[18] the concept of *affordance* describes how environments offer or constrain possibilities for action in relation to an organism's body, abilities and intentions. Affordances are thus inherently relational: the same physical feature, such as an embankment, a tree or an empty lot, affords different possibilities to different actors, whether children, cyclists, foxes or pollinators. The affordance framework reveals a form of coexistence that is not defined by discrete objects or subjects but by overlapping *fields of possibility*. These fields can generate both synergy and conflict: where humans perceive a pathway, a bird may find a perch; where livestock find forage, rare plants may be endangered. For spatial disciplines, this entails focusing on the material and perceptual conditions that enable or limit action — visibility, accessibility, body scale and resource distribution — while recognising that these conditions evolve over time. This perspective carries direct implications for spatial design: intentionally opening

18 James J. Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances (1979)", in *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, ed. by J. J. Gieseking and others (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 56–60.

or restricting affordances — such as boardwalks that protect nesting areas while allowing human passage or buffer strips that permit pollinator foraging but prevent human disturbance — designing refuges, and calibrating visibility to mediate multi-actor use. Recent developments extend affordances to incorporate socio-cultural practices, making the concept especially valuable for multispecies and participatory landscape design.[19]

Correspondence. Developed within anthropology at the turn of the twenty-first century, Tim Ingold's concept of *correspondence* reframes human–environment relations by shifting attention from static representations to lived processes through which they are continuously (re-)made.[20] Grounded in the idea that people and materials are co-constituted through skilled practices and embodied trajectories, correspondence rests on the assumption that relations between humans, non-humans and materials are reciprocal and processual rather than instrumental. As Ingold explains, correspondence entails "joining with things in their unfolding, rather than imposing form upon matter".[21] This perspective frames coexistence as an ongoing practice of mutual responsiveness: humans attend to the affordances and resistances of materials, while their actions leave traces that shape future possibilities. For landscape and urban studies, the concept opens analytical space for examining flows, routes, seasonality and everyday practices as constitutive of spatial form and meaning. It also suggests design approaches that are incremental and open-ended — responsive pathways that evolve through use, repairable materials and infrastructures inviting care and co-creation. As such, correspondence offers a powerful orientation for rethinking landscapes not as finished artefacts but as collaborative processes sustained through practices of active coexistence.

19 See Candeloro, G., L. Mastrolonardo, M. Angrilli, A. Crociata, and P. L. Sacco, "Three Waves of Extended Mind Theories and Urban Planning: The City as a Distributed Socio-Cognitive Architecture", *Frontiers in Built Environment*, 10 (2024), 1446919.

20 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011); Tim Ingold, *Correspondences* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

21 Ingold, 2020, p. 13.

Becoming-world. Emerging from post-humanist philosophy, Rosi Braidotti's notion of *becoming-world* reconceptualises subjectivity as distributed, relational and in constant transformation alongside non-human others[22]. Its core assumption is that humans are inseparable from the bio-techno-material assemblages that sustain life, and that acknowledging this entanglement carries ethical and political responsibility. As Braidotti writes, "we are not unitary subjects but nodes in a web of becoming",[23] where coexistence is understood not as static accommodation but as a process of *becoming-with*. Applied to spatial studies, this perspective encourages interpreting territories as bio-techno-social assemblages, where species, infrastructures and materials enact mutual transformations. It frames coexistence as an affirmative and generative practice, in which justice and care must be extended across species and scales. For design, the *becoming-world* perspective implies prioritising multispecies flourishing — through habitat connectivity, restorative land-use and governance arrangements that represent non-human interests — while questioning anthropocentric metrics of success.[24] In this way, Braidotti provides a conceptual ethics for landscape and urban projects that seek not merely to manage environments but to nurture relational vitality.

From shared spaces to relational landscapes?

This chapter aims to challenge conventional understandings of coexistence and prompt reflection of its usefulness for spatial — and specifically landscape — studies. Rather than as the simple cohabitation of uses, functions or communities, coexistence is approached here as a conceptual tool for rethinking relations

22 Rosi Braidotti, *Trasposizioni: sull'etica nomade* (Roma: Luca Sossella, 2008); Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

23 Braidotti, 2008, p. 49.

24 E.g. see Donna Houston, Jean Hillier, Diana MacCallum, Wendy Steele, and Jason Byrne, "Make Kin, Not Cities! Multispecies Entanglements" and "Becoming-World" in Planning Theory', *Planning Theory*, 17.2 (2018), 190–212.

between human and non-human systems amid profound ecological and social transformation.

To broaden the perspective, the chapter positions coexistence alongside a selection of concepts developed in other disciplinary fields: Kropotkin's *mutual aid*, Margulis's *endosymbiosis*, Gibson's *affordance*, Ingold's *correspondence* and Braidotti's *becoming-world*. Although these notions do not explicitly address coexistence, each proposes an alternative way of imagining the relationships between living beings and their environments — whether by redefining patterns of cooperation and reciprocity (Kropotkin, Gibson), rethinking the very essence of relationality (Ingold, Braidotti) or reinterpreting interdependence as the formative principle of life itself (Margulis). Drawing on diverse disciplinary genealogies, together they provide a set of complementary lenses that help reframe coexistence as a dynamic, processual and materially grounded condition.

Coexistence thus emerges as an analytical and operational bridge between ecological and social systems, human and non-human agencies, and matter, practice and meaning. The exercise proposed here is not intended to be exhaustive; many other terms and approaches could equally contribute to this discussion. Rather, it aims to open a space of reflection on *coexistence-sensitive lenses* that could support new ways of reading and designing landscapes, allowing spatial disciplines to engage more effectively with complexity, plurality and interdependence.

Within this expanded understanding, perspectives on coexistence invite a renewed interpretation of landscapes in transformation. They first challenge the view of landscapes as bounded, legible and exclusively cultural constructs, foregrounding instead their processual, contingent and hybrid nature. As interpretive devices, landscapes must engage with fragmented and overlapping realities — ecological, infrastructural and social — that coexist and sometimes collide. As material fields, reinterpretations of coexistence reveal the ecological, infrastructural and political processes through which landscapes are enacted, contested or denied.

Finally, the reframing of coexistence articulated through these conceptual encounters opens a practical horizon for design. It calls for approaches attentive to relationships and care, such as fostering commons and collective infrastructures, supporting iterative and

practice-based processes, implementing multispecies-sensitive interventions and considering spatial conditions that intentionally mediate access, refuge and interaction. In doing so, coexistence becomes more than an analytical category about co-presence: it evolves into a guiding principle for spatial practices that aspire to cultivate interdependence and "co-agency", sustaining the fragile conditions of shared life in an increasingly uncertain world.

Giambattista Zaccariotto

WATER IN CONCEPTUAL ART
Recent Practices and Positions

Introduction

In the second half of the 20th century, building on modernist scepticism toward finished form, conceptual artists marked a shift in approach from the object to the concept. In other words, in their work, the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, unpretentious and/or "dematerialized".[1] The shift is accompanied by a critical attitude towards art institutions and a questioning of the social role and responsibility of the artist, along with a different role and a new set of demands placed upon the spectator, proposed to be informed and critically active.[2]

In its broadest definition, the conceptual in art means in addition to an expanded critique of the cohesiveness and materiality of the art object and a growing wariness toward definitions of artistic practice as purely visual, also fusion of the work with its site and context of display, and an increased emphasis on the possibilities of publicness and distribution.[3] Thus, the term conceptual art describes several different types of art, including Performance art, installations, Video art, Earth art and Land art.[4] Conceptual artists took over the role of

1 Lucy R. Lippard, ed., *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. vii.
2 Jon Bird, *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. viii.
3 Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: MIT Press, 2000), p. xvii.
4 Susie Hodge, *50 Art Ideas You Really Need to Know* (London: Greenfinch, 2023), p. 180.

the critic traditionally concerned with evaluation and interpretation of artist´s work and framed their own propositions, ideas, and concepts, defining the intentions of their work as part of their art. Thus, advancing propositions or investigations.[5] A line of artistic production engages the environment as a conceptual medium and as a field of inquiry. Early gestures emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with artists who used documentation, entropy, and site-specific strategies to reveal how ecosystems, climate, and human impact intersect with culture.

Specifically concerning water, Robert Smithson's works engaged with rivers and tidal contexts, making the water itself a record of geological and cultural time. Richard Long focuses on rivers, riversides, and wetland corridors with simple gestures (walking, line-making), emphasising duration and flow that link human action to natural processes. Alan Sonfist's urban projects reinhabit waterside spaces with time-based documentation of native ecologies. Hans Haacke›s water-context projects document real-time flows (e.g., water usage, resource statistics), illuminating governance and ecological impacts. When engaged with waterways or moist urban contexts, Mierle Laderman Ukeles foregrounds cycles, labour, and stewardship with documentation that traces ongoing ecological and municipal processes. These practitioners engaged with the environment not only physically but also conceptually, seeking to challenge and transform perceptions and ways of thinking about it and the relationships within it, an attitude integral to institutional critique and to the politics of knowledge. Their work blends scientific observation, political engagement, and poetic pedagogy.

Water as Material and Symbol

Water's role in conceptual art is both material and symbolic. Water's inherent fluidity and temporal instability make it ideally suited for anti-formal art and dematerialised artistic practice. In this context, water is not simply a passively depicted subject but an active agent through which the process of art itself is interrogated. The continuous change in water properties parallels the artist's

5 Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972).

pursuit of capturing ideas of ephemerality and mutable states of existence. Water can represent renewal, vulnerability, and climate consciousness. For example, artworks use water's transitions — between liquid, ice, and vapour — as metaphors for climate variability and sustainability challenges. Through these symbolic and material resonances, water becomes an instrument for conceptual critique as well as a medium for communicating urgent messages about global warming and environmental change.

Recent experiences highlight a convergence of art, environmental science, and technology through interactive and participatory means. Within this framework, water is reinterpreted as a nexus, which links hydrological data, artistic process, and community engagement. Such a model has fostered collaborations that are sensitive not only to aesthetic innovations but also to the broader socio-environmental contexts prompted by climate change.

Interdisciplinary Methodologies in Practice

Recent interdisciplinary research projects in Europe have demonstrated innovative methodologies for integrating water into artworks. Common practices include:

Data-Driven Immersive Installations. Several studies have documented installations integrating real-time environmental sensor data with water-based artworks. For example, interactive technology to modulate water flow, creating immersive experiences that mirror changes in local climatic conditions. These works couple artistic expression with environmental performance, confronting audiences with tangible manifestations of climate change.

Urban Public Interventions and Policy Engagement. Other projects have emphasised the role of public art that deploys water features in public spaces in shaping urban discourse on water management. By linking artistic display with the operational aspects of water networks, these projects encourage citizens and policymakers alike to address water scarcity and flood risks in an era of climatic uncertainty, serving as platforms for community dialogue on urban sustainability and resource management.

Integration of Indigenous and Local Knowledge. Many European initiatives — though less frequent in mainstream literature —

have drawn on indigenous and local knowledge systems to enrich conceptual strategies concerning water. These projects highlight how traditional ecological wisdom can inform contemporary art practices, providing alternative narratives of water conservation and climate resilience. Often featured in interdisciplinary research programmes, this integration reaffirms water's cultural significance and its role in sustaining community identity, particularly in regions facing climate-induced water crises.

European Case Studies and Climate Change

Olafur Eliasson and the Materiality of Climate Change. Olafur Eliasson's installations offer compelling case studies of water as a research tool. His works, which incorporate interactive water elements, invite viewers to experience the instability and transformative power of water. These installations often include real-time data on ambient conditions and provoke deliberations on the consequences of climate change, such as altered water cycles and extreme weather events.

One of the most emblematic projects, *Ice Watch* (2014),[6] marked the publication of the UN IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report on Climate Change. It used large blocks of ice captured from Greenland's fjords to create an immersive installation in urban public squares, first in Copenhagen and later in London and Paris with the stark material reality of melting ice providing a visceral experience of climate change. By presenting real ice as a medium for an artwork, Eliasson makes the abstract notion of global warming concrete. Viewers can physically feel the cold, observe the gradual melting, and thereby connect emotionally with the consequences of environmental deterioration. The tactile nature of this installation underscores the urgency of the climate crisis, transforming the viewers' passive observation into an active encounter with the reality of water's changing nature in a warming world.

6 Olafur Eliasson, *Ice Watch*, 2014, Copenhagen, https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/ice-watch-2014/ [accessed 11 july 2025]

In the 2008 project, *The New York City Waterfalls*,[7] Eliasson reintroduced waterfalls into the urban context of New York City. Although this installation primarily focused on urban transformation and aesthetic experience rather than providing a direct commentary on climate data, it nonetheless hinted at broader environmental issues. The cascading water in the installation was a reminder of nature's potential to intervene in human environments, catalysing discussions about urban planning, sustainability, and the reconnection of people with natural phenomena. By recontextualising water as an urban phenomenon, Eliasson invites viewers to consider how natural elements can be reintegrated into everyday life even as they are endangered by environmental change.

Other water-based projects — such as *Waterfall* (2016)[8] at Versailles and indoor rain installations like *Your Strange Certainty Still Kept (*1996)[9] — demonstrate the versatility of water as an artistic medium. These installations often utilise carefully orchestrated water flows to produce visual spectacles that meld natural beauty with engineered precision. In such works, water is both a sensory reward and a narrative device that speaks to the uncertainty of relying on natural cycles in an age where climate anomaly is the new normal. The deliberate choreography of water in these pieces not only captivates the senses but also provokes a reflection on the unpredictable patterns of precipitation and hydrological cycles in our disrupted climate.

Random International's The Rain Room and Urban Water Narratives. Another notable European case is Random International's *Rain Room*[10] installation in London, at the Barbican Centre's Curve Gallery (2013), a 100m2 field of rain through which the visitor can walk without getting wet. In the Rain Room, every drop of water is precisely controlled. The system's ability to constantly monitor and

7 Olafur Eliasson, *The New York City Waterfalls, 2008,* New York, https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/the-new-york-city-waterfalls-2008/ [accessed 11 july 2025]

8 Olafur Eliasson, *Waterfall, 2016,*Versailles, https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/waterfall-2016/ [accessed 11 july 2025]

9 Olafur Eliasson, *Your strange Certainty Still Kept,* 1996, New York, https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/your-strange-certainty-still-kept-1996/ [accessed 11 july 2025]

10 Random International, *Rain Room*, 2012, London, https://www.random-international.com/rain-room [accessed 11 july 2025]

adjust in real time epitomises the ultimate form of adaptive control. It creates a dry "safe zone" for every visitor by anticipating their movement and pre-emptively shutting off rain above them.

The work uses controlled rain to craft an immersive environment in which the viewer's movement modulates the behaviour of the water. While the installation achieves an idealised state of control over a typically chaotic natural process, it also poses the question: How realistic is it for urban water managers to achieve such precision control, given the inherent variability of natural systems?

This meticulous orchestration represents an idealised state — a technological utopia in which human intervention can neutralise natural unpredictability.

In contrast, urban water management operates in a realm where uncertainty is a constant companion. Unlike the predictable environment of the Rain Room, urban water systems must contend with rainfall fluctuations, climate change impacts, and non-linear responses in hydrological cycles. While water managers may strive to implement adaptive measures, real-world constraints — such as outdated infrastructure, funding gaps, and sociopolitical complexities — hinder the level of control achieved during installation.

Daan Roosegaarde and the Integration of Public Art in Urban Water Management. Interventions, often implemented in cooperation with local environmental agencies, demonstrate how artworks can influence public understanding and foster policy engagement on water management and climate adaptation. Daan Roosegaarde *Waterlicht* (2015)[11] is a large-scale, site-specific light-and-mist installation in the Netherlands that simulates virtual flood levels above public spaces using LEDs, lenses, and haze. It makes sea-level rise and riverine flooding legible at a 1:1 urban scale. "Waterlicht is an activator for a better future, highlighting the vulnerability and strength of living with water". Developed and presented with Dutch water authorities and municipalities, and local cultural institutions, it was also exhibited elsewhere in Europe. By visualising historical high-water marks and projected flood scenarios where people live, it turns abstract risk into an embodied experience, fostering public conversations about dike systems, sponge-city strategies, and climate adaptation policy.

11 Daan Roosegaarde*, Waterlicht*, 2015, Amsterdam, https://www.studioroosegaarde.net/project/waterlicht [accessed 11 july 2025]

Synthesis and Future Directions

The article examines contemporary artistic practices that generate new spatial or landscape experiences, often through temporary installations. These works not only transform physical environments but also engage with concepts of impermanence, presence, and perception, and show how water operates on dual levels. As a material, it instantiates processes that question permanence and temporality, while as a symbol, it addresses ecological vulnerability, renewal, and sustainability. Taken together, these interdisciplinary projects are significant for fields such as landscape architecture and urban planning, not so much for providing technical models as for offering symbolic insights that challenge how we conceive of space, time, and human interaction with the built environment in the context of climate change.

Despite significant progress in this field, several avenues remain open for further scholarly exploration. Future research might focus on integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches — for example, by examining the impact of water-based installations through the combination of artistic feedback and measurable environmental data. Extending comparative case studies across diverse European contexts, and even into transnational frameworks, could further illuminate how socio-cultural factors shape artistic engagements with water and climate issues. At the same time, emerging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality offer promising possibilities for the creation of immersive, data-driven artworks capable of simulating potential climatic futures. Finally, empirical studies investigating the influence of water-related conceptual art on urban water policy and on public engagement with climate adaptation strategies could provide valuable insights into the wider societal implications of artistic practice in this domain

Conclusion

Water is a multifaceted research tool in the conceptual art scope with continuities and shifts in water-focused conceptual art from the 1960s to the last decades, arguing that while core strategies — systems thinking, site specificity, measurement, and public

pedagogy — persist, contemporary practices recast water as a hydrosocial interface where climate science, policy, and community knowledge converge. In the 1960s/early 1970s, conceptual art foregrounded process as form and systems aesthetics. Water was treated as a self-regulating material that indexed entropy, flux, and feedback. Site-based inquiries and indexical methods (instructions, mappings, tests) framed hydrological processes as legible, often within an emergent critique of institutions and extractive modernity. Canonical projects and critical texts positioned water as both medium and evidence, cultivating a pedagogy of attention to processes otherwise invisible in gallery settings. The last decades retain these foundations while introducing four decisive inflections. First, artists deploy real-time sensing (e.g., water quality, hydroacoustic, level/flow) and responsive media to render aquatic variability perceptible, producing immersive environments that translate environmental signals into sound, light, and visualisation. Second, works stage sea level rise and flooding, transforming abstract models into embodied, place-specific experiences that catalyse public dialogue on adaptation. Third, collaborations with water-related organisations reposition public art as a communicative interface for policy, expanding the remit of institutional critique into institutional coproduction. Fourth, practice-based research integrates indigenous and local knowledge alongside scientific inquiry, reframing water as cultural memory and community identity. It also surfaces key tensions, such as show versus sustained engagement; evidence versus affect; and the ethics of mobilising data and community knowledge within cultural and policy arenas.

Matteo Vianello

THE ICE WILL LIE
Diachrony between Cultural Representation and Matter in the Alpine Landscape

> The natures that we [...] want to include in landscape histories and geographies are unlikely to be innocent.
>
> Steve Hinchliffe, *Inhabiting: Landscapes and Natures (2003)*[1]

Introduction. Immigrant mountains

In her essay *Landscape as Provocation*, British sociologist and geographer Doreen Massey offers some thoughts on landscape theories from the observation of the Skiddaw Mountain in England.[2] While contemplating the contours of the North Lake District mountains, Massey develops a critique of the assumption that landscapes are immutable and permanent backdrops for human activity. In her reflections, she mainly focused on the temporal disjunction between human histories and geological times, challenging the notion that the landscape exists solely as a function of human perception. Massey highlights how landscapes resist the neat dichotomies often used to categorise them: "[landscapes] make a mockery of the oppositions that we create between time (History) and space (Geography), or between nature (Science) and culture (Social Anthropology)".[3] Thus, in contrast to traditional understandings of landscape as static or foundational, Massey describes mountains not as permanent elements of the

1 Steve Hinchliffe, '"Inhabiting": Landscapes and Natures', in *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, ed. by Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (London: Sage, 2003), p. 209.

2 Doreen Massey, 'Landscape as a Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains', *Journal of Material Culture*, 11.1–2 (2006), 33–48.

3 Bender 1999, in Massey 2006, p.35.

earth's surface, but rather as *immigrant rocks*,[4] a definition she uses to describe how geological processes over vast time scales effectively transform the appearance of landscape. The discrepancy between human and topographical temporalities highlights the transient and impermanent nature of mountains, which ultimately creates an elusive sense of stability to human perception. This rethinking of the mountain as a slow-moving, unstable entity leads Massey to propose a broader, more dynamic conception of landscape, one that resists its objectification as the neutral ground upon which infrastructures, borders, and built environments are imposed. However, she also warns against interpreting the relentless transformation of natural elements as a justification for the harmful and irreversible anthropogenic changes that have occurred since the Industrial Revolution. Massey's provocation thus rests on a reorientation of how we understand both landscape and time. Based on her arguments, the landscape, she argues, should not be seen as a passive entity acted upon by human hands, nor as a stage for extractive or territorial practices. Instead, becoming aware of the landscape's ability to escape existing aesthetic and spatial assumptions opens up the possibility of seeing ecosystems as *vibrant matter*,[5] as networks of subjectivities that participate in environmental transformation just as much as humans do. In other words, landscapes may appear immutable while they are slowly changing before our eyes. As they shift beneath our feet, landscapes should be understood not as inert scenery, but as living and mutable entities. Finally, the notion of landscape as a space for encounter, closely related to ideas of locality and indigeneity, is continually tested by the changing nature of *immigrant mountains.* Like all landscapes, they remind us of the illusion of permanence and of the urgent need to reconsider the temporal and material assumptions underlying our relationship with the environment.

The Lies of Ice

Although Massey's insights stem from her observations of the Skiddaw mountains in England, her conclusions can be meaningfully

4 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
5 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

extended to other geographies. Among the many ecosystems that have become powerful symbols of global warming, glaciers occupy a central position. Their retreat is a global phenomenon, unfolding simultaneously across different regions with comparable effects.[6] In particular, the context of Italian Alps is witnessing a remarkable morphological, cultural and ecological change as the ice is retreating. Over these places, past cultures have built precise imaginaries and ways of representing glaciers. For instance, the representation of the icy landscape of North-Eastern Italian Alps was aesthetically built within the Venetian culture of the 18th century. In this context, the Dolomites appeared as an inaccessible and sublime backdrop, standing in stark contrast to the orderly design of the cultivated plains. The symbolic opposition between the 'garden' of the Venetian lowlands and the 'wild' nature of the Dolomites' glaciers played a crucial role in shaping the cultural perception of the glacial landscape, a perception that persists to this day.[7] This marked the emergence of an early form of "glacial landscape", founded on the idea of a permanent and majestic glacial topography. However, a specific aesthetic perception of the Alps has spread since the early explorations in the 19th century, one inclined to view the Alpine landscape as staring and unchanging, despite the profound and ongoing morphological transformations affecting Alpine environments.

In these decades, the building of the aesthetic and social construction of the Alps as a landscape and the first visual and scientific representations coincided with a pivotal historical moment, the rise of modern representational devices.

Moreover, at the time, the first modern classification of the Alpine ice landscape coincided with the rise of mountaineers as a distinct group. Being a technical, performative, and largely male activity, this process reframed the high mountains as remote, performative spaces, territories to be conquered rather than inhabited.[8] As

6 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Tempo di festa, tempo di carestia: storia del clima dall'anno mille*, 3rd repr. (Torino: Einaudi, 1987).

7 Rosario Assunto, *Il parterre e i ghiacciai: tre saggi di estetica sul paesaggio del Settecento*, 1st Italian edn, Logos, 3 (Palermo: Novecento, 1984).

8 Enrico Camanni, *La nuova vita delle Alpi*, 1st edn, Temi, 122 (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002); Enrico Camanni, *Ghiaccio vivo: storia e antropologia dei ghiacciai alpini*, Paradigma (Scarmagno, Turin: Priuli & Verlucca, 2010).

the first British and French bourgeois elites began to explore the Marmolada for leisure, the aesthetic of the glacier shifted from a wild and pristine place to a powerful environment to be conquered and mastered. As a result, certain visual elements —such as altitude, rock formations, wind, and the stark whiteness of the snow— became defining characteristics of the glacial landscape.[9]

The written accounts of early mountaineers also reflect the unfamiliarity of these terrains. Their descriptions often lacked a specialised vocabulary for describing glacial morphology. Instead, they relied on metaphors drawn from architecture and geometry, comparing ice formations with architraves, parallelepipeds, and cubes.[10] While such descriptions are now historicised and situated within the early pioneering phases of alpinism that was taking place in those years, they nonetheless contributed to the formation of a lasting cultural imaginary, one that continues to depict glaciers through a lens of stability and timelessness.

Despite scientific awareness of the seasonal variation in glacial mass, since the mid-19th century, mountaineers perceived the ice as a vast, white desert, an environment devoid of life and transformation, inhospitable, and highly metaphysical. Yet, even as it was described in these static terms, the glacier remained in constant motion, undergoing relentless seasonal shifts that continuously reshaped the very geometric forms identified by these early explorers. The earliest explorations took place at the end of the Little Ice Age, a period that made glacial environments accessible for the first time, while marking the beginning of an unstoppable melting process, whose final, dramatic consequences are now unfolding before our eyes. Paradoxically, while the narratives and aesthetic representation of glaciers constructed an idealised and enduring image, which is still present in advertising and alpine tourism, the material reality of glaciers has always been in flux, undergoing radical and increasingly rapid transformation.

The Marmolada glacier, situated in the Alps of the Veneto region, offers a striking example. On 3 July 2022, a massive portion of ice broke and collapsed into the valley below, killing twelve mountaineers. The temporal disjunction between the cultural

9 Flavio Pintarelli, 'Marmolada of Madness', *Not. Nero Editions*, 15 July 2022 https://not.neroeditions.com/marmolada-of-madness/.

10 *Ibid.*

representation of the glacier as stable and eternal and its current state as unstable and dangerous became tragically evident in the shock that followed the avalanche.

While scientific observation captures glacial change through chronological time — quantitative, linear, and standardised — local narratives and myths have long portrayed glaciers as living, sentient entities. Historically, glaciers were seen as threatening forces. Today, they are described as severely ill or dying.[11] These traditional accounts emphasise not only the dynamism of ice but its agency, a perspective that is largely absent from the scientific and touristic imaginaries, which dominate public discourse. Some researchers frame the Marmolada and similar cases within the notion of *fragile landscape,* a concept that does not merely reference ecological degradation, but rather seeks to express the sense of continuous instability and movement embodied by the icy landscape.[12] According to Massey's reflections, the notion of *fragile landscape* encourages us to see ecosystems not as fixed physical structures, but as animated matter that continuously subverts the representational norms inherited from landscape culture. This approach is especially relevant in the age of global warming, where ecosystem behaviours are increasingly marked by uncertainty and unpredictability.

This perspective profoundly challenges landscape design, particularly in relation to the role of images, and more broadly of representation technologies. This condition of uncertainty is well articulated within post-humanist literature, particularly by Donna Haraway. She calls for an epistemological shift, and advocates to abandon the search for stability in the future, instead embracing the messy, situated task of *staying with the trouble*.[13] Among the many conceptualisations of landscape, this view prioritises constant observation and checks with previous configurations. Hence, emphasising the *performativity* of the landscape does not

11 Elisabetta Dall'O', 'I draghi delle Alpi. Cambiamenti climatici, Antropocene e immaginari di ghiaccio', in *Disasters in Popular Cultures*, II: 197–223, *Geographies of the Anthropocene* (Cosenza: Il Sileno, 2019).

12 Antonio Longo and Annalisa Metta, 'Fragility as a Condition: The Landscape Perspective', in *Fragility and Antifragility in Cities and Regions*, ed. by Francesco Curci and Daniele Chiffi (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), pp. 108–35.

13 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

imply blind reliance on objective data and parametric modelling, but rather calls for a constant cultural reassessment of traditional representations and the perceptible forms of the environment. Yet, fully embracing landscape impermanence — particularly in the case of glaciers, which are deeply entangled with tourism and economic interests — remains something yet to be implemented.

The concept of *melancholy* has thus been proposed to describe our relations with certain landscapes, particularly those where topographical transformations have long refused the established idea of landscape.[14] Alongside the elevation of certain ecosystems — most notably glaciers — into monuments of global warming, *melancholy* primarily expresses a state of paralysis, a temporal short circuit between the observer and the landscape. Here, one contemplates the prelude to catastrophes, anticipates an obituary, and denies the possibility of renewal. The "*lies of matter*"[15] unfold primarily on a temporal scale. It is precisely within this temporal disjunction — between the rapid melting of glaciers and the cultural inability to generate new aesthetic or conceptual tools — that the full scale of the crisis becomes apparent.

Historically, transformation in glacial mass has always resonated with shifts in the aesthetic codes associated with the Alpine landscape. However, today, an image persists that does not acknowledge change but instead underscores the disappearance of an environment. In the temporal gap between the presence of glaciers and their projected extinction, an unprecedented glacial aesthetics is emerging, namely one that redefines how we understand and inhabit Alpine landscapes. Artistic and scientific practices increasingly intersect, reconfiguring the role of art in relation to environmental materiality. The so-called "funerals for glaciers" — rituals that commemorate the collective loss of glacial activity — have become more frequent.[16] These funerary rites

14 Jacky Bowring, *Melancholy and the Landscape: Locating Sadness, Memory and Reflection in the Landscape*, Routledge Research in Landscape and Environmental Design (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

15 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

16 The first such funerary ceremony took place in Iceland for the Ok Glacier in August 2019.

have emerged as another means of personifying glacial matter, transforming it into a collective subject of grief.[17]

If Ice Lies, Ice Is Alive

The conception of the glacier as a living entity leads to a new set of theories and images, extending both toward recent post-humanist literature and deep into the ancient roots of legends tied to icy landscapes. Jane Bennett's theory of *vibrant matter* offers a helpful framework here. She describes ecological materials as possessing vitality, not because they have an inner essence or soul — an *anima* — but because they can establish conflict or alliance-based relationships with other entities. In this sense, vitality is not intrinsic, but relational. From this perspective, the glacier is neither an inanimate object nor a personified subject cast in an anthropomorphic or animistic sense. Instead, it asserts its living presence through its effects when it resists passage, encroaches upon cultivated fields and villages, provides economic sustenance, and gathers communities. As a living matter, the glacier shapes human practices just as much as it is shaped, inhabited, and transformed by them. For Bennett, it is within this system of relations that the *life* — or agency — of the glacier is to be found. Consequently, also the glacier's *death* is legible through the transformative practices that have been imposed upon it since the onset of the modern era, giving us the possibility to consider glaciers as active subjects in the making of places.

Viewing glaciers through this lens requires recognising the role of myth as a form of knowledge capable of narrating the glacier through the relationships it has woven with the inhabitants of the valleys. In other words, the myth makes explicit the network of interdependencies, conflicts, and alliances that have long defined the icy landscape, well before its scientific classification.

The image of the glacier as fragile and ill invites us to reconsider how we understand the glacier as a landscape. The anticipated disappearance of the glacial dynamics of the Marmolada raises not

17 Arnar Árnason and Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson, 'A Funeral for a Glacier: Mourning the More-than-human on the Edges of Modernity', *Thanatos*, 9 (February 2020), 46–71.

only ecological alarms, but a deeper cultural question: what will remain of the meanings, myths, and images constructed around it? While its physical disappearance may be inevitable, the symbolic and affective future developments of the glacier remain uncertain. The very fact that glacial melting still provokes strong emotional and cultural reactions confirms that landscape remains a central construct in Western thinking.

The radical and irreversible transformations of the glacial ecosystem bring to light a profound crisis in our cultural tools for conceiving landscapes. Increasingly the *image* of the landscape, i.e., its visual representation, can no longer be re-experienced. The risk is that the glacier becomes a landscape anchored solely in the past, and its future can only be imagined as absence. Although landscape as a concept has always carried a degree of abstraction, dating back to its semantic roots in the early Renaissance, the modern era has further exacerbated this tendency, leading to the crystallisation of environments into fixed and idealised representations of their vibrant vitality. Contemporary landscape theory is, therefore, increasingly returning to primary, material concepts ('matter,' 'soil', 'fire'), in an effort to reorient its ontology. Landscape studies are seeking to bridge the temporal gap between form and narrative, between language and the tangible world. The renewed attention to *experiental modes* aims to go beyond the hegemony of the visual, recovering perceptions and cognitive postures derived from listening, walking, and smelling. It seeks to restore the immersive, multisensory dimension of the landscape as a collective phenomenon.

This leads to consider landscape a tool of political and cultural inscription, imposed upon the morphology of the environment. However, it has always been the environment itself — fluid, unstable, unpredictable — that ultimately resisted the ontological assumptions behind this operation. Indeed, any cultural idea on the erroneous conception of an unchanging and permanent environment cannot be firmly established. The Skiddaw mountains, as Massey suggests, point to a radically different concept

of destruction and renewal.

Contemporary landscape design research echoes this shift. The research of landscape architects like Günther Vogt suggests that landscapes are not destined to *die*, but to regenerate through

continuous transformations, whether radical or not, of ecosystems. Alpine valley landscapes, for instance, are themselves the long-term result of glacial erosions during the past ages. While current glacial retreat is driven by the climate crisis, glaciers, both today and in the distant past, continue to generate morphologies and environments. Their disappearance does not mark an end, but a transition.

Conclusions

The geological and glacial materiality of ice not only challenges the cultural constructs underpinning the Alpine landscape but also prompts a deeper interrogation of the very meaning of *landscape* as shaped in modernity. Oscillating between memory, image, object, and geo-ecological substance, landscape increasingly operates as a discursive field, disconnected from the physical environment that generates it. While the cultural memory of the Marmolada's glacial landscape will endure, its current condition calls for a renewed, physical and emotional relationship between ice, body, and culture. Returning to the ridge of the Marmolada, now almost entirely exposed, the urgency is to touch, listen, and re-localise our idea of the landscape. This is not merely an act of witnessing loss, but a necessary reconfiguration of how we understand climate, environment, and matter through new cultural lenses.

The glacier of the future invites us to recognise that the vibrating matter of ice is neither an object nor a subject, but rather an unfinished system that is constantly re-written. New relationships emerge within this system, grounded in the acknowledgement of uncertainty and precarity. Under this lens, the glacier becomes an ecology where no fixed and stable conception of territory and memory can be sustained over time. It is a space that defies a crystallised stratigraphy of time. Instead, it acts as continuous provocation–a demand to rethink our cultural imaginaries of nature, and an invitation to reformulate them through a form of perception that is not intimate and collective.

Francesca Berni

CO-ACTING LANDSCAPES BEYOND THE HUMAN-NATURE DIVIDE
Concepts and Experiments[1]

> Mas pra quê? / Pra que tanto céu? / Pra que tanto mar? Pra quê? / De que serve esta onda que quebra? / E o vento da tarde? De que serve a tarde? / Inútil paisagem / Pode ser que não venhas mais / Que não voltes nunca mais / De que servem as flores que nascem pelos caminhos? / Se meu caminho sozinho é nada.
>
> Antônio Carlos Jobim and Aloysio de Oliveira, *Inútil paisagem* (1965)[2]

The lyrics of Aloysio de Oliveira's *Inútil Paisagem* evoke what landscape *can* be. Unfolding in a rhythm both playful and dramatic, they express landscape as a necessary uselessness — a space of meaning that exists not for function but through relation. Its existence depends on cultivating a continuous, resonant mutuality with the world. The song reveals life as an unceasing phenomenon

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 18th AESOP Young Academics Conference, *Bridging Gaps: Urban Planning for Coexistence*, held at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano, 19–22 March 2024, as *Reconnecting with Landscapes in Trouble: Towards Co-existence?* (F. Berni and I. Bianchi).

2 From Antônio Carlos Jobim (music) and Aloysio de Oliveira (original Portuguese lyrics), *Inútil paisagem* [*Useless Landscape*], first released in *The Wonderful World of Antônio Carlos Jobim* (Warner Bros. Records, 1965, English lyrics by Ray Gilbert), and later performed in its original version by Elis Regina and Antônio Carlos Jobim in *Elis & Tom* (PolyGram / Philips Records, 1974): "But what for? / Why so much sky? / Why so much sea? What for? / What's the use of this wave that breaks, / And the evening breeze – what's the use of evening? / Useless landscape. / Perhaps you'll come no more, / Perhaps you'll never return. / What's the use of flowers blooming along the paths, / If my lonely path is nothing?" English translation by the author.

of transformation, where creation and destruction coexist within the same movement. It discloses how multiple perspectives and agencies inhabit every scale of time, intertwining their destinies and unfolding space as a living fabric beyond human control. It also reminds us that nothing, when isolated — unconnected and detached from the web of relations — can make sense or endure. Landscape thus appears as a choral mechanism, a collective and solidaric dance. From this perspective, this chapter explores conceptual and practical references that challenge competition among species and experiment with new forms of *mutual aid*[3] between humans and non-humans. Drawing on a range of references from diverse fields of knowledge and action, this contribution explores the dynamics of landscape fragility in relation to the human–nature divide, with particular attention to approaches that have sought to bridge this rupture through reciprocity and care. The chapter is supported by the analysis of three illustrative examples that, through documentary inquiry, design experimentation and artistic engagement, have attempted to act *with* the landscape. In particular, they are examined through a lens attuned to fragility — not as a limitation but as a generative condition[4] from which to begin, where fertile and promising traces emerge to guide landscape design processes.

From the Gaze to Co-Agency: Landscapes in Transformation

Echoing this idea of landscape as a choral mechanism, Severtsov's attentive observation of the Voronezh region captures the same sense of interdependence and collective vitality animating the living world: "[…] further on, almost every wave carries a duck rocking on it, while above you can see flocks of shelducks. Everywhere life

3 On the idea of *mutual aid* as a cooperative principle underlying evolution, see Pëtr A. Kropotkin, *Il mutuo appoggio. Un fattore dell'evoluzione*, ed. by Giacomo Borella (Milan: Elèuthera, 2020; first publ. 1902).

4 For a further discussion, see Antonio Longo and Annalisa Metta, "Fragility as a Condition: The Landscape Perspective", in *Fragility and Antifragility in Cities and Regions*, ed. by Francesco Curci and Daniele Chiffi (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024) https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035312559.00015 [accessed 20 January 2024]. Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

swarms exuberantly".[5] His words reveal a landscape teeming with reciprocal gestures — a choreography of movements and energies in which every being contributes to the vitality of the whole. This exuberance of life anticipates an understanding of landscape as a shared space of mutual aid and transformation, where no organism thrives in isolation.

Along the same lines, Serres reminds us that "it no longer depends on us that everything depends on us".[6] His reflection exposes the illusion of modern thought: the desire to master time, space and the living world. Yet it also opens the possibility of another wisdom, grounded in relinquishment and listening, in recognising the limits of human agency alone and the autonomy of other forms of life. In this light, coexistence becomes an experiment in learning from difference — an attunement to the multiple agencies that compose the world and to the solidarities that sustain it. As Ingold suggests, life unfolds through the meshwork of lines that bind beings and environments together — a *sociality* of continual correspondence rather than separation.[7] Within this living fabric, survival and transformation are sustained through relational actions: shared gestures among species, collaborations that renew the meaning of landscape as a co-acting, ever-becoming field. From this perspective, landscape is traversed by multiple and unpredictable forces, suspended between vitality and decay, in which even destruction can be understood as a creative act: a transformation that generates new forms of life, relations and meanings. As Metta writes, the landscape's vitality does not exclude ruin: processes of erosion, abandonment and collapse are also gestures of creation, through which the world reinvents its own forms and meanings.[8] They reveal

5 N. Severtsov, *Periodic Phenomena in the Life of Mammals, Birds and Reptiles of Voronezh* [in Russian] (Moscow, 1885); quoted in Pëtr A. Kropotkin, *Il mutuo appoggio. Un fattore di evoluzione* (*Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*), ed. by G. Borella (Milan: Elèuthera, 2011; first publ. 1902), p. 251 (English translation by the author).

6 Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, translation by Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 172.

7 Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 14.

8 Annalisa Metta, *Il paesaggio è un mostro: città selvatiche e nature ibride* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2022), p. 62.

the hybrid nature of contemporary territories — wild, porous and constantly reshaped by the coexistence of human and non-human agencies. Coccia identifies this potential within the climate itself, in the condition of mixture: "a continuous topological inversion, an oscillation that unravels the boundaries between subject and environment and reverses their roles".[9] Such a condition invites a different understanding of agency — one that is neither separative nor dominant but entangled and co-constitutive. Landscape, in this view, becomes a field of reciprocal transformation, where every act participates in the continuous negotiation between forces, scales and species. It is within this dynamic that co-agency unfolds as both vulnerability and creation.

Fra-Agility of the Landscape

Le Guin reminds us that "To use the world well, to be able to stop wasting it and our time in it, we need to relearn our being in it".[10] Her call for relearning invites a renewed mode of presence based on admiration, care and reciprocity. Within the framework of co-agency, Le Guin's words suggest that design and landscape practice must shift from acts of control to gestures of participation — of listening to and acting with the world's multiple rhythms. From this perspective, *fragility* and *agility* converge as central notions for understanding landscape not as a fixed form but as a living process of becoming. "Fragility" derives from *frangere*, "to break": it denotes a condition of tension close to rupture, where transformation is imminent.[11] Agility, from *agere*, "to act," introduces motion — the ability to respond, to move within that vulnerability.[12] When held together, these two terms

9 Emanuele Coccia, *La vita delle piante: Metafisica della mescolanza* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2019), p. 39.

10 Ursula K. Le Guin, "'Deep in Admiration", in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts of the Anthropocene*, ed. by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. M15–M21 (p. M17).

11 "Fragilità", *Vocabolario Treccani online*, https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/fragilita/ [accessed 16 December 2024].

12 "'Agilità", *Vocabolario Treccani online*, https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/agilita/ [accessed 16 December 2024].

suggest a dynamic state of responsiveness: an elastic condition through which landscapes continuously reorganise themselves. *Fra-agility* emerges as an attitude of co-agency, a shared capacity to act and transform amidst instability, acknowledging that movement and change are not external disruptions but intrinsic forces shaping every living relation. To think through *fra-agility* is to recognise movement and change not as external disruptions but as intrinsic forces shaping every living relation. It implies an ethics of presence — an ability to participate in the ongoing negotiation of the world's configurations. In this light, agency is not individual but distributed — an unfolding reciprocity that binds human and other-than-human lives within a common rhythm of transformation. As Longo and Metta write, "there is indeed a close link between fragility, uncertainty and the unexpected", and it is precisely for this reason that "the landscape perspective can act as a way of recognising, interpreting and dealing with fragility, because the landscape is the staging and action of fragility".[13] This observation captures the profound continuity between landscape theories and practices that "reconsider territorial fragilities as a set of characterising qualities, and not as a negative condition to be overcome".[14] Thus, landscape design practices can also be seen as exercises in co-agency — a way of participating in the ongoing negotiation of processes and meanings among the multiple species, materials and temporalities that compose the ecosystems through which they temporarily pass. This does not mean that landscape architecture is a neutral or mimetic spatial practice; rather, it calls for a recalibration of how we think, affirm and speak in the world. To understand fragility as a natural condition of landscape is to see design not as an imposition of stability but as a responsive practice — a shared field where fragility becomes a generative force.

13 Antonio Longo and Annalisa Metta, "Fragility as a Condition: The Landscape Perspective", in *Fragility and Antifragility in Cities and Regions*, ed. by Francesco Curci and Daniele Chiffi (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), p. 109 https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035312559.00015 [accessed 20 January 2024]. Open Access CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

14 *Ibid.*

Within the Landscape Folds: Practising Fra-Agility

If fragility and co-agency describe the world as a living web of relations, how can landscape practices act within it? How can design operate with and within ecosystems, rather than upon or onto them? These questions guide the following section, which moves from the conceptual premises of *mutual aid* and *fra-agility* towards their resonance in practical, situated experiences. In their differences, these projects encourage us to abandon linear, solution-driven thinking and to embrace slower, more open forms of reasoning, imagination and action. Drawing from Haraway's appeal to "make kin in the Chthulucene",[15] this study conceives landscape thought and practice as an in-fra-agile mode of action — one that moves within the folds of transformation and small-scale contexts, aware that every form is temporary and every intervention part of a broader metabolism of becoming. Through this lens, landscape design acts within transience, cultivating bonds that embrace impermanence as the very ground for kin-making and mutuality in action. Haraway's vision of the *Chthulucene* — a "timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth"[16] — resonates with the notion of *fra-agility*: both articulate an ethics of presence grounded in the now, where acting means participating within transformation rather than seeking to master it. This work reimagines design as a practice of co-agency — one that emerges through landscape practices grounded in the material and spatial specificity of places. These embodied practices cultivate the imaginative and perceptive basis for engagement, entering the ecosystem not only as a physical environment but as an imaginative field nourished precisely by the presence of bodies, matter and relations. In this sense, to inhabit what Bennett calls "a world of vibrant matter"[17] is to recognise embodiment as a condition of entanglement: we are not discrete individuals but constellations of bodies —

15 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

16 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

17 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 112.

human and more-than-human — continuously exchanging matter through energy in a ceaseless cycle of transformation. From this perspective, embodiment operates as an integrative process, closely intertwined with fieldworking — understood "not only in terms of gathering raw material that is then made sense of, but rather as a generative process".[18] From an initial mapping of thirty small-scale projects across thirteen countries, three were selected for their resonance with the reflections developed in this study (*mutual aid*, *fra-agility*, *co-agency*). The selected cases — *Fragments of Extinction* (IT), *A Recoletora* (PT) and *Jardim de Sequeiro* (BR) — function as a laboratory for rethinking landscape practice beyond the human–nature and theory–praxis divide.

Fragments of Extinction[19] (*FoE*), an ongoing project by eco-acoustic researcher and composer David Monacchi, interprets the landscape through sound. Since 1998, Monacchi has recorded the sonic traces of primary forests untouched by human presence, documenting their progressive disappearance. The project culminates in the *Sonosfera®* — a spherical sound space now part of the Pesaro Musei heritage — where visitors can experience ecosystems through immersive listening.

Monacchi's work, inspired by the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* (2005), transforms scientific data into sensorial awareness. It reveals that listening can be a form of knowing and caring, expanding landscape perception beyond the visual regime. The acoustic compositions of *FoE* evoke an "eco-acoustic science"[20] — a way of recognising fragility through resonance. These soundscapes become spaces of encounter where the landscape is not represented but performed — co-experienced by multiple species within a shared rhythm of existence. The project also reveals that it is not only sounds and the species producing them that are disappearing but also our very capacity to listen. *FoE*

18 Kristen Sharp, "Open Fields: Fieldwork as a Creative Process", in *Fieldwork for Future Ecologies: Radical Practice for Art and Art-based Research*, ed. by Bridget Crone, Sophie Nightingale, and Polly Stanton (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2022), p. 59.

19 *Fragments of Extinction*, https://www.fragmentsofextinction.org/fragments-of-extinction/ (accessed 3 December 2025).

20 David Monacchi, "Eco-Acoustic Science", in *Festival della Mente*, 2019 [talk transcript].

makes us aware that hearing — the human faculty of perceiving and interpreting the world in its variety and complexity — is itself becoming endangered. As the acoustic textures of the planet fade, so too does our ability to attune to them — to engage in *co-agency* with other voices, to perceive the *mutual aid* that sustains every ecosystem and to recognise in the subtle fabric of sound the *fra-agility* through which life continuously resonates and transforms.

A Recoletora[21] (*AR*) is a collective project based in Portugal that gathers and restores value to edible wild plants in post-industrial territories between Porto and Matosinhos. Structured around three interrelated actions — collection, classification and preparation — it seeks to reestablish an ecological relationship between humans and spontaneous vegetation. Each phase nourishes the others in a circular movement: plants are identified and mapped, their properties studied and, finally, cooked and shared in community gatherings. The initiative highlights at least two vulnerabilities: the ecological precariousness of metropolitan soils and the social marginality of communities inhabiting them. By reviving practices of gathering and collective preparation, *AR* challenges industrial food systems and reclaims the cultural and ecological agency of local territories. It transforms foraging into a relational act of learning and reciprocity — an everyday practice of co-habitation through which landscape reveals itself as a living environment of awareness, inviting us to learn from the places we inhabit and pass through. In this sense, it enacts mutual aid as a form of solidarity among species and communities, practices fra-agility by moving through the fragile ecologies of neglected soils and cultivates co-agency as marginalised groups become aware of their capacity to enact alternative forms of togetherness and collective action — practising landscape as a living, equitable process that harmoniously transforms space while materially reconnecting to the ecosystem.

Conceived and coordinated by Professor Júlio Pastore at the University of Brasília, the *Jardim de Sequeiro*[22] (*JdS*) is an experimental and pedagogical landscape project rooted in the biome of the Cerrado, a region known for its extraordinary biodiversity

21 *A Recoletora*, https://arecoletora.com/ (accessed 3 December 2025).

22 *Jardim de Sequeiro*, https://sites.google.com/view/jardim-de-sequeiro/jardim-de-sequeiro (accessed 3 December 2025).

and seasonal alternation between intense rains and severe drought. The project explores how landscape design can act with and within environmental cycles, cultivating ecological awareness through temporality, collaboration and care. The *JdS* — literally "Dry Garden" — is a temporary garden that germinates, blooms and fades with the rhythm of the seasons. Planted through direct seeding at the beginning of the rainy period, it grows without irrigation, relying solely on natural rainfall. As the dry season returns, the vegetation withers, leaving behind seeds that are collected and reused for the next cycle. Each edition of the garden is redesigned, introducing new species and spatial compositions that mirror the adaptive processes of the Cerrado. Beyond its ecological intelligence, the *JdS* nurtures collective and inclusive forms of making. Every cycle involves students, volunteers and local participants throughout the entire process of design, sowing and maintenance, turning the act of gardening into a collaborative practice. By working *with* the Cerrado, the project strengthens the bond between communities and their environment, reactivating dormant ecological processes that counteract water scarcity and soil degradation. The *JdS* also redefines aesthetic expectations: its beauty does not lie in permanent exuberance but in the constant transformation that follows the pulse of climate and time, encompassing both growth and decay. It is an exercise in coexistence and awareness — a poetic and scientific device that illuminates landscape design as a shared and playful activity, where human and non-human agencies converge to cultivate living together within the fragile temporality of the world.

Fra-Agile Futures: Relearning Our Being in the World, Acting within the World

Thus, landscape design — understood as an interconnected living environment — compels a reassessment of our modes of presence and action. Every human gesture leaves a trace; every intervention resonates beyond its intended scope. Moving away from domination and towards participation becomes essential: the notions and discourses explored throughout this study — *mutual aid*, *co-agency*, *fra-agility*, *correspondence* — aim to expand the understanding

of landscape as a continuous process of relational becoming and transformation, in which everything and everyone are implicated and involved. The analysed projects translate these principles into action: they practise attention, care and responsiveness as modes of inquiry and landscape design. As Kristen Sharp observes, "creative practice is immersed in the subjective — it is an emergent, processual knowledge, where thinking, knowing and learning occur through doing, through being in the field and making".[23] Operating from the margins and within lateral temporalities, these practices do not pursue permanence and accumulation but transformation and transmission. Their power lies not in scale or replication but in their ability to reveal alternatives — other ways of knowing and sensing. Each initiative exemplifies *fra-agility*: acting within instability while sustaining relation, listening and becoming. Ultimately, these experiments show that the convergence of art, science and landscape design can nurture more attentive and interconnected ways of understanding and inhabiting the world. By hybridising languages and practices, they remind us that transformation begins in the small, in the local — in gestures of care capable of echoing across scales — gestures that enact what Le Guin called "relearning our being in the world".[24]

As such, the very idea of landscape as a fixed construct has come into question. Historically shaped by the eye and the mind, by gaze and intellect, its cognition and construction have always been mediated by technology. In this sense, technology has played — and continues to play — a central role in mediating transformations.[25] A renewed dialogue between landscape design and ecological theory[26] is needed to reflect critically on this intensive use of the eye — the

23 Sharp, "Open Fields: Fieldwork as a Creative Process", p. 67.

24 Le Guin, "Deep in Admiration", p. M17.

25 On the historical intertwining of vision, technology and the very formation of the landscape idea — where the act of seeing becomes reflexive and technologically mediated — see Michael Jakob, *Le origini tecnologiche del paesaggio* (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2022).

26 See Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), quoted in Mark A. Cheetham, *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature Since the '60s* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), p. 157: "[Ecological thinking] pervades and reconfigures theory and practice. It does not reduce to a set of rules or methods; it may play out differently from

very organ through which the ideas of landscape and design have evolved. The unprecedented acceleration and ubiquity of digital and visual media have further intensified this mediation, transforming not only territories and cities but also our ways of perceiving and interpreting reality. As Lovelock reminds us, technological evolution need not imply alienation from the natural world; rather, it can become a means of restoring a sensible harmony with the living systems of Gaia.[27] A fragility inherent in the very idea of landscape — understood as a space of shared imaginaries and agencies — is thus revealed. This condition calls for re-engaging the whole body in the study and practice of landscape: observing not only through intellect and gaze but also through all the senses, movement and the material presence of being in the world. To dwell, perceive and act in this way means expanding the perceptual, cognitive and imaginative scope of design — learning once again from the world as a living interlocutor. In this process, the arts and humanities play a crucial role: they nurture intersections across disciplines and cultivate sensorial modes of inquiry that translate experience into understanding. As the discussion of the three case studies also seeks to show, such approaches reveal how learning, perception and design awareness arise from embodied engagement with the fragile and ever-transforming conditions of landscape. They invite us to conceive landscape design not as an image to be seen but as a situation[28] to be felt and traversed — where knowledge emerges from the bodily experience of fragility itself, and design becomes a pedagogical path towards embodied place awareness.

location to location; but it is sufficiently coherent to be interpreted and enacted across widely diverse situations."

27 James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; first publ. 1979), p. 110.

28 Metta, *Il paesaggio è un mostro*, p. 169.

PART III
EXPERIMENTS

Luca Befera, Oriana Persico

THE BREATH OF DIGITAL ART
PneumOS, Datapoiesis and Ecological Transformation

Introduction

The story of *PneumOS*, an installation created by the research centre HER: She Loves Data, is one of transformation. Or rather, of a series of transformations that, juxtaposed, overlapped, and intertwined — much like an organic process — have bloomed into a new breath. This chapter traces the genesis and aim of the artwork through these transformations, each of which represents a tale of people, computation, and ecology that HER wishes to convey. It is divided into two sections. The first section describes the HER research centre and its three founding concepts of knowledge, datapoiesis, and ecology. To clarify these concepts, each paragraph opens with a quotation from *I Principi del Nuovo Abitare* (Italian for "The Principles of New Living"), a manifesto listing eleven principles that outline a new approach to art and life at the core of HER's practice.[1] The second section is dedicated to *PneumOS*, drawing on the previously defined categories. The chapter emphasises the relationship between the artworks and the contexts in which they are exhibited or from which they collect data, as well as the change that HER aims to achieve by raising public awareness of the social and environmental issues addressed.

1 Salvatore Iaconesi, "The Principles of Nuovo Abitare," *Medium* (2021) https://xdxd-vs-xdxd.medium.com/the-principles-of-nuovo-abitare-c766cb6e1b88 [accessed 30 March 2025].

HER

Knowledge

From extractive models we must shift to generative ones in which the actor produces and maintains the data, making it available in an ecosystemic way, both individually and through their roles in communities and in society. Data thus becomes autobiography, expression, self-representation.[2]

Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico, partners in both life and work, established the research centre HER: She Loves Data after years of creative exploration within the network AOS (Art is Open Source) and the company HE (Human Ecosystems).[3] Formally established in 2016, following the relocation of their company from London to Rome, HER (Human Ecosystems Relations) embodies the founders' queer and feminist orientation and their pursuit of new forms of relationality cultivated through artistic practice. Iaconesi passed away in 2022 due to a brain tumour. After his diagnosis in 2012, he chose to openly share the data from his medical examinations, allowing others to use his condition to generate new forms of meaning and to transform the very notion of cancer through human connection and shared knowledge. *La Cura* (Italian for The Cure), as he called the project, was his way of reclaiming his body and identity through an open-source process of exchange.[4] Accordingly, HER's artworks aim to challenge the extractive approach of data colonialism, which "combines the predatory extractive practices of historical colonialism with the abstract quantification methods of computing".[5] Instead, they promote generative social knowledge.[6] Data is collected and shared with the community with no purpose other than to foster social insight.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Cesare Biasini Selvaggi and Valentino Catricalà, *Arte e Tecnologia del Terzo Millennio: Scenari e Protagonisti* (Milan: Electa, 2020).

4 Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico, "La Cura," (2017) https://la-cura.it/ [accessed 30 March 2025].

5 Nick Couldry and Ulises A. Mejias, "Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject," *Television & New Media*, 20 (2019), 336–49 (p. 337).

6 Bernard Stiegler, *Prendre Soin: Tome 1, De La Jeunesse et Des Générations* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008).

Datapoiesis

Data could and should become "zero kilometre data", "community data", or "locally sourced and managed data". This does not exclude industry, but it does mean that industry must operate sustainably, respecting the environment, society, and people's rights, freedoms, and psychology.[7]

The transformation of data plays a central role in all HER projects, and culminates in the concept of "datapoiesis".[8] Datapoiesis refers to the use of software as a mediating tool to enhance relationships between human and non-human entities, and to enable the emergence of new ecosystems. At its core are "datapoietic objects", which encompass "not only technical artifacts, but also cultural and existential ones, as they dive deep into contemporary culture, human perception and understanding — creating new opportunities for social imagination".[9] Computation lies at the heart of the datapoietic approach, drawing on methods of data translation already employed in science — such as visualisation,[10] sonification,[11] and physicalisation[12] — as well as in computer-generated art, where "the artwork results from a computer program being left to run by itself, with minimal or zero interference from a human being".[13] The authors define the overall rules, and the algorithm processes the inputs accordingly. As a result, sonic, visual,

7 Salvatore Iaconesi, "The Principles of Nuovo Abitare," *Medium* (2021) https://xdxd-vs-xdxd.medium.com/the-principles-of-nuovo-abitare-c766cb6e1b88 [accessed 30 March 2025].

8 Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico, "Datapoiesis: La Vita Del Progetto," (2020) https://he-r.it/datapoiesispub/ [accessed 30 March 2025].

9 HER, "Datapoiesis," (2021a) https://www.he-r.it/project/datapoiesis-2/ [accessed 2 September 2025].

10 Matthew O. Ward, George Grinstein, and Daniel Keim, *Interactive Data Visualization: Foundations, Techniques, and Applications* (CRC Press, 2015).

11 David Worrall, *Sonification Design: From Data to Intelligible Soundfields* (Cham: Springer, 2019).

12 Yvonne Jansen et al., "Opportunities and Challenges for Data Physicalization," in *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York, 2015).

13 Margaret A. Boden and Ernest A. Edmonds, 'A taxonomy of Computer Art', in *From Fingers to Digits: An Artificial Aesthetic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), pp. 23–59 (p. 33).

and light outputs continuously shift in response to changing inputs. The artwork becomes a living node, a conduit that channels and transforms data in real time, linking the environment where the data is sourced with those for whom it is intended.

Iaconesi and Persico jointly created two datapoietic artworks: *Obiettivo*[14] and *U-DATInos*.[15] *Obiettivo* (2019) comprises 19 transparent Plexiglas panels arranged in parallel to form a parallelepiped (Fig. 1). Each panel is engraved with a slice of a three-dimensional figure depicting a homeless person lying on their side. LED lights illuminate this figure according to global hunger data sourced from international institutions, including the United Nations, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the World Poverty Clock. As poverty levels rise, the figure becomes more sharply defined; conversely, lower levels produce a dimmer, less perceptible image. The lights thus operate as a persistent alert, a symbolic materialisation of the urgency and visibility of global poverty. *U-DATInos* (2020) is, instead, an artificial plant that emits light and sound according to water pollution levels in the Oreto River in Palermo (Fig. 2). Data collectors, called "river custodians", use sensors immersed in the river to record numerical values for four key pollution parameters. These values are then uploaded to a local database via an online application. If data are not regularly submitted, the plant's light and sound gradually fade until they disappear entirely. The plant must, therefore, be continuously "watered" with data to survive, a symbolic gesture linking environmental monitoring with care, attention, and presence.

14 Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico, *Datapoiesis: La Vita Del Progetto*, (2020) https://he-r.it/datapoiesispub/ [accessed 30 March 2025].

15 HER, "U-DATInos: Sensibili all'Acqua," (2021b) https://udatinos.eu/ [accessed 2 September 2025].

Figure 1. *Obiettivo*, exhibited at the Ex Chiesa San Pietro Martire, Bologna, 2020.

Figure 2. *U-DATInos*, exhibited at the Ecomuseum Mare Memoria Viva, Palermo, 2020.

Ecology

We must prepare ourselves to come into contact with different, alien, and queer sensitivities, which must be translated into one another, beyond mere usefulness. This is the role of art, to make these expressions and representations "senseable", that is, perceptible to the senses and, therefore, capable of generating both sensation and meaning.[16]

HER's practice embeds various ecological perspectives that inform the aesthetic, philosophical, and political orientation expressed in *I Principi del Nuovo Abitare*.[17] A key reference is "ecosophy", which challenges the entrenched dualism between human-cultural and nonhuman-natural systems. Thinkers such as Bateson,[18] Naess,[19] Guattari,[20] and Haraway[21] argue that such separation restricts ecological complexity and situates humans as passive observers rather than as active participants within relational ecosystems. In HER's artworks, various elements — plants, rivers, air — act as active agents within multi-species fields of interaction. Through the translation of environmental data into aesthetic experience, HER advocates an entangled mode of inhabitation, blending humans with these elements and their ecosystems. For Iaconesi and Persico, participation in these processes is not optional but foundational: one must engage in the becoming of data, bodies, and environments. Therefore, the concept of datapoiesis addresses the "presence" of participants, understood as "a moment of awareness of the exchanges between the subject and the living environment of which

16 Salvatore Iaconesi, "The Principles of Nuovo Abitare," *Medium*, (2021) https://xdxd-vs-xdxd.medium.com/the-principles-of-nuovo-abitare-c766cb6e1b88 [accessed 30 March 2025].

17 *Ibid.*

18 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: A Revolutionary Approach to Man's Understanding of Himself* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing, 1972).

19 Arne Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary,' *Inquiry*, 16 (1973), 95–100.

20 Félix Guattari, *Les Trois Ecologies* (Paris: Galilée, 1989).

21 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

they are part".[22] This presence holds transformative potential, encouraging human beings "to enter into a new relationship with themselves and the world".[23] The possibility of not only perceiving data but of creating a shared memory rooted in communities and places suggests new ecologies yet to be explored.

PneumOS

A few months after Iaconesi's death, Persico embarked on a new artistic venture on her own. This was linked to a call launched by the city of Ravenna under the DARE (Digital Environment for Collaborative Alliances to Regenerate Urban Ecosystems in medium-sized cities) Project, funded by the European Union under the Urban Innovative Action (UIA) Programme.[24] The call required the use of data from the three existing outdoor monitoring stations in Ravenna to visualise air quality and raise public awareness. Persico conceived air as a form of breath, and the artwork became a tribute to Iaconesi, a spiritual legacy in which her partner's breath would symbolically endure. This vision gave rise to *PneumOS*. By drawing on real-time data from the monitoring stations to display air quality, the work addressed several of the 14 global challenges identified by the UIA Programme, including air quality, climate adaptation, culture and cultural heritage, digital transition, sustainable land use, and nature-based solutions. The artwork extends into the urban space, encouraging the audience to care for air quality by highlighting pollution. Its development, between 2023 and 2024, brought together a transdisciplinary team of experts in computer science, acoustics, aesthetics, design, physiology, ethology, and climatology. *PneumOS* premiered at Tecnopolo in Ravenna in February 2025, and was later selected for the Italian Pavilion of Expo 2025 in Osaka.

22 Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks, 'Introduction: Archaeologies of Presence,' in *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*, ed. by G. Giannachi, N. Kaye and M. Shanks (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 1–26, p. 53.

23 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 207.

24 Comune di Ravenna, 'Cosa Facciamo,' (2022) https://www.darsenaravenna.it/home-dare/cosa-facciamo-progetto-dare [accessed 30 March 2025].

The artwork builds on the legacy of *Obiettivo* and *U-DATInos* in terms of datapoiesis and exhibition. It consists of a pink-coloured metal base concealing the hardware components, and a Plexiglas dome that reveals a silicone sac and five responsive membranes (Fig. 3). Functioning like a lung, it collects data from the DARE monitoring stations, and reacts to the density of pollutant particles, which are processed as numerical values. These values are then translated into sounds — produced by vibrating membranes — and into the rhythmic contraction and expansion of the lung sac, explicitly mimicking human breathing. This physiological reference allows participants to intuitively grasp the current level of pollution by associating it with a bodily experience. The lung metaphor is further enhanced by the audio output, providing a multisensory and creative interpretation of the air quality data. *PneumOS* thus implies a "grammar of breath", whose syntax consists of the increasing noise produced by the membranes and the irregular movement of the sac as pollution rises. Translating invisible environmental parameters into perceptible forms creates a tangible connection between the air, the artwork, the participants, and the broader urban ecosystem.

Furthermore, the design of *PneumOS* evokes an alien presence through its green sac, marked by bulging protrusions and fabric threads along the edges of the membranes. It constructs its own fiction as an entity that has arrived on Earth to engage with humans and the environment. The informational material placed around it, describing its main components and the grammar of breath, encourages participants to become aware of pollution particles, and provides guidance on how to read the outputs. The interaction between the artwork and the participants resembles medical observation. Indeed, the artwork, like a sentient body, displays a symptom — a manifestation of its own condition — through sound and movement. The participants, like a doctor, infer the sign — an expert interpretation of the symptom — by drawing on their own understanding of air quality and the artwork's parameters. The insight gained from this exchange can lead to a "regenerative cycle" between the participants and the artwork, each supporting the other in a mutually beneficial way.[25] Local efforts to reduce pollution

25 Bill Reed, "Shifting From 'Sustainability' to Regeneration," *Building Research & Information*, 35 (2007), 674–80, p. 677.

influence the atmospheric conditions to which the artwork responds, and the artwork, through its interpretive sensibility, reflects these changes back to the community. *PneumOS* thus fosters a relational ecology in which data, bodies, and environments co-evolve within a shared field of interdependence.

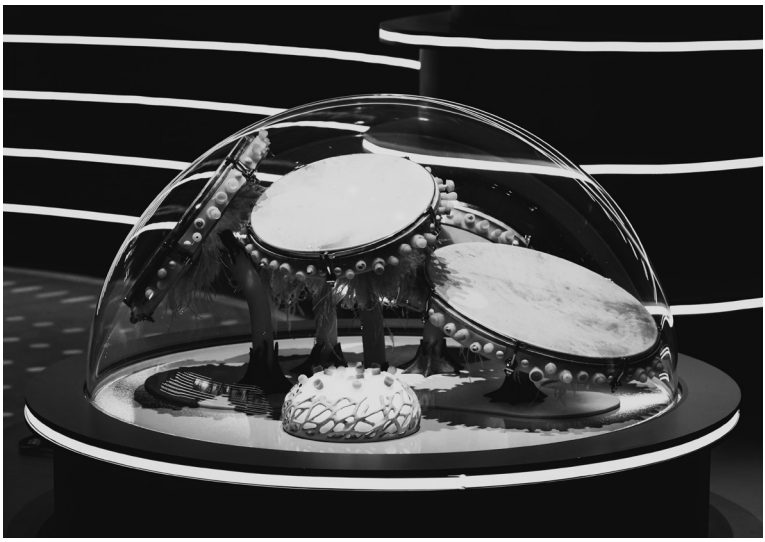

Figure 3. *PneumOS*, exhibited at Expo 2025, Osaka.

Figure 4. *PneumOS*, QR link to an excerpt of the installation in motion at Expo 2025, Osaka.

Conclusions

PneumOS, like the other datapoietic artworks created by HER, rejects the spectacularisation of exhibition and directs its purpose towards a shared ecological practice. Firstly, it creates new relationships encompassing human and non-human, biological and non-biological beings. Secondly, the "grammar of breath"[26] provides insights into pollution and fosters ecological awareness among participants. The artwork is not merely a device for translating data. It initiates an ecosystemic transformation and a broader transformative process, from a passive, unaware community to an active, informed one. The engagement with *PneumOS* encourages presence and empathy between humans and the environment, united by a new breath. Being rooted in the urban area where it was originally exhibited, it becomes part of the social fabric and functions both as a relational agent and a tool to promote environmental care. It thus constitutes a subtle thread connecting the entire production of HER[27] — linking care with data, rituality with place — and opens pathways towards future developments yet to be revealed.

26 Bill Reed, "Shifting From 'Sustainability' to Regeneration," *Building Research & Information*, 35 (2007), 674–80, p. 677.

27 HER, "Datapoiesis", (2021a) https://www.he-r.it/project/datapoiesis-2/ [accessed 2 September 2025].

Natalia Agati

RE-ENCHANTING SERPENTONE[1]
An Urban Rite of Vertical Passages

The Dream of a Home, a Dream Home

"What a wonder, up here! I had never been! I had no idea my house was this beautiful. Oh love, come and see what's up here, you all should come, it's worth it!" says Ninette, a resident of a lower-floor flat, as we climb together to the summit of the mountain that has appeared on the rooftop of the fourth block of Corviale, the one-kilometre-long housing complex on the south-western outskirts of Rome. The structure is part of *Oribasìa Corviale*,[2] an artistic project that we, the -ATI collective, have been carrying out in recent months at the *Serpentone*. For several weeks, soft pink organic forms stood out against the harsh grey concrete, becoming a relational pretext for inviting residents to imagine a different atmosphere for the building's rooftop. Few know that on those

1 Literally, *Serpentone* ("big snake") is the popular nickname of the Corviale housing complex, a one-kilometre-long building constructed in Rome between 1975 and 1982.

2 *Oribasìa Corviale* is a project by the -ATI collective, developed between autumn 2024 and winter 2025 in collaboration with Roma Tre University, the Corviale City Laboratory, the Charlemagne Foundation and Periferiacapitale. After several months of a participatory construction of the "peaks", the ritual ascent took place on 26 October 2025 and the descent on 18 January 2026, with the involvement of the CAI (Italian Alpine Club) choir. For this project, the -ATI collective brought together the creative and active participation of Maria Rocco, Matteo Locci, Emanuele Caporrella, Başak Tuna, Panagiotis Samsarelos, Alessandro Giovannini, Natalia Agati, Francesco Restuccia and Edoardo Fabbri. To learn more about the *Oribasia Corviale* project, there are two short videos that show the performance of the ascent and the descent: https://vimeo.com/1063878644?share=copy; https://vimeo.com/1063912246/ee042721d4?share=copy. The project was later exhibited and revisited at the Scuola Piccola Zattere in Venice: https://www.scuolapiccolazattere.com/en/events/extruded-polystyrene-styrofoam

terraces, intended to harmonise the composition of the façade, architect Mario Fiorentino designed a tall, narrow parapet that ultimately blocked the view. What could have been a panoramic space became a sad sequence of cramped courtyards. Starting from the observation of what seems like a minor mistake — yet one that speaks volumes about the architectural ideology behind many — the -ATI collective envisioned a vertical infrastructure built by stacking extruded polystyrene styrofoam (XPS) rigid insulation panels, widely recognised in Rome for their use in energy-efficiency upgrades. By climbing this new organic elevation, it finally became possible — even if only for a moment — to enjoy a 360-degree view across the entire city. From the peaks that now rise over these long-abandoned terraces, on clear days the gaze can wander freely, linking historic domes with modern sails, snow-capped mountains with an endless sea.

The *Oribasìa Corviale* project is, above all, an action aimed at rethinking space, beginning with one of the many critical architectural details. It transforms industrial materials, normally used for technical upgrades to existing buildings, into relational devices capable of opening new urban scenarios, hosting encounters, fostering connections and making room for unexpected forms of wonder. In ancient Greece, *oribasìa* was an initiatory journey encompassing the entire territory. During this ritual space-time, dancing Maenads would leave the *polis* and ascend Mount Parnassus. Edith and Victor Turner describe this pilgrimage as a path marked by distinct phases, tracing the back-and-forth movement between Delphi and the city.[3] Once at the summit, the *communitas* could experience a certain magical state of existence that, by the end of the ritual, would also influence those who had remained in the city.

In much the same way, the performance held on 26 October 2024 became a collective invitation to ascend, explore and experience Corviale as perhaps never before and, upon reaching the summit, to create a new state of encounter inspired by the wonder of the view. It took place precisely where architectural mistakes had once seemed like insurmountable barriers between the self and the community, between the self and the world. That evening, bathed in the red light of sunset, the temporary community of guests and residents gathered on the

3 Edith Turner and Victor Turner, *Il pellegrinaggio* (Lecce: Argo, 1997).

terrace of the fourth block seemed to have reclaimed — even if only for a moment — the enchanted gaze of the first tenants, who could still see, in that vast sweep of concrete, the dream of a home.

> *"That morning, the Corviale housing complex revealed itself in all its splendour: stretching one kilometre in length, rising thirty-two metres in height and encompassing a volume of one million and fifty thousand cubic metres. A nest for seven thousand inhabitants: for many, like us, the fulfilment of a dream. After all, happiness is also a home with fifteen thousand neighbours next door."*

These lines, from the 1983 film *Sfrattato Cerca Casa Equo Canone* (*Evicted Tenant Looking for a Rent-Controlled Home*), are spoken as the Stroppaghetti family arrives at Corviale, the newly inaugurated and gleaming public housing complex. Marino's triumphant tone may sound almost comical today, yet it recalls a time when public housing — through the work of the Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari (IACP) — embodied genuine hope for the future, rooted in the belief that architecture could redeem society.

Figure 1. Oribasia Corviale, collettivo-ATI, la salita 26 ottobre 2024, Corviale, terrazza condominiale lotto 3

Figure 2. Oribasia Corviale, collettivo-ATI, la salita 26 ottobre 2024, Corviale, terrazza condominiale lotto 3

Figure 3. Oribasia Corviale, collettivo-ATI, la salita 26 ottobre 2024, Corviale, terrazza condominiale lotto 3

However, things did not unfold as hoped. The story of Corviale is so well known that it has become a kind of legend. Its reputation precedes it: the *Serpentone* quickly rose to national prominence as a symbol of the failure of the large-scale modern social housing ideals, the heroic dream that animated architectural culture in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Engaging with a place inhabited by such a multiplicity of anthropological worlds requires a plurality of perspectives and complex interpretative frameworks. Yet, as Tafuri notes, one of Corviale's most evident shortcomings was that it was conceived as "a serpent without prophecies", so that "this decantation of songs to the future is triumphantly realised as the outer limit of Rome's periphery, without any certainty of being able to shape its future developments".[4] Its great limitation, he continues, was "having experienced, but not led, the crisis".[5] In other words, having failed to break through the suffocating web of "populisms and realisms"[6] that, since the post-war reconstruction, had characterised policies promoted by the Italian left, themselves the product of "the slow but progressive consumption of myths and ideologies".[7]

The massive concrete architectural volume was conceived as "a reorganising magnet for a disaggregated urban site", a "monument to mediation",[8] through which the architectural culture of the time deluded itself into resolving the housing crisis without ever confronting it for what it truly was: a radical and profound anthropological transformation. What the culture that designed the *Serpentone* failed to recognise was that the conditions of that period — just as today, though the context has changed — were neither exceptional nor newly emergent. They were the manifestations of a far deeper crisis, the harmful outcome of a long historical process. Despite its mythological scale and apparent promise of enchanted futures, the *Serpentone* is in fact a project that, by its very making, reinforced the core mechanisms of the *disenchanted dispositif* of control that modernity, in its hegemonic

4 Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944–1985* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), p. 155.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 155.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 155.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 184.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

form, has continually reproduced.[9] It thus stands as a paradigm of urbanity in crisis, with the capacity that *dispositifs* typically have "to capture, orient, determine, intercept, shape, control and secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions and discourses of living beings".[10]

It is important to note that this process generated a dissociative mechanism, which acts as a "great partition",[11] underpinning the failure of the housing models promoted by the IACP. It is worth noting that the dualistic ontology upon which modern dwelling is founded also entails a fracture between the political and aesthetic dimensions. Corviale, this immense and cruelly optimistic structure,[12] holds together the need to "control the anonymous language of technique" with the ambition to construct a "new monumental and spectacular scale",[13] ultimately reinforcing the separation between aesthetics and politics. These two dimensions were once deeply interconnected through a synaesthetic way of inhabiting,[14] now lost in an architecture where form has become estranged from the life that dwells within it. If *world-making* — inhabiting and belonging to an environment — is, first and foremost, an aesthetic, sensitive and generative bond, then to *undo worlds* and impose a unitary system, that relation must first be severed. It is precisely by following this diabolical trajectory that Corviale's heroic and universalising architecture — despite the good intentions behind its conception —

9 Stefania Consigliere, 'Archeologia della dissociazione', in *Strumenti di cattura. Per una critica dell'immaginario tecno-capitalista* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2019); Natalia Agati, 'L'arte di legare. Incanto, estetica del disincanto, reincanto critico', *Pòlemos. Materiali di filosofia e critica sociale*, no. 1 (2022), *Estetica e partecipazione. Prospettive critiche su arte, politica e spettatorialità*, ed. by Andrea D'Ammando and Francesca Natale (Rome: Donzelli Editore), pp. 157–265.

10 Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* (Milan: Nottetempo, 2006).

11 Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, trans. as *Non siamo mai stati moderni. Saggio di antropologia simmetrica* (Milan: Eléuthera, 2009); Isabelle Stengers, 'Le Grand partage', *Nouvelle Revue d'Ethnopsychiatrie*, 27 (1994), pp. 7–19; trans. as 'La grande partizione', in *I Fogli di ORISS*, 29–30 (2008), pp. 47–61, trans. by Stefania Consigliere.

12 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

13 Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana*, p. 155.

14 Lidia Decandia, *Dell'identità. Saggio sui luoghi: per una critica della razionalità urbanistica* (Rubbettino, 2000).

ended up hindering the very possibility of collective forms of urban life.

An essentially "quantitative" housing policy,[15] by elevating itself to the illusory status of a universal housing model, severs the bonds that connect individuals within a community, preventing a cohesive whole. In such a framework, dwelling becomes *anaesthetised*, detached from lived experience, separating individuals from the world they inhabit.[16] It thus becomes clearer that, as the quintessential modern project in the Roman context, Corviale is a vivid expression of how the *disenchantment dispositif* has operated within the urban realm, of the consequences of this *modus operandi* and of how deeply relevant they remain today. Indeed, to live in Corviale today means to undergo a continuous experience of dissociation, separation and severance: between individuals and the place they occupy, between countryside and city, and between dreams of progress and the irruption of multiple and unexpected forms of urban life.

Being Here and Now

Fortunately, even the most ossified legends can harbour faint glimmers of change. Corviale is, after all, a "disenchanted but proactive" work.[17] A possible path lies in identifying those elements, gestures, postures and practices that might — if only momentarily — work on another plane to re-enchant the *Serpentone*. Over the past two decades, various projects and policies have engaged with the structure in an effort to address an increasingly critical situation. These initiatives have sought not only to tackle its material and architectural issues but also to anticipate and accompany the social consequences of such transformations.

15 Bernardo Secchi, *Il racconto urbanistico. La politica della casa e dei territori in Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1984), p. 88.

16 Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018); trans. by Anna Curcio as *Reincantare il mondo. Femminismo e politica dei commons* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2021).

17 Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana*, p. 155.

The *Km Verde*[18] and the winning proposal from the international competition *Rigenerare Corviale*[19] are currently driving a major urban regeneration process focused on the complex. While these projects make valuable and necessary contributions — particularly through concrete technical improvements to the built structure — they nonetheless remain confined to the plane of reality to which Corviale seems destined. Since the 1990s, and with growing frequency over the past two decades, Corviale has also attracted international researchers and artists to the site. Many have launched participatory projects, yet such initiatives are now often met with widespread indifference from residents. A profound sense of disenchantment still permeates the kilometre of concrete that is the *Serpentone*. This crisis is palpable, and true regeneration will be impossible without re-enchantment. Moving beyond the emergency-driven logic of recent decades requires framing Corviale's crisis as, above all, a cultural and ontological one, rooted in the original fracture that extends beyond the mere materiality of concrete.

This issue concerns the very problem of *being-in-the-world*: the *Dasein*, where the *da* signifies the "there", that is, the being-here-and-now realised through the construction of specific historical and cultural horizons. The possibility that such horizons might collapse is what De Martino referred to as the "crisis of presence".[20] This threat, which lies at the heart of existence itself, represents a constant anthropological risk that various rites attempt to manage in order to enact new forms of unity, reintegration and encounter. From this perspective, individual crisis is not a personal or natural fact but must be understood as the consequence of the rupture of the social and cultural fabric in which we live, where essential human activity has been reduced to mere economic subjectivity. This reduction marks the very limit of historical materialism, which profoundly influenced

18 The *Km Verde* (Green Kilometre) project at Corviale, launched in 2015 by Guendalina Salimei's TStudio and currently under implementation, is redeveloping the fourth floor into housing and shared green areas, creating a continuous "green spine" that reconnects architecture with community life.

19 I personally took part in the competition with the research group composed of Stalker+ma0+ATI suffix and ARCò, which was awarded a special mention.

20 Ernesto De Martino, *Il mondo magico. Prolegomeni a una storia del magismo* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007; first published 1948).

the Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari's initiatives in the 1970s. The self is thus not in crisis because of inherent or physiological fragility, but because symbolic horizons for action have collapsed, leaving a void rooted in a lack of empathy toward the surrounding world and a disconnection from the "entire sphere of sensible activity"[21] that constantly exposes subjects to crisis. For De Martino, the seemingly uninhabitable world — for which Corviale stands as a model — does not necessarily have to end. But it will if we persist in approaching such phenomena from the wrong angle. As noted above, the problem is neither exceptional nor newly emergent but ontological: deep-seated, complex and seemingly irresolvable. Many of today's catastrophic consequences stem from a flawed framework that ignores or lightly sets aside the fundamental questions embedded in the way we have shaped our system of reality and the very nature of power.[22] As Tiqqun writes: "We clearly see that, for now, from within their limbo, forms-of-life remain in the most fearsome chaos. And it is the feeling of this chaos, just like their attachment to this foolish idea of freedom, that casts our contemporaries into the mesh of apparatuses".[23]

Helping urban *forms-of-life* emerge from this limbo is no simple task. One possible way forward is to complement existing policies with a different kind of action: experimenting with alternative forms of presence in the territory, capable of fostering anti-heroic, festive moments of union in which more radical possibilities can be experienced, however temporarily. Initiatives such as *Orìbasia Corviale* seek above all to forge new alliances, creating the conditions for proposals that, alongside broader intervention strategies, can rebuild bonds in urban contexts marked by rupture and imagine new tools for collective life. This approach stands in sharp contrast to traditional top-down interventions, in which socio-territorial policies and projects are conceived as the exclusive and unilateral prerogative of the State. Instead, the regeneration scenarios to be pursued must emerge from a work of micro-weaving: a careful stitching together of relationships which, through the right alliances, can generate disruptive aesthetics, short-circuiting a reality that has become

21 *Ibid.*

22 Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (Turin: Einaudi, 2019; first published 1977).

23 Tiqqun, 'Il bell'inferno', in *La fête est finie*, trans. by Marcello Tarì, in *Pòlemos I*, no. 1 (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2020), pp. 69–82 (p. 80).

paralysed. These practices employ different languages, aimed at generating forms of regeneration quite distinct from the meaning attributed to the term by administrations. They often operate prophetically and, by reconnecting lost ties, create the preconditions for a new form of urbanity, making space for a magical dimension, precisely where it seems to be entirely excluded.

Promoting practices to re-enchant the *Serpentone* therefore means symbolically overturning the very philosophy on which it was conceived, confronting what Cacciari calls the "necessary impossible"[24]: rethinking the act of design to overcome the "ontological impossibility"[25] of a discipline trapped in the central equivocation of utility. It is about "building an imaginary basin capable of collecting the gestures that determine the languages of design practice beyond the pure perspective of usefulness and rationality".[26] This requires adopting appropriate techniques to foster reflection on alternative modes of action, drawing on a certain "sensible politicality"[27] and experimenting with ways to critically re-enchant the urban environment. Aesthetics emerges here as a never-neutral field — perhaps the most viable one — for reweaving the severed bonds between individuals, and between them and the sensible world, restoring a removed enchantment. This can be achieved by creating immanent devices of critical re-enchantment[28] that reconnect with the often-excluded dimensions of reality. Actions, installations, situations and performances operating on another plane can generate a shared framework of social knowledge, enabling the expression of states that would otherwise remain unarticulated. In doing so, they pursue the recognition of the complex anthropological multiplicity inherent in every urban organism, and they practise that being-here-now which may seem lost yet persists in the shadows.

24 Massimo Cacciari, 'Progetto', *Laboratorio Politico*, no. 2 (1981), pp. 88–119.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

27 Jacques Rancière, *Le partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000); trans. by F. Caliri as *La partizione del sensibile. Estetica e politica* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2016).

28 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Logica del senso* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969); Daniela Angelucci, *Là fuori. La filosofia e il reale* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2023).

Figure 4. Oribasia Corviale, collettivo-ATI, la salita 26 ottobre 2024, Corviale, terrazza condominiale lotto 3

Figure 5. Oribasia Corviale, collettivo-ATI, la salita 26 ottobre 2024, Corviale, terrazza condominiale lotto 3

Sergio Rodríguez Estévez, María Salas Mendoza Muro,
Francisco José Pazos García, Estelle Jullian

SONGS OF NEARBY EARTH (SONE)
A Nature-Culture Based Solution

A la orilla del río
sembré una parra,
me salieron tres chorros
de agua salada.

Traditional Christmas carol from Jerez de la Frontera

In 1974, the average annual temperature in Jerez de la Frontera was 16.9ºC. Fifty years later, it had risen by 2ºC[1] — or by 4ºC when considering average maximum temperatures (Figure 1). Against this backdrop of rising temperatures, the SONE[2] project explores mechanisms of climate adaptation by combining local landscaping practices — for example, the use of *Vitis riparia* vine arbours (Figure 2, top) — with the celebration of cultural rituals such as *zambombas,* Advent festivals where communities gather to sing carols around bonfires, accompanied by friction drums bearing the same name (Figure 2, bottom). Two processes that may appear unrelated are, in fact, materially connected: the vine shoots pruned at the end of autumn fuel the bonfires of the December festival.

1 These annual averages are derived from daily data recorded at the AEMET weather station at Jerez Airport, in operation since 1 February 1946. Although climate change is not officially assessed by comparing single annual averages, the contrast between these two years is striking. Official AEMET data already indicate a rise of 0.86 °C over the past 50 years. For context, the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report seeks to keep the global temperature rise well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels, and ideally under 1.5 °C (Masson-Delmotte et al., *Global Warming of 1.5 °C*, Cambridge University Press, 2022, p. vii).

2 Estelle Jullian proposed the name *Songs Of Nearby Earth* for the project, in contrast to Arthur C. Clarke's novel: *Songs Of Distant Earth*; Arthur C. Clarke, *Cánticos de la lejana tierra*, trad. Francisca Graells Reynoso (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1987). The SONE Project is carried out in Jerez de la Frontera as part of the PALIMPSEST Project. For more information, see: www.palimpsest-project.eu + palimpsestjerez.gardenatlas.net

Within this framework, SONE explores how such collective rituals can provide feedback for processes of urban renaturalisation.[3] Rather than relying on generic and "alienating solutions"[4] — often based on the mobilisation of isolated elements in a decontextualised way — this project foregrounds the combination of local knowledge and practices. In doing so, it seeks to enable a collective and diplomatic[5] readjustment of our relationship with the landscape.

This chapter briefly introduces the SONE project. After outlining the main theoretical references that inspired it, the article describes the key stages of the ongoing process, which, through the active participation of local actors with diverse profile and sensibilities, gave rise to SONE.

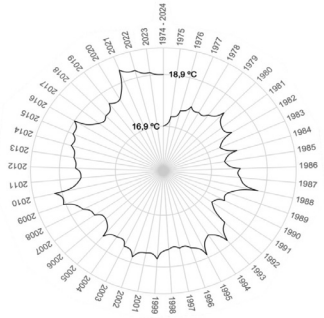

Figure 1. Diagram of average temperatures in Jerez de la Frontera 1974–2024. Nomad Garden.

3 In this work, the term does not imply a return to a "pre-urban" natural state, nor does it stand in opposition to the artificial, as if culture and nature were separate. Rather, we use it to describe a "natural" tendency towards greater systemic complexity: an evolution of the relationships between human and non-human elements in a landscape. In this sense, related notions such as Michael Rosenzweig's "reconciliation ecology" could be of interest.

4 Anna Tsing addresses how the simplification of certain production processes, based on the alienation of resources and jobs, is carried out to make it easier to scale up production by avoiding the existence of links and support networks. Anna L. Tsing, *La seta del fin del mundo. Sobre la posibilidad de vida en las ruinas capitalistas*, trad. Francisco J. Ramos Mena (Madrid: Capitán Swing, 2021).

5 A concept developed by Morizot that is closely linked to Isabelle Stenger's cosmopolitics and allows the collective to be extended beyond the human sphere. Baptiste Morizot, *Les Diplomates: Cohabiter avec les loups sur une autre carte du vivant* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2016).

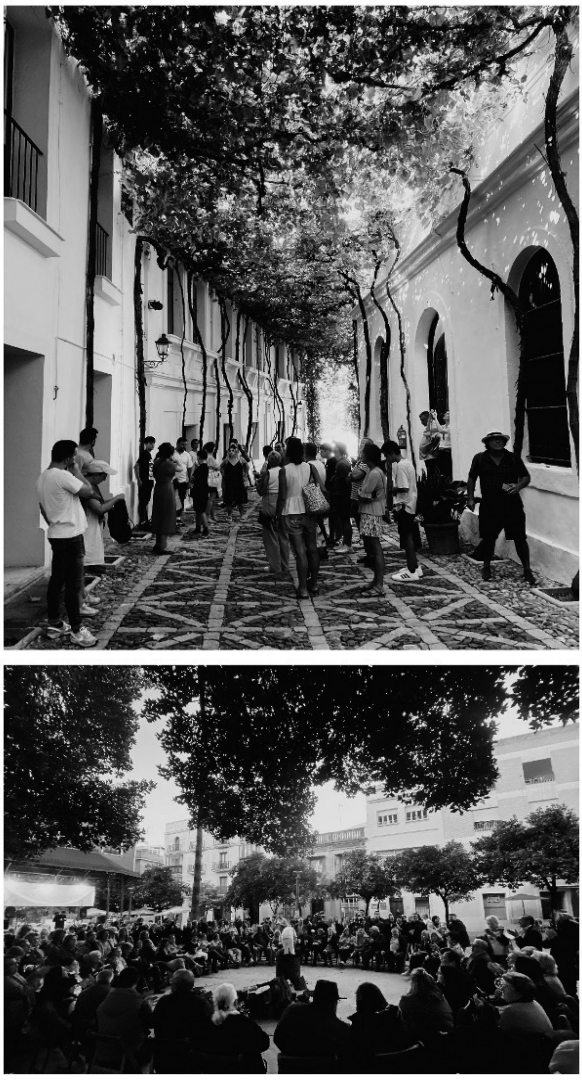

Figure 2. Calle Ciegos. Jerez de la Frontera. 5-9-2023 (top). Celebration of a zambomba in Jerez. 15-12-2023 (bottom). Sergio Rodríguez Estévez.

Theoretical references

The American philosopher John Dewey[6] argued that all experience, including artistic experience, arises from the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environment. From this perspective, art becomes an experiential way of adjusting and harmonising our relationship with our surroundings. For Dewey, rituals serve a similar function at a collective level: they reinforce social cohesion and sustain the identity of a community rooted in shared traditions, values and beliefs. Rituals can thus be understood as experiences that recognise and stabilise existing relationships, prioritising the preservation of the community. Yet they may also be seen as experiences that foster new relationships which broaden existence, thereby revealing a transformative impulse within them, as argued by Graeber,[7] Sennett[8] and or Pérez de Lama.[9] From this perspective, such experiences may be understood as vehicles through which we enter — by way of the imagination and the emotions they evoke — into alternative forms of life.

Our fascination with rituals lies precisely in their potential capacity to restructure everyday life through shared aesthetic experiences, allowing us to imagine and recalibrate our relationship with our surroundings. In this sense, rituals can become spaces where the possible relationships among the elements of a landscape intensify, expanding their modes of existence towards more symbiotic and exuberant forms. The philosopher Emmanuele Coccia describes such experiences as "Contemporary Natures", highlighting their aesthetic dimension.[10]

Fields of study, such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), defend the direct involvement of these collective cultural experiences

6 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Tarcher, Kindle Edition, 2005).

7 David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2022), pp. 116–17 (Kindle edn).

8 This is precisely the transformative function of art that Sennet defends in his book "The Performer" as a vehicle for promoting a more open, inclusive and sustainable city. Richard Sennett, *The Performer: Art, Life, Politics* (London: Allen Lane, 2024).

9 José Pérez de Lama, *Máquinas rebeldes: sobre arquitectura, ciudad y mundo digital* (Málaga: Recolectores Urbanos Editorial, 2024).

10 Emanuele Coccia. *Metamorfosis: La fascinante continuidad de la vida* (Madrid: Siruela, 2024. pp. 171–190.

in the conservation of sustainable landscapes, linking the material and symbolic dimensions of territories. This quality is central to the ongoing work. Building on this, the project hypothesises that rituals can be reactivated to meaningfully engage citizens in the co-creation of landscape processes for climate adaptation.

In any case, the aim is not to use *zambombas* as a pretext to legitimise practices such as *emparrados* (vine arbours), nor to treat the latter as a backdrop for the former. Rather, the goal is to create a space for encounter and mutual contamination to rethink these practices as a ritual process — an aesthetic experience in which the material, technical, relational and symbolic qualities of the landscape complement one another. This multidimensional perspective helps us better understand Julia Watson, who in Lo-Tek,[11] quoting Berkes,[12] identifies qualities that enable certain societies to support sustainable landscapes over time, such as: i) Knowledge of plants, animals, soils and landscapes within the communities (Knowledge); ii) Resource management through accessible practices, tools and technologies that foster diversity rather than deplete it (Practices); iii) Organisation of communities into distributed and flexible governance institutions that enable self-correction (Governance); and iv) Emergence of artistic expressions, beliefs and rituals that transmit and renew the ties between community and the landscape (Rituals).

Although these qualities are rooted in sustainable landscapes associated with traditional cultures, many of these principles could guide a rethinking of the relationship between contemporary landscapes and the communities that shape them. On this basis, the aim of this work is to identify local agents, resources, knowledge and practices which, when realigned, can support the collective stewardship of more sustainable and creative landscapes.

The SONE Project in a nutshell

The story of SONE begins with *albariza* — the white, soft and porous soils surrounding Jerez, formed by marine sediments such

11 Julia Watson, *Lo-TEK. Design by Radical Indigenism* (Cologne: Taschen, 2019).

12 Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, 4th edn (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2017) (Kindle edn).

a radiolarians and diatoms. These soils provide the ideal substrate for grape varieties such as *Palomino Fino*, *Pedro Ximénez*, *Tintilla de Rota* and *Moscatel*. Thanks to this soil, a century-long winemaking tradition has flourished, one that is both economic and cultural, intertwined with rituals, celebrations and collective memory.

Distinctive elements of these wines are the *criaderas* and *soleras* systems — dynamic ageing methods in which vintages from different years are blended to create a unique continuity of styles and flavours. Yeast communities are central to this process, forming the *velo de flor* (film of yeast) on the wine surface when exposed to air. These microorganisms require specific environmental conditions to thrive. To meet these needs, wineries developed strategies for regulating their own microclimate, such as adjusting building height, designing the layout and sandy soil irrigation, controlling ventilation and shading adjacent urban spaces with vine arbours.

Classical authors such as Pliny the Elder recall that vines have long been used to shade courtyards and porticoes, as in Villa Livia in Rome,[13] where pergolas were sometimes covered by a single vine. In Jerez, this tradition endured, integrating vines not only into the productive countryside but also into urban spaces as both a climatic and cultural resource. Since the 1960s, the González Byass wineries have taken this practice further, extending vine structures across entire streets as exemplary models of urban climate adaptation. In 2022, the Emparrados[14] — led by Juan Luis Vega and Miguel Revuelta — proposed expanding this initiative to other streets in the city. SONE-PALIMPSEST joined in 2023, working to foster its diffusion by aligning local agents, knowledge, practices and rituals.

The following sections are dedicated to describing the alliances forged in this process. Notably, the order of the narrative is neither fixed nor definitive: it could begin or end at different points. As in ritual processes — or bioregional cycles — time is not linear but circular, folding back on itself; it is in this circularity that meaning is revealed.

13 *Plinio el Viejo, Historia natural. Libros XII–XVI*, trad. Maria Luisa Arribas Hernáez (Madrid: Gredos, 2010), lib. XIV.5.

14 This proposal emerged from a group of people associated with the Amigos del Jerez de los Árboles Association, who in 2025 formed the Emparrados Association.

We began with the experiences developed at the González Byass wineries[15] and the knowledge preserved by the Emparrados community, from which we gathered complementary insights. Austin Gardner (fabber and founder of FabLab Jerez) then joined the project. Building on a prototype of climate sensors developed with students from El Altillo International School, we designed and manufactured specific measuring units[16] and conducted comparative tests between vine-covered and uncovered streets. Preliminary results show temperature reductions of up to 11ºC during peak hours in August 2025, providing key data for improving the design of this infrastructure.

In Jerez, vine arbours are not only valued for their climatic or productive qualities. At the Andalusian Flamenco Centre, numerous paintings and engravings depict singers and dancers beneath them. Following these cues, art historian Valeria Reyes Soto has compiled an iconographic inventory showing vines as spaces of culture and conviviality, in continuity with a Mediterranean artistic tradition dating back to Greek antiquity.

The productive, bioclimatic and cultural qualities of the vineyard sparked the interest of the Jerez 2031 European Capital of Culture Office. This broadened the initial proposal to extend vine arbours across the city, raising new questions: What if the city's educational and cultural spaces were enriched with vine arbours providing public shade? What shaded routes could connect existing green spaces with these areas? What activities might take place in these intermediate spaces? Such questions are being explored through citizen participation, generating insights for future plans aimed at democratising the benefits and added value of these strategies.

15 Although we consider these interventions exemplary models due to their scale and semi-public nature, we are also identifying additional vine arbours through a citizen mapping process, aiming to document the many urban green infrastructures of this type that exist in private spaces throughout Jerez: https://gardenatlas.net/garden/palimpsest-jerez/spaces/

16 The dimensions analysed were ambient temperature, ambient humidity, solar radiation, air quality — measured as TVOC (ppb) and eCO_2 (ppm) — and noise pollution.

Meanwhile, the Emparrados collective has extended this strategy to four additional streets, using their own knowledge and resources.[17] The *Vitis riparia* vines, donated by the González Byass winery, were planted in 30 x 40 cm tree pits dug by the council. Many seedlings, however, were vandalised by people and pets, necessitating a second planting campaign. Council technicians also raised concerns that the pits, located next to façades, could cause leaks. In response, we explored alternative popular planting alternatives, such as reusing ceramic pots to protect seedlings and reduce water seepage at wall bases. This seemingly minor adjustment allowed us to examine two broader issues.

The first issue concerns the remarkable flexibility of everyday objects in assuming functions beyond those for which they were designed. This observation resonates with Don Ihde's "multistability" concept,[18] which challenges the modernist view of form as fixed to function. Instead, it points to elastic and polysemic conceptions, where objects adapt to context and suggest new uses. A clear example is the *zambombas* — friction drums once used as containers for water, oil or wine. This reflection raises a provocative question: could they also protect vine arbours?

The second question addresses the possible connection between vine arbours and *zambombas*. From this perspective, the *zambomba,* as an Advent festival, coincides with vine pruning and the end of the agricultural year. It is a ritual of collective songs and romances performed around bonfires — once held in neighbourhood courtyards, now in public spaces. These fires, traditionally fuelled by

17 The selection and adaptation of specimens suited to Jerez has been perfected, prioritising vigorous growth, the absence of fruit, resistance to pests, low water requirements and vertical root development to prevent damage to pavements or facilities. Structural solutions have also been improved, replacing architectural solutions with more agricultural and community-oriented techniques.

18 "...multistability refers to a technology's capacity to be taken up for different uses and to be meaningful in different ways". As Ihde puts it, "no technology is 'one thing,' nor is it incapable of belonging to multiple contexts." Robert Rosenberger, *Callous Objects: Designs against the Homeless*, Forerunners: Ideas First (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017) (online edn), https://manifold.umn.edu/projects/callous-objects (accessed 29 August 2025).

pruning waste, foster gatherings by alleviating the cold in a way that mirrors how green vines in summer mitigate the heat.

The connection deepens when we consider the material nature of the *zambomba* itself: an object made from local resources that anchor it to the Jerez bioregion.[19] Building on this idea artist, Estelle Jullian proposed making new *zambombas* from local materials, experimenting with *albariza* clay and ash from wine pruning burned in the *zambombas* — to shape and glaze the instruments.[20] This led to a co-creation process involving experts from different fields: geology and oenology, such as Willy Pérez; viticulture, such as Vara y Pulgar; ceramics, such as Luis Torres, Enrique Carrillo and his students from the Jerez School of Art and Design or Gresierra; and music, such as Belenish Moreno-Gil *zambomba* luthiers in the city.

During the design process, we explored forms that could function not only as instruments or plant protectors but also as totemic objects embodying the connections between community and environment. After multiple attempts, we selected the climate curve profile of the last 15 million years as our model — a curve previously used to chronologically situate materials collected in the Jerez bioregion. This decision established a direct link between the form and material of the *zambombas*, producing a series of ceramic pots generated by the rotation of the different periods that constituted this climatic curve (Figure 3).

19 Cyclical processes of interaction, transformation and return that occur within a bioregion, understood as a geographical and ecological unit where nature and culture are integrated and mutually conditioned.

20 During the 2024/2025 academic year, the SONE project was integrated into the educational programme of the Intermediate Training Course in Ceramic Decoration at the Escuela de Arte y Superior de Diseño de Jerez, involving first and second year students. The collaboration was structured around different modules. During the first term, a formal analysis of *zambombas* was carried out, using the creation of a prototype as a teaching tool to practise shaping techniques and experiment with different types of clay and firing methods. The second term focused on decoration, especially ceramic glaze made from vine wood ash, agricultural waste and other materials, including bonfire remains and albariza, experimenting with high-temperature firing and primitive techniques such as pit firing. The use of local wine yeasts in the *rakú obvara* technique (traditionally made with baker's yeast, both of the *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* genus) was also explored, but ultimately, the development of glazes was selected due to the results and applicability achieved in the teaching context.

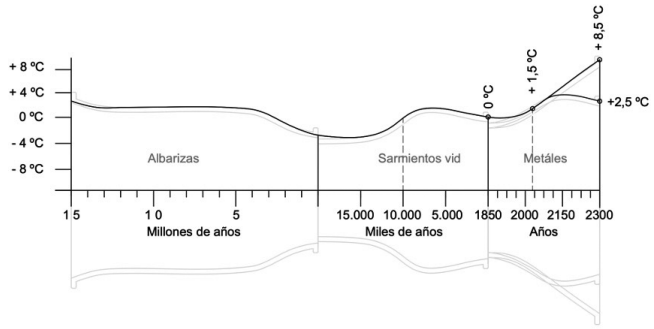

Figure 3. Climate curve over the last 15 million years adapted for shaping and glazing *zambombas*. Nomad Garden.

The first piece (or lower piece), representing the Miocene epoch — when Jerez was a shallow sea rich in radiolarians and diatoms — was glazed with *albariza* powder. The second piece (middle), linked to the Holocene and the spread of agriculture, combined ashes from Palomino and Pedro Ximénez vine canes with *albariza.* The final pieces, representing the Anthropocene, were divided into two futures: a darker version, glazed also with lithium carbonate, embodying the extractive impulse that defines this era and echoing predictions of rising CO_2 levels and temperatures; and a brighter version, glazed with a more balanced mixture of *albariza*, vine shoots, copper and lithium carbonate, evoking the pursuit of equilibrium and the hope for mitigation. Adopting the climate curve as a model for the forms may seem arbitrary, yet its value lies in its ability to extend the project's temporal horizon — not only symbolically but also materially — by invoking the past, present and future inhabitants of this landscape.

This opens another dimension of the initiative: the *zambomba* as a musical instrument, originally used as a mediumistic tool for invoking the spirits of the place.[21] Following this reflection, SONE

21 Christian Velázquez Vargas, "La zambomba instrumento musical. Incorporado al mundo en tiempos de esclavitud", *Elementos: Ciencia y*

facilitated collaboration between a local artist–musicologist duo and an artisan to *sonorise* or give voice to the new ceramic pieces, each with its own timbre and nuances (*son trouvé*). This allowed the duo to compose soundscapes that evoke the past and present of Jerez, as well as its possible futures.[22]

On another level, the songs and *romances* performed collectively at the festival also preserve the communities' perception of the landscape, treasured for centuries. In collaboration with the authors of the popular *zambomba* songbooks,[23] we selected lyrics that highlight these relationships — not only as a fossilised heritage but as a living legacy that opens space for new narratives addressing contemporary concerns. From this perspective, one might ask: could a *zambomba* ritual become a popular climate conference?

In December of 2025, the first Climate Zambomba will be rehearsed in Jerez, accompanied by an exhibition: a synaesthetic experience[24] that will transform the ritual into an intense perception of the vine arbours, through a material and symbolic exchange among agents who nourish one another — planting vines, weaving shadows, pruning canes, singing around bonfires, gathering ashes, glazing ceramics, playing *zambombas*, protecting vines, weaving shadows, pruning canes and more. An unceasing exchange, neither technical nor purely cultural, but a diplomatic act between species, objects, memories and possible futures. A Nature–Culture Based Solution, it reminds us that in Jerez — as in so many other territories — climate adaptation is not only about adopting new technologies but also reactivating the aesthetic, symbolic and vital potential of the landscapes we inhabit (Figure 4).

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cultura, 058, vol. 12, (2005), 49-54. Thanks to Belenish Moreno-Gil for the reference.

22 During a meeting with Willy Pérez, the possibility arose of experiencing future climate change scenarios through wine tasting designed to simulate these conditions. Given that wine tasting is already part of the tradition during the *zambombas* festivities, we are considering integrating this proposal as a complementary experiment.

23 B. Moreno-Gil, C. GR Moneo and L. Franco Corrales, *Lah letrah de nuehtra zambomba*, 2.ª ed. (Jerez de la Frontera: Prima Luce Natus, 2023).

24 The synaesthetic dimension of rituals is one of their most unique and valuable qualities, about which we still have much to learn. They appeal not only to reason but also to the senses and emotions, opening up the possibility of evoking alternative ways of life.

Figure 4. SONE cycle diagram. Nomad Garden

Antonio Longo

AFTERWORD
The Art of Evading easy Solutions

The brief primer that follows is a limited exercise, serving this book and its eclectic approach to a central question: can artistic and landscape design practices substantially contribute to understanding and addressing shared, relevant issues beyond the private and intimate — though legitimate — horizon of the artist's life and action? Primers, by their nature, do not offer definitions; rather, they construct possible relations of meaning among reflections and references, without rigid homogeneity. In this text, I will present recurrent themes and arguments regarding the relationship between landscape design — in the less scientific and technological sense — and artistic practices. These themes acquire meaning through the practices described in this book by their authors. They also gain meaning in the practices through which each person, as designer or artist, may engage.

Solutions

Is it possible to propose solutions when the problems are not clearly understood? Can we imagine that the role of creative practices which combine art and science — such as architecture, urban planning, and many forms of art — is not to produce immediate and simple answers, but rather to play a role in *problem setting* under conditions of declared and enacted complexity? Should we train ourselves to be reactive and to seek solutions? Can collaboration between designers and artists — actors, dramaturgs, performers, visual artists, photographers, choreographers — contribute to shaping tangible landscapes which, as with conceptual and intellectual contexts, play a fundamental role in incubating and enabling forms of complex reflection that confront the world's complexity without reduction? This book offers a rich perspective on these questions, assigning a significant role to the landscape.

It is straightforward to state that the technical principle of applying solutions, rather than the scientific principle of research and the continuous

refinement of interpretations, techniques, and methods for complex problems, is incompatible with simplification. If we accept this premise, we understand how artistic practice — an expressive mode that produces works and knowledge that cannot be reduced to purely logical or experimental principles, but rather through the practice and experience of specific disciplines — is ancillary and inseparable from scientific and technological forms of knowledge.

This principle — the foundation of modern science, since Galileo Galilei at least — is challenged today by the constant reliance on ready-made solutions in contemporary design and on the exclusive primacy of technology over other modes and practices of knowledge. The call to rely on mature cultural and relational principles, on which modern knowledge is based, may appear almost banal — supported as it is by decades of literature — and here I refer in particular to the recent reflections of Richard Sennett.[1] At the same time, however, it is important to reiterate that the appeal to ready-made solutions often produces failure: incorrect or false solutions, or those politically and economically motivated by commissioners or funders seeking confirmation. At best, we witness an inability to combine elements and recognise the economies in assembling individual solutions that derive from distinct principles and techniques — resulting in wasted resources; at worst, we fall into the circularity of a solution that must replicate itself in order to justify its existence. One need only observe the most recent stages of European Union–funded projects post-COVID to encounter such situations.

Dilemmas

In 1972, RAI broadcast a series of lessons by Luciano Berio titled *C'è musica e musica*, in twelve episodes.[2] A musician, composer, and teacher, Berio proposed a major compositional work, and in the series (the first, *Overture*, describes the origins and nature of music), he addressed the fundamental issues of musical culture and practice. After the first episode, in which music is defined, the second raises a question that in those years — marked by increased consciousness,

1 Richard Sennett. *The Performer: Art, Life, Politics*. Penguin Books (2025).
2 Luciano Berio. *C'è musica e musica*, 1972 Teche Rai (versione DVD Volume, Feltrinelli 2013).

rebellion against the Vietnam War, and environmental, social, and civil concerns — was inescapable. Drawing on Bertolt Brecht, Berio asked: "Why literature, why poetry, why music, when there is war, when the city is burning?" Today the question is even more urgent when injustice, violence, and environmental concerns dominate, and when fear demands a new form of commitment and a new ethics.

Through the life of two young orchestra musicians, an Italian and an American, who share a summer together in Fiesole, possible answers are found — supported by the contrasting opinions of masters such as Elliott Carter, Pierre Boulez, and Bruno Maderna. Artistic practice poses the dilemma, while the search for certainties, for unequivocal ethical and methodological principles, contradicts the practice itself and limits its existence. Music — like the particular gaze that interprets landscapes and imagines its potential configurations — is nourished by doubt, by dilemma, but also by the tension toward continuity.

Representations

There is no art without action, even when the action is reduced to a gaze, a moment of waiting, or a simple mark on a wall. For a concept to be transmitted, it requires representation. A book without a reader is a useless object; music, if not performed, becomes mere archive; a poem, if not read, simply does not exist. Creation and representation come to life in relation.

Landscapes, like music, offer a very clear point of view on the substance of artistic action. Landscapes are constructed objects, a system of relations established, governed, shaped, or simply directed. In a drama that does not follow classical dramaturgy, as in the works of Gertrude Stein[3] (who explicitly speaks of *landscape drama*), the landscape — or the drama — emerges from the ensemble of relations, from what takes place on the stage, in the city, or in an environment.

Whether in an act of pure creation, within the neutrality of a theatrical stage, or in a relationship with an active, living, reactive

3 Gertrude Stein. *Opere ultime e drammi*. Liberilibri (2010).

ecology — as in landscape design or in artistic actions situated within the landscape — representation becomes meaningful through the relation between object and subject. Only in this way can it produce change, new perspectives, and possibilities for action.

Distance

Where do we locate ourselves within the landscape? How should one position oneself within the dilemma and in synesthetic representation? What role should the artist and designer assume, as actors in the "landscape drama"? Many creative practices have weakened their relationship with traditional critique. This is well described by Anthony Scott[4] who, in his *Better Living Through Criticism*, emphasises the fundamental capacity to adopt a critical perspective as an integral part of creative activity. Critic and creator, with different yet related dispositions, both rely on a fundamental mode, recurrent in artistic practices and made evident in landscape: the role of distance.[5]

This distance is physical, geometric, conceptual, but also diachronic. Discrepancy and difference are vital conditions for creativity and critique. Solutions to emerging problems result from the relationship between creativity, invention, and critique. Without distance, they cannot occur.

Experimentation

Innovation is of course fundamental, and progress is marked by innovation. Yet a rhetorical obsession with innovation has influenced decades of funded design, including at the European level. Countless projects have sought innovation without necessarily producing it, and criticism has often issued value judgments based on presumed innovation.

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4 Antony O. Scott. *Better Living through criticism*. Milano: Penguin Press (2016).

5 Ginzburg, Carlo. *Occhiacci di legno: saggi sulla distanza*. Torino: Einaudi (1989).

Innovation can be measured (albeit with debatable methods), usually according to the consensus of the scientific community or social utility; it can be recognised *ex post*, over time, through critical distance. It is inevitable that funding bodies seek innovation *a priori*: research questions often arise from this demand. The problem, however, emerges when artistic and design practices interact, and the theme of innovation enters into crisis. One may speak of innovative languages — musical works, artworks, landscapes — but it is very difficult to align the value of a work with innovation as such. Many works of radical literature criticise the capitalist ideology underlying the concept of innovation.

From a practical standpoint, artistic–scientific practices such as urban planning — whose meaning lies in their relationship with places, communities, political systems and cultures — risk appearing paradoxical when assessed solely on innovation. Innovation is something that emerges through the critical historicisation of events. Conversely, experimentation, practice, and exercise lie at the core of artistic activity; innovation follows. The "toolbox" adapts to expressive needs, to representation, to the necessity of communicating and reacting. Art generates knowledge beyond itself: reducing the anxiety of innovation and emphasising practice and its rationale, technical change, and evolution. Only in this way can substantial innovation be produced.

Uselessness (and Paradox)

Landscape is useless, yet it possesses immeasurable value. When understood as an aesthetic experience and an artistic product, it cannot be quantified or reduced to instrumental objectives aimed at utilitarian effects or outcomes. It is certainly true that *landscape* is a polysemic term, assuming different meanings depending on cultural, academic, and geographical contexts, as noted at the outset. Reflecting on the functionality of landscape — whether by rejecting it entirely, or by pursuing it to the point of equating landscape with ecosystem — constitutes the dialectical paradox of this book and of the Palimpsest project that inspired it. Perhaps this very ambiguity is one of the strengths of the research.

If, for example, we consider landscape as the sensible manifestation of an environment and of the systemic ensemble of living beings within that environment, then the definition essentially coincides with that of an ecosystem (in the sense, to be clear, of Forman or Odum) is reasonable — following a long scientific and technical tradition — to speak of *landscape ecology* as a discipline capable of describing and measuring relationships, magnitudes, effects, and flows, both descriptively and predictively. From this perspective, it is also appropriate to speak of *landscape design*, of the construction of new landscapes, and to imagine that there exist services that landscape can provide in response to specific demands, needs, and problems: the pollution of rivers or air, urban heat, lost biodiversity that must be restored, the impossibility of living in cities due to excessive chaos and density, the need for healthy and regenerative spaces.

Modern urban planning, from the eighteenth century onward, confronted these issues precisely through the often-contested notions of landscape and garden: Olmsted's park systems emerged, Alphand's urban hygiene infrastructure, Schreber's therapeutic gardens, Migge's neighbourhood layouts, and so forth; rivers and waters were purified, urban environments were made healthier and more beautiful, and cities were reimagined as sponges. Landscape understood in this way has, quite literally, saved — and continues to save — people's lives, giving sensible and aesthetic form to the environmental actions necessary for human existence. Indeed, practice — beyond definition — and the body of experiences transmitted through manuals and treatises may render the debate between aesthetic and scientific dimensions somewhat idle, insofar as landscape design, like urbanism, is both "science and art." This is what the projects, and existing places- teach us, as do the research and writings of figures such as Olmsted, Wagner, Migge, Eckbo, Sørensen, and their heirs today.

Palimpsest

Yet, if we return — somewhat stubbornly — to considering the relationship with art and the cultural dimension of landscape, the issue acquires a sharper edge. Landscape, when understood as an aesthetic experience, is not useful, has no function, and cannot be

measured. Perhaps only time, duration — as in music — is most akin to landscape, and constitutes its true unit of measurement. For Kevin Lynch, the sense of place was tied to time: "what time is this place?".[6] The cultural conception of landscape adopted here therefore shifts the problem, but, once again, offers no solution. If landscape, like music, poetry, or a work of art, does not possess a use, then what kind of value does it have?

Perhaps we must acknowledge that if landscape value is not functional, then seeing and sensing the landscape is a decisive political act: the only act capable of generating attention, awareness, desire, and a drive toward care. Exercising one's gaze and senses on a landscape without function — entirely useless — as the outcome of a conscious choice and an equally deliberate language, justifies more than anything else our continued engagement with it. Practicing it within the folds of *Palimpsest* will therefore prove, paradoxically, highly useful.

6 Kevin Lynch. *Il tempo dello spazio*, il Saggiatore, (1977).

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Francesca Berni is a practice-based researcher and landscape architect. She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow for the New European Bauhaus Horizon Europe Research Project PALIMPSEST at DAStU – Politecnico di Milano. She obtained her PhD in 2020 through a co-supervised Politecnico di Milano–Shanghai Jiao Tong University program, with a research project focused on rural contexts in China and their relationship with the Chinese notion of landscape. Her research investigates landscape as an environment of extended imagination, with particular attention to cultural and ecological interactions in critical contexts. In 2021, she was awarded the Italian Fellowship in Architecture, Urban Design, and Landscape Architecture at the American Academy in Rome. Her work has appeared in journals and edited volumes such as *URBANO*, *Tracce Urbane*, and *Domus*.

Irene Bianchi is Assistant Professor in Urban Planning at DAStU – Politecnico di Milano, where she obtained a PhD in Urban Planning, Design and Policy. She previously conducted research activities at the University IUAV of Venice, Berlin Technical University, King's College London and Aalborg University. She is a member of the Executive Board of the Urban Resilience Research Network, part of the BIARI Alumni Network (Brown University), and member of the coordination team of the New European Bauhaus Horizon Europe Research Project PALIMPSEST – Creative Drivers for Sustainable Living Heritage Landscapes. Her main research interest lies at the intersection between decision theory and (urban) sustainability transition, with a focus on governance dynamics at the interface between niches of experimentation and policy-making processes.

João Nunes is a landscape architect and the founder of PROAP (1985). His work approaches landscape as a process in continuous transformation, integrating design, drawing, and interdisciplinary perspectives. He is a Full Professor at the Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio and has been a Visiting Professor at several international universities, including Harvard GSD and the University of Pennsylvania. His work has received numerous awards, including the Adalberto Libera Chair of Excellence, the Gagliardi Prize, the PIDA Prize, and the AIAC "Masters of Architecture" Award.

Giacomo Borella is an architect. He founded studio Albori in Milan with some friends thirty years ago. The work of the office mixes design with manual labour, focusing on the perspective of sufficiency in the use of resources and energy. He has edited and translated into Italian books by Ivan Illich, Petr Kropotkin, and Colin Ward. He is currently a visiting professor at the Accademia di Architettura of Mendrisio in Switzerland.

Francesco Careri is an architect, Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture, Roma Tre University, and co-founder of the Stalker urban art laboratory. He is co-director of the Master *Studi del Territorio/Environmental Humanities* and coordinates research and teaching activities focused on walking practices, civic arts, and neglected suburban areas. He is the scientific coordinator of the Laboratorio di Città Corviale and the Laboratorio CIRCO. His publications include *Constant. New Babylon, una città nomade* (2001), *Walkscapes* (2002) and *Nomadismo Architettura Ospitalità* (2020).

Marta Cuscunà is a theatre author and visual performer whose research combines activism and object-based dramaturgy. In works such as *Il canto della caduta* and *Earthbound*, she brings together myth, animatronics, and ecofeminist thought inspired by Donna Haraway. In 2021, she participated in the Rai 3 programme *La Fabbrica del mondo*, creating a mini-series on ecofeminism for mechanical crows. In 2023, the project became the theatre production *Corvidae. Sguardi di specie*, co-produced by MUSE – Museo delle Scienze di Trento.

Michael Jakob teaches History and Theory of Landscape at the Accademia di Architettura in Mendrisio. He is a visiting professor at Politecnico di Milano and at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Jakob's teaching and research focus on landscape theory, aesthetics, contemporary theories of perception, and the poetics of architecture. He is the founder and chief editor of *di monte in monte*, a book series on mountain culture (Edizioni Tararà, Verbania). He produces documentary films (most recently, *Il tempo sospeso: Arduino Cantafora*, 2025) and curates international exhibitions.

Massimo Venturi Ferriolo is a philosopher and former Full Professor of Moral Philosophy and Aesthetics. He has taught and carried out research at the Universities of Urbino, Milan (Statale), Heidelberg, Salerno, and at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Politecnico di Milano. He has delivered lectures at several Italian and international universities. Among his recent books are *Giardino & paesaggi. Scripta minora* (Libria, Melfi, 2023), and, with Gianni Burattoni, *Un'estetica di progetto. Visioni del paradiso per un'arte del sogno* (Franco Angeli, Milano, 2024).

Annalisa Metta is a Full Professor of Landscape Architecture at Roma Tre University and President of the Italian Scientific Society of Landscape Architecture (2025–28). Former Italian Fellow at the American Academy in Rome, she has taught at several international universities. She is the author of numerous books, including *Il paesaggio è un mostro. Città selvatiche e nature ibride* (2022), and curator of exhibitions such as *Nature at Home* at the Milan Triennale (2023).

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Matteo Vianello holds a PhD in Architecture from Università Iuav di Venezia and taught as an adjunct professor at Università di Genova. His research explores alternative design approaches through ecology and landscape theories, investigating the aesthetics, programs, and processes of post-capitalist territories.

Luca Befera is a Researcher at the University of Turin. His work focuses on algorithmic and multimedia art, interactive dynamics, and digital mediation, with current research on artificial intelligence in digital performance. He collaborates with artists such as HER, Fronte Vacuo, and Alexander Schubert, and is part of the CHANGES partnership research group on LLM applications for cultural institutions.

Oriana Persico is a cyberecologist, artist, and director of the research centre HER: She Loves Data. Her work explores data as a cultural phenomenon at the intersection of humans, technology, and society. Together with Salvatore Iaconesi, she creates artworks and performances exhibited internationally. Her recent project, *PneumOS,* was selected for the Italian Pavilion at Expo 2025.

Natalia Agati is an artist and Postdoctoral Researcher in Architecture and Urban Studies. Her interdisciplinary practice explores spatial control, visibility, and epistemologies of blindness through art and performance as research methods. In 2014, she co-founded the ATI collective, producing installations and performances across artistic and academic contexts.

Sergio Rodríguez Estévez is an architect and one of the founders of Nomad Garden. He specialises in urban planning and landscape, with experience at the University of Milan and the Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona. He holds a Master's degree in Sustainable City and Architecture and has taught at Politecnico di Milano and ETSAS.

María Salas Mendoza Muro is an architect and founder of Nomad Garden, trained at ETSAS. She specialises in urban planning and landscape in Paris, as well as in urban ecology at the Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona. She holds a Master's degree in Sustainable City and Architecture (University of Seville), with research focused on urban sustainability indicators. She has received awards in international competitions, including the ACXT Young Architects Call (2008) and the Dragados PFC Award (2006).

Francisco José Pazos García is one of the three founders of Nomad Garden, a graduate in Environmental Sciences, and a PhD candidate in Geography (Regional Geographical Analysis) at the University of Huelva. He completed a Master's degree in Territorial and Environmental Strategies for Local Development. He is a technical specialist in GIS and cartography.

Estelle Jullian is an architect based in Valencia, Spain. Her interdisciplinary practice spans territory, art, ecology, and participatory processes, developed through cultural projects, exhibitions, workshops, and site-specific interventions. She participates in artistic residencies and European projects addressing territory, memory, and innovative forms of inhabitation.

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