“...There is nothing natural about landscape: even though landscape invokes nature and engages natural processes over time, it is first a cultural constant, a product of the imagination”

James Corner
The Landscape Imagination, New York 2014

Beyond the wastelands of a terrain vague, and the slow and patient promises of designed ecologies, there exists a third dimension to landscape, which is definitely more immediate and palpable.

We are talking about this narrative glue behind all our landscapes, one that is as potent as it is mythical, and only readable through the precise cultural coding of signs and hidden symbols. This highly irrational and creative dimension is called “landscape imagination”, and each project in every place carries layers of what the historian Simon Shama calls “mythical unreason”. It is, therefore, the symbolic weight of distinct features within a landscape, which brings meaning to the whole. What you see is not necessarily what you get in terms of significance, when engaging with the contemporary landscape. Landscape imagination is more about feeling and subliminal meaning than it is about facts.

As an example, we shall examine landscape imagination along three distinct lines. The first line will consider the evolution of a particular form of landscape depiction within a given cultural context. By borrowing from the lineage of a given pictorial tradition, it will examine more precisely the build-up of meaning in projects through the layering of such notable references. The second line will take the literary dimension of landscape imagination through time and will juxtapose it to the production of landscapes against a background of mythical references such as the “forest of the origins” (Urwald). This literary dimension will also be played against the notion of unwanted “invasions” that are part of the current popular discourse. The third line will address the invention of future natures, which break away from their traditional roots and try to reinvent themselves. More often than not, this approach from the most banal modern landscapes to the most extravagant deconstructed environments must reinvent its own myth of landscape in an imaginative way.

Without the strong potion of landscape imagination, many current projects would remain without a voice and without a face, unless we seek within the diaphanous relationship of signifier and signified to further unveil what really lies beneath the surface of things.

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Literature:


