

UNDERSTANDING OF THE LANDSCAPE

A landscape-oriented cognitive process in which the subject interprets its elements through the cognitive reading of signs and symbols or physical perception and experience (residence).

Landscape can be understood naturally – as a sphere devoid of meanings and neutral background of human activities – or culturally – then we assume that in the cognitive process physical stimuli are transformed into human impressions, ordering space and influencing its meaning. Research based on a naturalistic approach refers to natural processes and focuses on *explaining* phenomena. Research arising from the humanistic tradition turns to human creations, with which one works through interpretation and *understanding*. Within the framework of a cultural approach, there are at least two transformations of the paradigm and ways of understanding the landscape.

The first transformation is connected with modernity and consists in drawing attention to the history of landscape, looking at it through the prism of landscape painting (landscape art), the development of which is connected with gradual clearing of the field of vision. The second transformation takes place on the basis of late modernity; its essence is undermining the primary role of painting and sight, shifting the emphasis onto semiotic aspects and experience. The changes in the understanding of landscape are also intertwined with the changing ways of capturing it. While the first approach, called by Mitchell contemplative, emphasises the "innocence of the gaze", the second, interpretive approach, understands the landscape as a system composed of many signs. They can be read and interpreted just like words. Human traces, trees, stones, water, etc. may acquire religious or political meanings, and their specific arrangements and patterns – as in literature – create genres and specific types of representation, referred to as idyll, sublimity, *picturesque*, etc., when given conditions are met (Mitchell).

The paradigm most strongly embedded in landscape studies is oculo-centrism, which defines landscape as an object of sight. It emphasises the primary function of sight (eye) in the process of examination, interpretation and understanding (Cosgrove). At the same time, within this current we can distinguish three main approaches to landscape, the essence of which is described by metaphors: curtains, text and gaze (Wylie).

The first approach should be connected with the history of landscape painting, which tried to shape three-dimensional paintings, reflecting the visual sense of depth and perspective. The production of this illusion on a flat surface is called perspective and derives from 15th century northern Italy. As a result of this procedure, the representation of the landscape has become more geometric, structuring and subordinating the world to the perception of the subject. The invention of perspective created an impression of order, peace and harmony, but, as Cosgrove notes, these features were not qualities of space, but rather originated in the way it was perceived. We can therefore speak of illusion, a veil. Marxist tradition proclaimed that this mystification hides material conditions, creating the ideology of the

bourgeois society through ways of capturing the landscape. If we agree to perceive the landscape as a veil, we attribute three special features to it. Firstly, the landscape is always a representation, which means that it should be interpreted. Secondly, it is a special point of view and is therefore subject to historical processes and different ways of representation. Thirdly, it has ideological functions and serves the purposes of a given social class, stratum or social group.

The approach to the landscape as a veil is opposed to the position proposing a comparison of landscapes to books (texts) that are both written and read, i.e. produced and interpreted. Semiotics deals with the study of relations based on signs and the senses they carry. In the area of cultural research, the constructivist paradigm represented by the post-structural current has become particularly popular with regard to it, which values the process of interpretation (at the cost of trying to read the author's intention), construction (at the cost of discovering) of meaning, intertextualism, i.e. intertextual links (at the cost of confining oneself to a single text); movement of meanings, their fragmentariness, polyvocality and even the contradictions between them (Tilley, Duncan and Duncan, Wylie).

Thirdly, understanding of the landscape is metaphorically captured by means of the *gaze* category. This approach was first used by feminism, pointing out that looking at the landscape, contrary to assurances of objectivity and neutrality, is most often masculine (patriarchal) and serves to experience pleasure. Landscapes and nature, for example, are compared to female bodies, and the latter are then defined in relation to nature, cyclicity and passivity – in contrast to culture, linearity and activity as masculine elements. The landscape perceived in terms of femininity becomes an area of desire, discovery and penetration (especially in the period of geographical discoveries), but not with the help of the body (understood as a female factor), but of reason (implicitly: free from bodily prejudices). "Male's Eye" is also characterised by voyeurism, understood as peeping. The source of pleasure in this situation is the asymmetry of the gaze, control of the situation, objectification of the passive object in relation to the active subject.

There are also non-oculocentric concepts of landscape, emphasising living space, residence and use, as well as sensual experience and symbolic understanding, which takes place through channels other than the visual ones. For this reason, Berleant distinguished from the traditionally understood (panoramic) landscape its second type, involving active participation and co-creation. The difference between them is well captured by a pair of notions: view-area. The view creates a sense of distance, less engagement, constructs the "tourist's gaze", accentuating vision at the expense of thinking and experiencing. In turn, the area is defined through bodily being, being thrown into the world, everyday work and being, influencing, e.g. the feeling of intimacy with places, cultural affiliation and group identity (Urry, Frydryczak and Angutek).

The methodological and interpretative approach, which emphasises the importance of subjective (individual) immersion in the world, its proximity and sensual experiences in the cognitive process, is referred to as phenomenology. Phenomenology sees artificiality in the

division into the world of nature and culture, postulating the perspective of thinking about the place of humans in the world as residence, and the interpretative process as mediated not only by the mind, but also by the body, which is a slightly different tool of cognition, characterised by feeling or mobility (Tilley, Wiley, Ingold).

Phenomenology is a bridge for the development of theories known as *non-representational*. While eyesight structures images and the mind "reads" signs in the landscape, bodily experience may additionally be "beyond comprehension" and "pre-understanding", most often non-spoken, and thus difficult to translate into a system of representation. For this reason, these theories underline the importance of affects, embodied habits and meanings that emerge in the relationship between humanity and its environment. The latter, understood as a material and cultural landscape, not only is and means, but also functions. This means that it does not only submit to interpretation processes in which, for example, power relations are revealed, but, like the subject, it is the causative element of relations. As such, it co-shapes the human world, e.g. by creating social relations on the one hand, and on the other hand it mediates and influences cognitive processes, i.e. understanding of the landscape (Mitchell, Waterton).

[Ł. P.]

Literature:

Cosgrove, Denis E. „Landscape and the European Sense of Sight – Eyeing Nature, In: K. Anderson, M. Domosh, S. Pile, N. Thrift (eds.), *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, London: Sage Publications, 2003.

Duncan, Nancy i Duncan, James. „Doing Landscape Interpretation”. In: *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, ed. DeLyser, Dydia [et al.] London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010.

Frydryczak, Beata i Angutek, Dorota. „Krajobraz i krajobrazy. Słowo wstępne”. In: *Krajobrazy: antologia tekstów*, Beata Frydryczak i Dorota Angutek (eds.). Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN, 2014.

Ingold, Timothy. *The temporality of the landscape*, "World Archeology", 1993, vol. 25, 2.

Mitchell, William John Thomas. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Tilley, Christopher Y. *Material Culture and Text: the Art of Ambiguity*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Tilley, Christopher Y. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*. Oxford: Berg, 1994.

Tuan, Yi-Fi. *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture*. Washington: Island Press, Shearwater Books, 1993.

Waterton, Emma. „Landscape and non-representational theories”. In: *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*. (eds.) Peter Howard, Ian Thompson, Emma. Waterton. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Wylie, John. *Landscape*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Wylie, John. „Landscape and phenomenology“. In: *The Routledge companion to landscape studies*, (eds.) Peter Howard, Ian Thompson, Waterton, Emma. New York: Routledge, 2013.

