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Book forum

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On Jacques Rancière, *The time of the landscape. On the origins of the aesthetic revolution*

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Jacques Rancière (University of Paris VIII)

Précis of *The time of the landscape. On the origins of the aesthetic revolution*

The *time of the landscape* deals with a precise object: the emergence of the landscape as an object of perception and thought. At a certain historical moment, in the 18th century, the word "landscape" came to mean three things at once: an object of perception, a subject for art (landscape gardening and painting) and the work of a specific artist, called nature. My "object" is defined by the inseparability of these three things: a transformation in art, the transformation of a concept (nature), and a mutation in the forms of the visible and the modes of perception.

Firstly, it is a transformation in art. This is what is emphasized by the subtitle of the book "On the origins of the aesthetic revolution". What happened with the emergence of the landscape as a "thing of beauty" is not only a new taste for the spectacles of nature and the design of picturesque parks. Nor is it only the introduction of a newcomer into the realm of the fine arts. It is an active component of the revolution that destroyed the hierarchy of the fine arts and made Art exist as a specific sphere of experience. In this regard, this study follows in the footsteps of my previous book, *Aisthesis. Scenes from the aesthetic regime of art* (2011). In the latter, I had selected fourteen scenes, borrowed from sculpture, painting, design, literature, theatre, dance, performance and cinema, which illustrated the shift from the representative regime of the arts to the aesthetic regime of art. This shift entails a constituent paradox: Art exists in the aesthetic regime of art insofar as the boundaries that separated artistic matters from trivial ones in the hierarchies of the representative regime

are blurred. This blurring has two consequences. First, any trivial thing or character can become a subject matter for art and the very distinction between low and base subjects is shattered down. Second, artistic beauty is no more defined as the product of an artistic design. Instead it becomes a sphere of objects and performances released from the links of knowledge and will. This is the most disturbing aspect of the paradox: the aesthetic regime makes art exist as such for the first time. But this does not mean that art has become its own end, that it has become "art for art's sake". On the contrary the end of art becomes its own disappearance, its becoming one with non-artistic life.

In regard with these two aspects, the landscape is a privileged object. As a subject matter it benefits from the upheaval of the artistic hierarchy. In the representative regime the representation of rural scenes was a base subject that must be dignified by becoming a site for a mythological, heroic or religious scene. It now takes part in the overturning that elevates low genres and relegates the once high genre of history painting. But it is not only a subject for art. It is also an artistic accomplishment *per se*. The English polemics about garden landscaping and the descriptions of wild landscapes made *by* travelers like William Gilpin put to the fore a key notion: the *scenes of nature*. These scenes are the product of a very specific art: an art that is made by a totally unconscious artist, an artist called nature that creates beauty because it does not want to make art. The discovery of the landscape then is a key element in the constitution of the aesthetic regime of art. Nature gives the first model of the identity between art and non-art that will be at the core of this regime. In that sense the emergence of the landscape is not only an addendum to the fourteen scenes. It is also an original one.

The fact is that this upheaval in art was made possible by the radical transformation of a notion which was not only a criterion for art but also a key notion embracing the whole of human experience and knowledge, namely the notion of nature. Such was the conceptual revolution accomplished through a century of descriptions of landscapes and discussions about the landscape. At the end of the 17th century the word nature did not include the slightest touch of greenery. It simply meant a global and necessary connection of causes and effects. Artists did not show nature by representing rural scenes. They did it by making visible the inner springs which triggered the play of human passions. All over the 18th century debates about landscape, nature becomes something quite different: first, it becomes a scenery of grass, trees, rocks, waters, lights and shades; next, it becomes the very creator of this scenery: a living being whose

own free manifestation can be pitted against human art and artifice. In passing, the study of this transformation questions the analyses that prevail to-day about the role of the landscape and landscape painting as forms of separation between the human and the non-human. In Philippe Descola's view, landscape painting created a space at disposal for the domination of the human cogito and the exploitation of the non-human (see Descola 2005; 2021). The "nature" of the landscape and of landscape painting did the exact contrary. It made nature a free-living being rebel to the human mind and its calculations.

My book follows the two main steps of this transformation. In a first step, it was epitomized by the opposition between two lines. Since the beginning of the 18th century English poets and philosophers put on the one side the French artificial line, associated with Cartesian geometrism and French absolute monarchy and illustrated by the straight and stiff lines of the French gardens, emblematized by the Park of Versailles. On the other side, they put the English "natural" line, the serpentine line made of insensible variations that was defined by an artist (Hogarth) before becoming with Burke the cornerstone of a philosophical theory of beauty. The ideal of the English natural line was illustrated by the gardens "improved" by Lancelot Brown and his likes with their vast vistas, soft and mellow slopes, curved lakes, rounded edges and winding paths. But Nature took on a much more irregular and powerful aspect in the picturesque and sublime scenes of lakes and mountains that it displayed in the wild scenery described by William Gilpin all along his travels across Wales, Cumberland or the Highlands. And at the end of the century, the sinuous parks designed by Capability Brown were deemed unnatural in turn by critics like Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight: just like the geometric French parks, they were the products of an art imposing its artificial order on nature to display its own skill and please the vanity of the landowners. Against that order Knight and Price pitted the work made by nature when it is left alone: a work characterized by two paradoxical factors, neglect and accident. Nature who had long meant regularity now came to mean the exact contrary. The promotion of the landscape as a thing of beauty went along with this radical move in the conception of nature whose most striking testimony was given by the sublime spectacle of the raging ocean or the hurricanes, erupting volcanoes, threatening rocks, deep ravines and so on. At the end of the century those wild manifestations of nature acquired a philosophical dignity by being introduced, along with the art of gardening, into Kant's *Critique of judgement*.

A new nature was also a model for a new social and political order. This is the third point: the landscape could provide a new artistic paradigm to the extent that it was much more than a sight in front of our eyes: it was a structure of the visible. And a structure of the visible belongs to what I proposed to call the distribution of the sensible. This distribution consists of a system of places, occupations and identities that serves as a matrix for both artistic and political practice since it determines what individuals and groups can – or cannot – perceive, think and do. The discussion about the landscape is a significant point in case since it is all about the kind of community that is set up by the design of the gardens or the scenery of nature. Burke proposed a clear equivalence between the scenery of the landscaped parks and that of English liberal monarchy and aristocratic society. The soft sinuous lines and the big oaks providing their generous shade to both the vegetation and the individuals composed a perfect paradigm of soft social inequality founded on the slow and harmonious development of natural things and making the distribution of social positions akin to the insensible variations of the ground and the gradations of light and shade. Burke pitted that liberal scenery against the authoritarian method of the French revolutionaries who, like the gardeners of the absolute monarchs, set out to produce harmony by levelling all gradations and variations.

Unfortunately the reality of the English social landscape was quite far from that ideal paradigm of social harmony. The time of the "improved" parks was also the time of the new enclosures which violently deprived the peasants of the use of the Commons and drove them away from the scenery of the aristocratic landscape. Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight could then oppose the "liberal" paradigm of the big protecting trees to the reality of the practice of the landowners and their landscape architects: they were the true levelers who destroyed the old harmony of natural and social coexistence. In the scenes of nature, all the elements (trees, branches, grass, weeds, rocks and waters) were intermingled without any principle of selection or hierarchy. That principle of unity in diversity was destroyed by the landowners and their 'improvers". Instead it was preserved by the landscape painters who knew that it is the diversity and interconnection of objects and figures that makes the interest and the charm of a canvas. Unlike the "despots" who wished to destroy cottages and pathways to reign alone in their deserted villages, Gainsborough and his likes welcomed the inhabitants of the countryside, their dwellings and their activities. The scenes of nature and the gaze of landscape painters offered then another aesthetico-political model of "liberalism" that took

all its relevance because it was strictly contemporary with the French revolution. Knight's didactic poem *The landscape* and Price's *Essays on the picturesque* came out in 1794 and 1795. Those works were also contemporary with Schiller's *Letters on the aesthetic education of man* that defined, in the footsteps of Kant's *Critique of judgement*, a new form of equality, a concrete and sensible one, opposed to the merely political equality of the French revolution. That sensible equality took on a radical turn when Schiller's disciple Hölderlin wrote his *Death of Empedocles* where he associated the sublimity of wild nature with the ideal of a communist society. The dreamed alliance between the egalitarian art of nature and the idea of a new community based on nature was driven away when Hegel, in his *Lectures on aesthetics*, pushed aside the art of gardening that Kant had introduced in 1790 into the sphere of the Beaux-Arts. The time of the landscape had accompanied the time of the revolution. In Hegel's view it had become, like the revolution, a thing of the past. I thought however that it was worth revisiting that story of the past to better understand the complex knot between aesthetics and politics.

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The ob-scenity of historical change

In *The time of the landscape. On the origins of the aesthetic revolution* (2023), Jacques Rancière takes what I am tempted to call a "meta-perambulatory" approach: he walks us through treatises on the design of the Georgian English landscape garden, through politico-horticultural poems and horticulturo-political essays; he takes in landscape painting in its reciprocal relationship with the (re)designed land and follows in the footsteps of those visitors whose own walks were so carefully choreographed through the meticulously curated landscape. At many turns in the path his reading

opens new vistas new "scenes", in his preferred parlance – in which the aesthetic and the political are shown as growing intertwined, twisted and turned together, as though "the aesthetico-political", attention to which has become a signature of his thought, were already a horticultural motif. We might briefly recall here another French philosopher who saw politics in horticulture. Although, in Foucault (1975), it is *le dressage* – animal taming and training – that most prominently figures the subject-shaping work of disciplinary power, horticulture teaches a similar lesson in the "orthopaedic" making of subjects by way of the final image, of a tree trained to grow against a stake (image 30, unpaginated) and a fleeting suggestion that Louis Le Vau's plan for the Ménagerie at Versailles was one of several precursors to the panoptic design (image 14, unpaginated).

Might we want to tread with even greater caution over some of this ground? The architectural historian Dana Arnold wrote, in her classic Arnold (2003), that the country house was "a symbol of the power and wealth of the landowner and more broadly the social, cultural and political hegemony of the ruling classes" (Arnold 2003: 16) and she warned that strolling through its grounds had its own political meaning: "[t]he house and estate could be viewed from afar by the lower orders and farm workers or close up by the tourist classes, usually middle class and lower gentry. […] Opening it up to the public helped to engender the feeling of a seamless society at once excluding and including different social groups but reflecting the cultural hegemony built on rapprochement between different social classes" (Arnold 2003: 19). Strolling through the landscaped gardens of an English country house from the Georgian period, even in meta-perambulatory fashion, requires that we see – and see through – the fiction of harmonious co-existence between classes which they try to teach and also imposes a duty of remembrance. Rancière does rather briefly mention the fact that the heyday of such gardens, with their soaring vistas and concealed boundaries (the "ha-ha"), followed hard upon the last wave of enclosures of common land, the "parliamentary" enclosures of the mid-late eighteenth century: legalised theft. Rancière rightly derides Burke's forgetfulness, his disavowal of the violence of the preceding two centuries of enclosure, when he misidentifies "levelling" as a French malady, serving up the grotesque political fiction of a naturally harmonious English society, the unity or "consensus" of which was figured by the landscaped gardens of its richest landowners. Burke's was a vision not only ignorant of the fact that there was perhaps more artifice in this so-called nature than in the geometric layout and "tyrannical" topiary of the French formal, aristocratic, garden, but blithely indifferent to the violent confiscation from the rural poor of their

common lands, their material cushion against adversity and the guarantee of their independence from the wage, the liquidation of which common land, as historian Peter Linebaugh put it in his Linebaugh (2014), established a "feedback loop" with the industrialisation of labour.

In the violent making of the English working class under pressure of enclosure and industrialisation, the enclosers' terrible crimes of accumulation were covered over by the making-up of new crimes, not least the new penalty of a seven-year sentence of transportation to the colonies for breaking down enclosers' fences. Here, it seems to me, some reflection on state power's facilitation of those "improvements", which redistributed wealth and means of subsistence away from the rural poor, must also enter the picture: in Marx's 1842 articles on the theft of wood, written to oppose the criminalization by the Rhine Provincial Assembly of historic practices of common right and described by Linebaugh as the moment when Marx first began to understand political economy, Marx wrote of the new crimes thus created that "The wood thief has robbed the forest owner of wood, but the forest owner has made use of the wood thief to purloin the state itself". In other words, the state is captured by the interests of capital, here those of the wealthy landowner, whose new rights of ownership are protected only by overturning centuries of common right and making criminal what had once been permitted. In Linebaugh's own analysis of the Rhineland forest legislation, three factors came together in this capture of the state by capital: (i) scientific ways of seeing which were used to justify "improvements", especially in productive yield; (ii) augmented police power; (iii) a shift in the juridical concept of landed property from indeterminate to absolute ownership. I am aware, of course, that – here as elsewhere – Rancière prefers not to talk about state or governing power, which is consigned to his category of "the police". But can we really talk about land(scape), especially in the late eighteenth century, without talking more about the way it was policed, or indeed about scientific ways of seeing it and juridical ways of owning it? In E.P. Thompson's work on the eighteenth-century enclosures, particularly his research on the estates of Earl Cornwallis, we see very clearly the continuities between the imperialist-colonialist expansionism of the British state, in Ireland as in India, among other places, and the design and management of wealthy country estates: the continuities between class oppression at home and colonial oppression abroad (Thompson 1993: 171; see also King 2006: 291). Rancière's relegation of state power beyond the frame of analysis has a questionable side-effect: these continuities barely register in his own account, nor for that matter does the extent to which the carefully curated pseudo-natural curvaceousness of the serpentine

line, as opposed to the angular sharpness of geometrical design, is informed by – figures, reflects and reflects back – oppressive fictions of appropriate gender, in particular a carefully regulated, compulsory-but-"natural" ideal of genteel femininity. Similarly, more concerted attention to Richard Payne Knight's scandalous interest in ancient priapic cults might also have opened up a queerer vista over some of this material. This is not a plea for Rancière's translation into some institutionally validated idiom of the intersectionally decolonial, simply an observation that significant lines of analysis are missed.

At the beginning of *The time of the landscape*, its author describes his interest in landscape in terms of the emergence, in the late eighteenth century, of a new form of aesthetico-political experience, "*the experience* of a form of unity in sensible diversity *capable of* [*propre à*] *changing the configuration of modes of perception and objects of thought*" (Rancière 2023: x, my emphasis; p. 9 French original). He also characterises the book as a prolongation of his *Aisthesis*, "another scene capable of [*propres à* – sic. *in the French the subject is plural*] bringing into view the genesis and transformations of a regime of art, and of the common sensible world it outlines" (Rancière 2023: xi-xii; p. 11 French original). But in this book as in that, whose experience is this and how is the (re)drawing of the world done? Who are the subjects of this new form of aesthetico-political experience and how precisely was it propagated in such a way that gave it political efficacy? Thompson and his comrades had their own answer to this key historical question, in class and class-consciousness: as Thompson put it, in the gendered language of his day, "class happens when some men, *as a result of common experiences* (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs" (Thompson 1993: 8-9, my emphasis) and Jacques Rancière has done much, over the years, to trouble this particular way of thinking. But who are the subjects of this new mode of experience in the aesthetic revolution, experience which he says is "propre à modifier" the existing *partage du sensible*? Why are subjects of experience, especially in their interiority, so adamantly blank or voided in Rancière's work? It is worth noting that when Rancière has been read within "the aesthetic turn" in Anglophone political theory, over which he is largely credited as being the most significant inspiring influence, it has become habitual to invoke other theorists to temper his extreme resistance to psychologised or psychoanalytic interiority (e.g. Norval 2007).

Rancière is interested in ways of seeing but why, I wonder, is he not more interested in this book in those scientifically and mathematically-informed ways of seeing which have to do with measuring, evaluating and owning the land? I am thinking of those forms of seeing that Linebaugh found bound up in dubious claims about the need for "improvement" of the land and the inevitability of its enclosure, as well as those forms of perception which, as in Éric Brian's study (Brian 1994), gradually ate away over the course of the eighteenth century at the tangled, messy, accretions of royal power in France, so beloved of Burke but so inefficient, confronting it with the demand that it be measured, schematized, subjected to those clean lines of bureaucratic accountability which the Constituent Assembly sought to draw as it mapped out the new state apparatus by cutting through the tangled thickets of privilege constitutive of the *ancien régime*. For, also in 1790, the early revolutionaries were drawing straight lines of accountability in their organigrams of the emerging new state, as indeed they were on the map of France's territory, the supposed "unnaturalness" of which geometric division into *départements* was a particular focus of Burke's ire. I understand that Rancière is not interested in "territory" (cf. Elden 2013), in so far as territory is allied with state power, or in its cartographical division, but rather in *land(scape)* as the horizon, medium, locus or "scene" of potentially more egalitarian forms of paratactic copresence, but it seems to me that those (aesthetic) forms of seeing and experiencing which are expressions of state or governmental power, whether in England or in the emerging French republic, its new institutions in 1790 and its novel designs on the map of France, are historically significant elements in the implicit context of this intervention.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the landscaped garden – considered as art – is an art object particularly well attuned, indeed perhaps rather too conveniently attuned, to Rancière's own aesthetico-political approach. In some of his earlier work he suggests that artworks in the aesthetic regime of art can lay out (the verb so often used is *dessiner*, to draw) a new *partage du sensible* and thus they exist in a middle ground between a (purely political) plan (or "design") for a new society and a (purely aesthetic) play of form. This is a description and also, to some extent, a normative prescription for the politico-aesthetic constitution of the artwork in the aesthetic regime. The question which then arises is: how exactly does this "drawing" of a new *partage du sensible* actually have an effect in bringing a new *partage du sensible* into being in the world, in really reconfiguring the world? In the case of the landscaped garden, as artwork, however, this question is all too easily answered, or rather does not even arise, because the garden is

already the world, or a portion of it: when the spectator walks through a landscaped garden they walk through a portion of the world which has already been remodelled by the designer-as-artist. The aesthetic form of their drawing and the realisation of it in the world (as "design") are already completed; in the landscaped garden, as artwork, aesthetics and politics are intertwined so tightly together as to leave no room for some of the more awkward questions left unresolved in earlier analyses of other types of artwork in the aesthetic regime. Yet it is the promise of analytical purchase on such entanglement which draws so many to Rancière's work in the first place. As a matter of historical fact, a new configuration (or *partage du sensible*) is only ever brought into the world by groups of subjects endowed with political cunning, courage and other forms of imaginative interiority, as well as the material resilience and organisation required to endure the friction produced when the "police" order seeks to suppress emergent new claims for justice. Without such a sense of history, the past becomes a storehouse of aesthetic forms, a repository of data within which we can choose to pick out patterns, commonalities of form, and assert that they "*capable of* [*propre à*] *changing the configuration of modes of perception and objects of thought*" (Rancière 2023: x; p. 9 in French original, my emphasis). How exactly that process of modification takes place, how the propensity in "propre", or the capacity in "capable of", actually yields the modification, why such modification only sometimes takes place, why one vision for a better *partage du sensible* gets realised whereas another does not, and how effecting historical change involves contesting state or "police" forms of looking, measuring and valuing – these vital questions remain beyond the frame of analysis ("ob-scene") as the study of history cedes to an exploration of homologies of form, or similarities of "scene".

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The nature of emancipation: landscape and peasants

Between 1865 and 1870, the painter of the Neapolitan School, Filippo Palizzi, who was a Carbonaro with a political culture that was part of the great reform movement of the Italian Risorgimento, devoted himself, with some variations, to painting a subject entitled *Fanciulla negli scavi di Pompei* (*Girl in the excavations of Pompeii*). Although interest in ruins had been growing in Europe for at least two centuries, it is not the genre that is new in Palizzi's painting. The girl in question is a commoner carrying baskets, the last in a line of women engaged in heavy labour. Barefoot, the girl interrupts her work, drops the basket and is depicted with an absorbed gaze looking at the frescoes unearthed during the Pompeian excavations. Palizzi's entire oeuvre, which has been relegated to Verism, a style that art history deems to be characterised by its focus on realism, between rural nature and the peasant classes, the faithful reproduction of animals and the representation of the agrarian world (Limoncelli 1928; Picone Petrusa 2002), seems rather to be intertwined with the key question posed by Jacques Rancière's *The time of the landscape* (Rancière 2023), a text that gestures towards emancipation through the landscape.

In Palizzi's case, this is not due to a poetics that confers a pictorial dignity on the represented subject, with peasants and shepherds occupying the centre of the canvas, replacing divinity and royalty. Rather, it is due to a representation that makes landscape painting the place where the conditions for the rupture of a natural order are set – that of the social division of labour that, to paraphrase a thesis dear to Rancière, can place peasant labour *by* nature *within* nature. Instead, the painter's canvases

are filled with idle peasants gazing at the Gulf of Sorrento, goatherds forgetting their flocks and lost in the contemplation of a landscape that we cannot see, housewives gazing over the threshold of the threshing floor to scan a horizon that lies beyond the frame of the painting. Idle labourers, pastoral strolls, peasant women enraptured by the carmine fresco or intent on caressing a curtain of wheat instead of harvesting it – they all form a scene in which the entire countryside is traversed by a movement, not of revolt but of wandering, in which the landscape is the motif dismantling the agricultural and industrious community. Palizzi's work goes so far as to contradict Petrarch's description of the ascent of Mount Ventoso in 1336, which is considered to be the *incipit* of the landscape, and which contrasts the grandiose spectacle experienced by the poet with the unawareness of the shepherd, who reports "nothing except fatigue and regret, and clothes and body torn by the rocks and briars". A tradition that also touches Friedrich Schiller when, in *The walk* (1795), he addresses the happy people of the fields: "Not yet to freedom awakened, / Gayly share with your field narrow restraints of the law. / All your wishes confined by the harvest's peaceful rotation, / As your daily work goes, thus does your life so unwind". This tradition was taken up by Georg Simmel, who believed that, in order for nature to become landscape, there must be "a tearing away from that unitary feeling of the whole of nature" (Simmel 1913: 22). This separation is finally confirmed by Joachim Ritter (1963), who sees in the instrumentality of agricultural work an insuperable condition for the experience of the enjoyment of nature. It is a tradition that can easily be summed up in the maxim "the peasants do not see the landscape" and that is overturned by the work of a minor Italian painter of the 19th century, just as Jacques Rancière does when he traces the moments of the affirmation of a new aesthetic sensibility that crosses nature, but above all an object called landscape, the scene of the subtraction of practical utility, of any purpose, which coincides with the invention of a new nature, including human nature.

The hypothesis that landscape is an aesthetic object that has taken shape on the condition of separation, at one with the affirmation of an urban life that has lost the sense of organic bonds, the result of a modernity that has dissipated the links with the unitary sense of classical *physis*, and is configured as that pure and disinterested contemplative experience that allows a sense of participation and confusion of the subject's unity with the world around it, marks an attitude that gestures to the paradox of landscape as an immersive experience that excludes precisely those who are too immersed in it. From Marco Ricci's *Capriccio italiano* (1730), in

which commoners mingle with goats and other animals in common ignorance of the historical significance of the ruins, to Cézanne's discouragement of the peasant "who had never *seen* the Sainte-Victoire" (Prado 1996), the aesthetic experience of landscape seems to be denied to those working classes not yet expelled from the earthly paradise and lacking the knowledge of its loss to be able to sufficiently enjoy its reunion (D'Angelo 2021). A hypothesis that betrays traces of Orientalism and leads to the contemporary accusation that landscape is a traditional device of Western culture (Descola 2005; Jullien 2014), not always useful to measure the ontological turns of the natures of others, as well as to criticise a scopic anthropocentrism that limits landscape to the dualism of a human subject simply placed to look at a world object (Mitchell 1994).

Jacques Rancière's reflection *The time of the landscape* is premised on something completely different. On the one hand, it takes place against the backdrop of a research that has at various times had subjected to criticism the relationship between the passivity of the gaze and the relationship with knowledge, as indicated for example by the figure of the spectator. On the other hand, it places the reflection on the landscape in the context of an aesthetic revolution, through a plasticity of nature and in the continuity between landscape painting and landscape gardening, where the core question is that of rethinking the conditions of equality and of a common world. The paradox of the peasantry to which the painter Filippo Palizzi responds in an anomalous way with respect to a tradition that excludes them *a priori* from the conditions of a sensibility and from the possibility of an experience translates that paradox of an insuperable gap as the foundation for a model of knowledge that Rancière denounces by referring to the figure of the master Joseph Jacotot and thus rejects as an unserviceable instrument for any emancipation. As illustrated above, what the peasants lack is precisely the knowledge of a separation, the knowledge of ignorance, "a knowledge of the exact distance separating knowledge from ignorance" (2008: 9). On the contrary, landscape can become the site of an emancipation, like other "scenes" that in the century of aesthetics, for Rancière (2011), define the conditions of an experiential shift that accompanies the formation of as many scenes of equality. More than that, a double emancipation. First, that of a nature that, through art, ceases to correspond "with the organized connection of causes and effects" (2023: 12), and thus frees the representation of nature from the mimetic paradigm of Aristotelian origin. Second, that of a human community that, through landscape, which is the "experience of a form of unity in sensible diversity"

(2020: x), emancipates itself from a natural order of the division of labour and the distribution of capacities and possibilities of experience.

The drawing *of* nature, which is the central theme of the century of the landscape, should therefore be understood as a double genitive. First, it relates to an object which, in the seamless transition from landscape painting to landscape gardening, interrogates the forms of an expressivity that breaks with the normativity of Cartesian geometry – an order imposed on nature from the Italian gardens up to Le Nôtre. Second, it relates to a subject from which one can derive an interrogation of the conditions of any relationality, including that of a human relationality that struggles with the configuration of new relations called democracy. Key to the understanding of this passage is a verse by Richard Payne Knight, discovered by Rancière while scrutinising that vast 18th-century English source known as *garden poetry* (Calvano 1996), which, in its author's staunch attitude towards the natural sublime against any natural order, translates the problem of a unity of diversity whose synthesis rests on such a principle of agreement as sympathy: "Nature in all rejects the pedant's chain / For nature still irregular and free, / Acts not by lines, but general sympathy" (Knight 1795, vv. 140-5). A sympathy that expresses, as was the case with Hume, a capacity for agreement between things, a bond that is neither normative nor institutional, and that, despite this, functions, with its immanence, as a synthetic principle. Rancière clarifies: "Nature's defining trait is that it does not select or distinguish. Instead, it allows the coexistence of all manner of objects, all varieties of forms, colors, light, and shadow. The absence of selection accomplishes the principle of unity in variety" (2023: 28-9). For the art that crosses such a scene of aesthetic revolution called landscape, both for painting and for gardening, the possibility emerges of breaking with the subordination to the classical principle of *mimesis*, of freeing nature from any implied logical or rational order, from the obligation to tell a story and to be accountable to human practices for connections, causes and effects related. Art is then called upon to imitate that synthesis of multiplicity that nature achieves without having to force its parts into pre-determined forms, that assembly without chains that holds together in the absence of dramaturgical principles, but rather by a force that, as Knight repeats in his didactic poem: "No single part dissenting from the rest, / But all in one united form comprest" (vv. 358-60). The rupture of this century-long moment does not lie in an art that emancipates the represented subjects by displacing the ornamental or allegorical function of plant life, thus giving it the same dignity as a historical or mythological subject, but, as Rancière

avers, in an art capable of forging "a way of seeing and feeling that extends the sympathy of illusions and movements that was then being designated by the word nature" (Rancière 2023: 43).

It is not philosophers who define the stakes of what, in a less than Rancièrian lexicon, we might call the ontology of nature. Rather it is a scene traversed by gardeners, writers, architects, painters, and landlords, which we might sum up in Knight's fierce opposition – along with Uvedale Price – to the landscape garden archistar Lancelot "Capability" Brown. For, on the one hand, there is a nature which, in contemporary terms, we might call integral, one that proceeds through the common working of entanglement and diversity, which is endowed with an expressiveness of its own, the synthetic principle of which is an intersubjective bond called sympathy. This nature can hold things together, including human things. On the other hand, there is a nature that is recognised through the capability of getting improved. It is certainly freed form the formal principles of the 17th-century French garden, but is nevertheless levelled, cleared, even made more productive for land use. This is a diversity of views that turns into a completely different attribution of what nature is capable of, a different agency that, for Rancière, becomes the precondition for "the sensible appearance of a world without property" (2023: 91).

With an insight whose premises should also be extended to the contemporary reflection of environmental aesthetics (Stern 2018), Rancière traces the formation of this new view of nature back to Alexander von Humboldt's *Natürgemälde*, an overall view in search of a possible connection of everything with everything. The very image of interconnectedness, characterized by the coexistence of botanical information and geography, climatic data and geology, summary of types of knowledge that are located in separate spheres and objects placed at a distance from each other, as well as historical facts and sensual impressions, cultural forms and ecstatic experience. The *Natürgemälde* is a cognitive model that gets unity out of difference, and where the connection between things is a knowledge that "grasp nature as one great whole, moved and animated by internal forces" (Humboldt 1845-62: 24). At the origin of this relational knowledge which Humboldt's ecology is, a model of knowledge that gives us an anthropic attitude that must always be revived, an investigation *between* and not *on*, should be found in that century of landscape that freed its object from the landscapeology of the Renaissance system (Camporesi 1992) – one that was made up of visible parts of country, of caves and cypresses as backdrops for ongoing human enterprises and events, of indissoluble links between *genius loci*, habits and customs of

people and territories; one that paves the way for experiencing a world in which everyone can participate without the constraints of a specific knowledge, including the peasants.

In Rancière's text, then, the landscape becomes an instrument of significant power, following in the footsteps of the formation of a nature that Palizzi's peasants can access after abandoning the work that by nature is imposed on them. In the distance that separates them from an object that they can finally enjoy without knowledge, the space of a knowledge that perhaps no longer needs to bridge any distance is opened. If, for Rancière, the era of landscape ends with the passing of the baton to a new scene, that of an art which, in the freedom of nature, has freed itself from all constraints, to the point of being the place where it is permissible to stop reacting to beauty and devote oneself to the construction of life forms, maybe we should wonder if lately a new scene has emerged, animated precisely by the peasants. An anomalous peasantry, traversed by writers and philosophers, artists and scientists, workers and artisans, roams the European countryside, filling an ignorance of nature with aesthetic practices and techniques to make the world, agrarian poetics and life sciences, in search of a relationality that continues to explore the possible connections between things and their place in the world (Spanò 2017; Pineau 2019). As it shows that ontogenesis is a poem and that ecology is the child of the aesthetic revolution, Jacques Rancière's extensive research provides us with the tools to read this further moment of an emancipation that happens along with the continuous invention of nature.

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Landscape and history

Without will. The constitutive paradox of art has been underlined many times by Jacques Rancière: art only appears in the singular at the very moment during which its boundaries are constitutively blurred; in other words, at a time when the questioning of the boundaries of art has become a dimension of art itself. But it is important to see that another paradox lies behind this one: the art of the aesthetic age, which appears in the middle of the 18th century, is that which, in order to attain perfection, must be made without artistic intent. To be an artist of the aesthetic regime of art, one must know how to intentionally abandon the intention to make art. The paradox thus lies in the following: to wish the accomplishment of art, is to wish for a non-volition; it is to voluntarily produce what can only be obtained by the abdication of the will.

Against this backdrop, we can understand the kinship between aesthetic experiments as diverse as (to take a few well-known examples, although I don't think Rancière refers to them in his books) surrealist automatic writing, the ready-made, or Jackson Pollock's dripping. In these and many other cases, the artist is not the one who must control the creative process; rather, s/he must see himself or herself as the mere relay of a creative power that surpasses him or her. This creative power has been called "nature". Paul Klee took up the Spinozist distinction between naturing nature and natured nature to understand the artist's function: the artist should stay as close to naturing nature as possible, s/he must know how to let nature's infinite power and productivity pass through her or himself. But the art that most directly illustrates the paradox of the will of art thought in relation to nature is that which allows nature to express itself freely: the art of landscape gardening. A seemingly minor art, but one which can be seen, on the contrary, through the lens of Rancière's analysis, as the paradigm of the accomplishment of art in the aesthetic age, precisely because it takes a position at the heart of the latter's paradox. Landscape gardening is the art that will restrain the artists' will to make, and enroll them, more directly than anywhere else, in the school of nature.

This art form too had its aesthetic revolution, first of all with Lancelot Brown praising the curved line against the rigidities of the Versailles gardens. If Versailles still reflected the search for an ideal nature "beyond" sensible nature, the curved line, which "ever […] fix[es] on one spot" is the paradigm of nature restored to its freedom, to life in the making, always surprising, always inspiring wonder (Rancière 2023a: 19). But the

main theorists of garden design, Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, were quick to point out the limits of this opposition between geometric and curved lines. In their view, it was not enough to substitute one for the other: one must restitute landscape's random, incalculable "scenography of incidents" (Rancière 2023a: 36). Curved lines are suddenly interrupted, geometric lines are sometimes cut, unexpected breaks suddenly appear. Nature itself is the "producer of forms" (Rancière 2023a: 37) that are never defined in advance, and the art of landscape gardening must allow nature to express itself fully as such – allow it to express itself as the artist it is, precisely "because it is not trying to make art" (Rancière 2023a: 24).

Here we must recognize a complete reversal of the Aristotelian model: nature is no longer what needs to be completed by art, art converting its sensible being into an ideal model. It is art that must expose itself as necessarily unfinished in the face of nature's unlimited creative power, which it cannot capture. Art can only expose such power locally, and call upon the imagination of the individual who experiences it to go towards what art cannot directly present: this "unity in diversity", which is not reducible to a mathematical formula, and which resides solely in the infinite inventive power of the artist-nature. For landscape theorists, this way of encouraging the viewer's imagination, or rather the imagination of whoever is walking through the gardens, has a particular virtue: it enlarges the mind and generates a "unnamable happiness" (Rancière 2023a: 53). In the experience of landscape, the mind is taken "beyond its usual proportions" (Rancière 2023a: 52), and the freed imagination leads to a "plenitude that lacks nothing" (Rancière 2023a: 57).

It was against this background that the Kantian problematic of the sublime emerged. To be more precise, Rancière's thesis in *The time of the landscape* is that the Kantian gesture must be understood as a reversal of what the thinkers of landscape had shown. As we have just seen, for the landscape gardeners, the imagination stimulated by the sensible experience of the landscape led directly to an expansion of the mind, to the experience of an amplitude of life that took us beyond routine perceptions and ordinary forms of feeling. In the *Critique of judgment*, the experience of a "sublime" reality, greater than ourselves (the storm, the raging sea), does not lead to an exaltation of the imagination which in turn serves a prelude to an enlargement of the mind. On the contrary, it is the proof of the powerlessness of imagination, and of the need for it to rely on a higher faculty: reason. The resources of the imagination are overwhelmed by the unbridled power of nature. The imagination trembles before this power, Kant tells us, and therefore must entrust itself to that

which cannot be destroyed by nature, because it is removed from the contingencies of the sensible world. Kant thus reverses the aesthetic revolution: imagination is subordinated to reason, and sensible nature becomes once again that which we must free ourselves from in order to reach a higher nature.

Purpose. However, Kant does deserve some credit for pointing out that if the art of landscape gardening was much more akin to painting than the "utilitarian" arts such as architecture, it was insofar as it was devoid of purpose (Rancière 2023a: 41-2). Rancière develops this line of Kantian thinking in (Rancière 2023b[1]), and specifically in an article entitled *Art, vie et finalité. De Kant à Dziga Vertov* ("Art, life and purpose: from Kant to Dziga Vertov", see Rancière 2023b: 27-47). In this article Kant is no longer considered primarily as the figure who upset the aesthetic revolution such as it took place in the art of landscape gardening, but rather as the philosopher who took an interest in flowers. Flowers are paradigmatic of a beauty that cannot be reduced to the consideration of a purpose, whether external (utility) or internal (functional unity of parts). To appreciate the beauty of flowers is not to consider them as organisms, but as manifestations of the beauty of life: "In the free beauty of the flower, life is manifested as an indistinct power, indifferent to the differentiation and harmonization of its functions. And it is for this very reason that it gives the subject a heightened sense of his/her own life" (Rancière 2023b: 29).

The free beauty of the flower is therefore "a movement of life towards life" (Rancière 2023b: 30). It seems we have here a model of nature indifferent to any purpose, apart from the fully subjective purpose associated with a pleasure that can be understood as an "intensification of life" (Rancière 2023b: 29).

It was this same idea of intensifying life that was developed by the thinkers of decorative or "utilitarian" art. From William Morris and John Ruskin to the theoreticians of the Bauhaus, Rancière tells us that, in the end, it is a question of maintaining the gap between the criterion of utility and *customs*. Customs are the expression of a collective form of life that is seeking amplification. The manner in which such an aim ended up being reconciled with external, utilitarian ends in *Werkbund* and *Bauhaus* creations, gave rise to new complications, which Rancière details in this particularly subtle article. What is important, however, beyond the opposi-

[1] In this text, I have translated all quotations from the original French edition into English.

tion between internal and external purposes, is the discovery of the "subjective purpose of intensified life" which links Kant and Peter Behrens, or the 18th century landscape gardeners and the Soviet constructivists.

History alone. But this purpose is perhaps what most accurately names the point of coincidence between the concerns of art and those of revolutionary politics. These concerns have sometimes converged, as we saw during a brief period around the Soviet revolution, when artists thought of their work as an active component of the revolution (Rancière returns to this point at length in *Les voyages de l'art*). But it must be recognized that very often they were rivals. This was true for the art of landscape gardening in the late 18th century, when the influence of the French Revolution, and the effects of the new wave of enclosures in England, intersected. For the landscape gardeners it was a question of toning down the effects of the enclosures so as not to provoke the anger of those who had suffered from them, an anger that could have been inspired by the French revolutionaries. In fact, landscape has a decisive function in that it is the space in which hierarchical relationships are most clearly inscribed. The aim of the landscape gardeners was then to soften the harshness of these relationships and make them acceptable. The trick was always the same: "how to make the same order of things appear egalitarian to the partisans of equality, and inegalitarian to the partisans of inequality" (Rancière 2023a: 79). The art of landscape gardening works on sensibility in such a manner that it allows an alternative to revolution to be put to work, just like architecture for Le Corbusier.

According to Rancière, we need to understand Marx's thought as an attempt to make what had thenceforth been presented as an alternative into an indissociable unity: "in Marxism there is always a tension between a peaceful revolution of the material forms of life, and the idea of an insurrection that must await the precise moment of the historical process", a tension therefore between a revolution of the sensible that avoids the risk of violence, and an insurrection that assumes it. How then can we understand the unity of these apparently alternative paths? According to Rancière it will be through "history": "history is both the development of the material conditions of a new sensible world, and what must produce the moment in which we can act" (Wallenstein, West 2013: 20).

Marx's concept of history is to be understood as a legacy of Winckelmann, the author who inaugurated the aesthetic age of art, and to whom the first chapter of *Aisthesis* is dedicated. The idea of art in the singular is inseparable from the people and history. There seems to be an inaugural

intertwining of themes at stake here, which is found again among the artists of the Soviet revolution. In a recent, and as yet unpublished interview, Rancière evokes Lissitzky's painting, *Frappez les Blancs avec la pointe rouge*, which features on the cover of his latest book, *Les voyages de l'art*: "What is striking about this image is the sense of perfect coincidence: everything seems to go together naturally: the movement of art towards pure lines and colours, the movement of the masses reduced to a very simple struggle in which the whole evolution of society is summed up. [...] Red as a pure colour is immediately similar to red as the colour of the proletariat and of history".

But around forty years ago this inaugural intertwining seems to have come undone. At the end of the 1980s, Godard spoke of the solitude of history: history is alone, because it continues while having lost what seemed inseparable from it, namely its *telos*, its end – its purpose. It is alone because it no longer has the goal prescribed for it by the revolutionary movement: the horizon of a humanity freed from its chains, insofar as this horizon involved the complete dismantling of the capitalist world and the advent of an egalitarian society where "the free development of each individual" was to be "the condition for the free development of all" – which is a way of talking about the intensification of life (Marx, Engels 1976).

What seems to result from the loss of this horizon is a curious indistinction between artistic performance and political performance. In the same unpublished interview, Rancière talks about the importance of the spontaneous assemblies that have taken place in recent years, while underlining their limitations. For, he says, "these assemblies are performing the people rather than constituting them". It is their nature to be evanescent. No doubt this is due to the difficulty of finding a horizon that is likely to be desirable for everyone and making it tangible. So, in art as in politics, we are perhaps forced to ask ourselves whether we have not made a mistake by allowing our enemies to confiscate the promises of history.

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Jacques Rancière (University of Paris VIII)

Responses: the politics of landscape

I thank Bernard Aspe, Ilaria Bussoni and Oliver Davis for their kind comments and the new insights that they open not only into my book but also into the very issue of the landscape. All three make suggestive connections with other aspects of my work that they know very well. Their most incisive comments draw on the "politics of the landscape", meaning the parallelism between the "community" of elements that composes a landscape and the political community. This choice is understandable since it is certainly the most challenging aspect of my book: what kind of connection can we exactly make between the egalitarian composition of the scenes of nature, affirmed by two English landlords, and the French revolution that took place at exactly the same time? Between the aesthetic revolution and the political one? Not surprisingly, Oliver Davis is the most reluctant to find seeds of emancipation in the transformations of the parks of the British gentry. That's why he puts the stress on a statement that appears in the very first paragraph of the book when I assume that the discovery of the landscape gives rise to a form of experience "capable of changing the configuration of modes of perception and objects of thought" (Rancière 2023: x). He asks for a clarification: "Who are the subjects of this new mode of experience?". As a matter of fact, it is impossible to give them a definite social identity, since the very principle of this redistribution consists in blurring the hierarchy that allotted to each social group the form of sensible experience that suited them. The only right answer is "anybody". This can be William Wordsworth, the young student, fond of nature and poetry, who recognized the freedom of revolutionary France in the curbs of its rivers, the slopes of the vineyards and the plays of light and shade over the elms along the French roads. This can be the three young workers who went on strolling on a Sunday in May 1832 and enjoyed the bends of the Marne, the islands on the river and the trees "where the wind slipped its youthful delirium" or the white flowers of the hawthorns, before transmitting their Saint-Simonian credo to the fellow guests of a country inn (see Rancière 2012: 115-6). This can

also be the young female peasants depicted by Filippo Palizzi and mentioned by Ilaria Bussoni who forget their work to gaze at the Gulf of Sorrento or the frescoes unearthed during the Pompeian excavations and like "caressing a curtain of wheat instead of harvesting it". This gaze absorbed in the landscape will probably not make them socialist activists. I have always emphasized that aesthetic equality is not the same as political equality. They may stand apart or intersect in various ways, but they are part of the same reconfiguration of the perceptible which involves a redistribution of capacities. This redistribution of the sensible is the red thread that runs all along my work, from my studies on workers' emancipation to my studies on art and literature. That's why I focused on the new images of the community and the new forms of perception opened by the "invention" of the landscape rather than on its "dark side" as has been analyzed by John Barrell (1980). Oliver Davis points out that many aspects of this dark side are "missing" in my analysis, notably the violent role played by state power in the new enclosures which were the backdrop of the "improved" gardens. I could recall that my chapter on the politics of the landscape clearly set up the polemics about garden landscaping in the context of the new enclosures and emphasize that my object was not the history of landownership in Great Britain. Nor was it the destruction of the Commons as an element of the primitive accumulation of Capital. But I think that what is at stake in this case of "missing" aspects is above all a question of method. It is a question of understanding what materialism means.

Admittedly, my analysis is unsatisfactory by the standards of Marxist historical materialism whose method is predicated on two principles. The first one is the clear distinction between material reality and ideological representation. The second is that an object is only intelligible as a consequence of the whole network of its conditions of possibility. From this point of view, the discussion about landscape is an ideological phenomenon which expresses the material transformations of landownership that are based on the development of the capitalist relations of production, a development enforced by state power and helped by scientific and technical novelty. Therefore all those elements must be developed in detail to provide a materialist analysis of the landscape. My own materialism is quite different. Firstly, it refuses to trace a dividing line between reality and representation. This is what the study of workers' emancipation taught me: you cannot put their material condition on the one hand and their representations on the other. The so-called "representations" are

material modes of perception, material ways of living in a time and occupying a place in a common world that are part of a global form of experience. It is this unity that defines their condition and gets lost when you separate the material from the immaterial to better trace it back to a first cause called capitalism or exploitation which happens to be the same that explains any other social, political or cultural phenomenon.

Against that idea of global causality and that regression to the first cause I pitted what I called the method of the scene. It consists in choosing a significant singularity and then trying to reconstruct the conditions that make it possible by pulling all the threads of intelligibility that are already present in it and woven around it. In order to analyze the emergence of the landscape as an object of perception and thought I drew on various materials holding together the three elements of the problem – the transformations in art, the new idea of nature and the new forms of perception. These materials consisted of descriptions of landscapes made by travelers, polemics about landscape gardening, poems, paintings, and engravings. I assumed that it was possible to pull out of these materials the threads leading to the understanding of their social and historical conditions. The fact is that, from the very beginning, the polemics on landscape gardening shows at once the kind of society that landscape gardening designs and the kind of society that allows it to do so. It does not show it as an external and abstract cause but as a form of violence materially written and visible on the ground. Let us simply look at the satirical diptych called "Improvements", included in a book written by one of the "improvers", Humphrey Repton. It shows us all the violence carried out on both nature and society by the power of the landowners and their landscape architects: the wheat fields that have replaced the waste used by the commoners, the new fences that isolate the space of property and force the tired worker at the end of his hard day to circumvent it to get back home, and the stiff and "stingy" conifers that have been substituted for the old oaks and the generous shade that they offered to pedestrians. The same evidence of the new and violent ordering of the common space is evinced in the polemical texts written by Price and Knight against their fellow landowners: in Price's critique that opposed the liberality of landscape painters to the rule of the "despots" who thought every person entering their domain an intruder or Knight's satirical description of the torments of the unfortunate visitor forced to follow all the windings of the serpentine paths in the improved park to reach the house of the lord set on the top of the hill. There is no need to look afar for the hidden reality

of Capital and state power. They are present and visible in the new scenery built by the landowners who are at once the lawmakers that have decided on the new enclosures, the owners of the wheat fields, the architects of the new stingy landscape and the living law of the village that destroys the cottages and sends the commoners elsewhere.

This insight into the landscape redesigned by the enclosures is certainly far from the Marxist approach that Oliver Davis sees at work in Peter Linebaugh's book on the enclosures that dwells itself on Marx's article about the theft of wood in the Rhineland (see Linebaugh 2014). But it might be closer to the scenery of landownership that was perceived by the young Marx when he wrote that article. Significantly, he didn't see in the law on the theft of wood the offensive of state power to facilitate capitalist accumulation. Instead, he focused on the shameful contradiction between what the members of the Diet did and what they should have done according to the essence of law and their task as lawmakers[2]. The young Marx was certainly a bit shortsighted if we look at his article from the point of view of Marxist science. But nobody lives in the time of global history.

It remains that "history" and its promises of emancipation are certainly the main issues at stake in the reframing of the idea of nature that was at work in the emergence of the landscape. Bernard Aspe and Ilaria Bussoni tackle the same issue, but they approach it from another angle. They set up in a different way the issue of what is "missing" and should be extended in my book. What is missing for them is not so much the background of the story as it is the future onto which it opens, a future to be looked at from the very challenges and uncertainties of our present. The fact is that the epilogue that concluded my book without concluding the story of the relationships between art, nature and politics is somehow undecidable. On the one hand I suggested that technique might have taken the role of nature as the representative in art of non-artistic life, a move that led from Uvedale Price's dream of continuity between nature and architecture to Frank Lloyd Wright's accomplishments and also to the architectural dream that accompanied the revolutionary dream of new forms of life in the young Soviet Union. On the other hand, I underlined that, at the very moment when Hegel expelled the art of the landscape from the realm of art, Alexander von Humboldt proposed a new global view of nature or a new alliance between art, science and nature. To a

[2] About this missed appointment of the young Marx with his future object – capitalist accumulation – see Rancière (2019 and forthcoming).

certain extent, it could be said that Bernard Aspe took up the first thread while Ilaria Bussoni took up the second.

Bernard Aspe did not only follow the line that goes from the unconscious work of the artist nature to the identification of art and non-art in Duchamp's readymades or surrealist automatic writing. He also pulled out of the knot of the "politics of the landscape" a definite thread: the idea of the aesthetic experience as a form of "intensification of life", an idea which plays a significant role in Kant's *Critique of judgement*. In a previous text I had tried to trace a line from the intensification of life conceptualized by Kant to the idea of art as a creator of forms of life that went across *Arts and Crafts,* the *Werkbund* and the *Bauhaus* up to the ideals and achievements of Soviet artists who wanted art to produce no more artworks but the forms of a new collective life (see Rancière 2017; 2023b). Bernard Aspe makes reference to this text in order to draw a "future" of the landscape that leads to the Soviet Revolution – more precisely, to the intervention of avant-garde artists in the beginning of that revolution, an intervention animated by the idea of the indistinction between art and life. In the time of the landscape – that was also the time of the French revolution – that indistinction had relied on nature whose freedom was the unifying power linking art, politics and life. In the times of the Soviet revolution, history had taken over the role of the unifying power. This is what is evinced by El Lissitzky's propaganda poster *Beat the whites with the red wedge* which has become an emblem because it erases the very distinction between pure abstract art, political propaganda and urban furniture, an erasing that defines a new form of sensible experience. On the surface of the poster, the red is three things at once: it is a pure color, the color of the revolution and that of history itself. As it turns out, the promises of nature had been taken up by history. Nature had proposed once a model of community common to the gardens and to society as a whole. History had taken over its role and was the force that seemed to guide the angles of the red wedge and make them converge toward a target which was at once the enemy that must be destroyed and the future that must be opened by that destruction. Bernard Aspe emphasizes how far we are now from that coincidence and from the intensification of collective life elicited by that revolutionary form of art. The new forms of indistinction of art and life in contemporary performances and installations create no future because they are no longer supported by any unifying power of this kind. He asks then "whether we have not made a mistake by allowing our enemies to confiscate the promises of history". It might be answered that the promises of history in the times

of the Soviet revolution were as equivocal as the promises of nature in the times of the French revolution. They were predicated on the Marxist idea of a historical necessity leading itself to the destruction of the enemy. Our nostalgic look at the unfulfilled promises of the past is a consequence of the failure of that "historical necessity". That's why Bernard Aspe would certainly admit that we need to think emancipation to-day in the framework of another sense of history.

Another sense of history, this is also what is required by the contemporary concerns about the environment. Ilaria Bussoni clearly inscribes her contribution within this context. And it is from that perspective that she draws another line that connects our present to the time of the landscape and revives what she sees at its core, namely a new idea of nature. Out of the scenery of my book she pulls another thread. It starts from Knight's affirmation that Nature "acts not by lines, but general sympathy"; it goes through Humboldt's cognitive model of the *Naturgemälde* that "grasps nature as one great whole, moved and animated by internal forces" and Palizzi's depictions of female peasants absorbed in the contemplation of the landscape up to the most contemporary issues of ecology and new forms of agriculture. As she sees it, the "sympathy" of the landscape is more than a promise of social equality. It is the concrete configuration within which such an equality can exist. And the case of the young female peasants who forget their work to look at the Gulf of Sorrento or the Pompeian frescoes means more than the excitement of the young saint-Simonian workers who proved that they were able to enjoy the curbs of a river and the lights and shades through the leaves of the trees on a Sunday in May. The countryside was not for those women a site for a Sunday stroll. It was the place where they lived and worked, the object of their activity and their knowledge. Their reverie, as it was depicted by Palizzi, did not only question the old order within which peasants were deemed unable to see the landscape because they were unable to take a distance from their social position. It also made them take part in another nature than the "human nature" which determined the respective roles and capacities of men and women, aristocrats and commoners, artists and ordinary people. Ilaria Bussoni calls it "integral nature", an undivided nature that makes everything coexist on an equal footing. The promise of the landscape then happens to be the promise of what is often called to-day an "ontological turn", a turn that destroys the ontology of domination which was based on the separation between the human and the non-human. I evoked earlier the dominant form of this claim for an ontological turn: it accuses the very notion of nature of being the instrument of the

separation. By the same token, the landscape and landscape painting are said to have contributed to the disastrous "naturalist" ontology by setting nature apart, in front of the human mind, at hand for all its calculations and enterprises. Though she shares the same concerns, Ilaria Bussoni takes an opposite direction. Instead of denouncing the concept of nature as the agent of the oppression of the non-human, she calls for an "integral" nature, "one that proceeds through the common working of entanglement and diversity, which is endowed with an expressiveness of its own, the synthetic principle of which is an intersubjective bond called sympathy" which means a nature than can "hold things together, including human things".

Holding things together, and notably the human and the non-human, this is a concern shared by many people today. But there are many ways of understanding it most of which claim for the action of a global authority. Climate change and the future of the planet are told to be a global threat that surpasses both the conflicts between social classes and the capacities of the individuals. That's why they can be handled only by state and superstate power with the help of experts. Ilaria Bussoni takes the opposite stance. She does not start from the high but from the low, not from climate change but from new forms of agriculture through which ordinary people affirm their capacity to contribute to a new form of human community which is at the same time a new and egalitarian practice of knowledge that she connects with another aspect of my research, namely the theory of the equality of intelligences spelled out by Joseph Jacotot and developed in *The ignorant schoolmaster.* In her view, it is only such an egalitarian human community that can invent a new way of dealing with the non-human. She thinks that the old word nature can still be used to designate this way of "holding together" the human and the non-human along with the word by which the 18th century enlightened landlords and art lovers characterized the specific unifying power of nature: s*ympathy*. Richard Payne Knight would probably not have expected such a future for his views about nature and emancipation. But I think that it gives an interesting extension to the politics of the landscape.

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