07
2019

Landscape in Perspective

Projections and Transformations

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Landscape in Perspective

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FOREWORD

Interestingly, in terms of both the concept and what it refers to, the word 'landscape' is an interpretation in itself: it relates to a particular view of our natural environment. Long before the species *homo* evolved, planet Earth was already in existence. In the Earth's evolution, humans are a late arrival, first appearing only some 2.5 million years ago, and the sub-species *homo sapiens* a mere 70,000 years ago. Nevertheless, this species has had a tremendous influence on the Earth's appearance. With the arrival of the species *homo*, 'landscapes' were born. The big-brained species, humankind, quickly developed the skills needed to work together and control many aspects of its living conditions in hunting and in gathering supplies for survival, and in the course of so doing changing the environment.

Today's world is the result of this presence; there are no 'landscapes' beyond *homo sapiens.* Nature may exist in a strongly altered form, ranging from the deepest oceans, vastest deserts, and most luscious rainforests, to the smallest of city gardens measuring only a single paving stone. However, it is the human species that impacted and/or created these different natural phenomena, and it is not the individual animal or plant but man himself who is conscious of them. These species do not have the kind of long-term memory humans have, nor the human ability to reflect on their actions. Whereas 'landscape' initially referred to natural landscapes, that is, to all the visible features of

an area of land (and often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal), the term increasingly indicates the entire living environment of humans: physical, visual, and mental. But there is more to it. In recent thinking, the term 'the Anthropocene' was coined to define Earth's most recent geological time period as being profoundly influenced by humans to such an extent that all kinds of Earth system processes, and the biosphere, have changed irreversibly, although there is some agreement that not all humans living on Earth can be held equally accountable. The industrialized countries are by far the biggest driving forces responsible for these changes. Whereas the suffix '–cene' indicates an epoch in geological times, '–scape' is a qualifier hinting at the modelling of ('landscaping') or interfering in the environment on the one hand, and a particular view (landscape, seascape, cityscape), that is, something that is perceived as such, on the other. This perception refers to the outside world as well as mental images: 'intellectual landscape', 'landscape of our mind', 'landscape of contributions', indicating the vast and multifaceted scope of something. Obviously, the term landscape has rich connotations, but the term has also lost its innocence. We live in a multitude of 'scapes' and they come in many guises, not all of them pretty, as the collection of articles in Issues #6 and #7 of this journal show. Together, these articles reflect the human condition with respect to our changed, industrialized, and computerized world. Because of these profound changes, the landscape has become the thermometer of the human condition. When the natural landscape changes, human beings change. The human species is slowly becoming aware of the fact that we are not standing outside, but are inherently part of our — natural — environment.

Perhaps because we are so intrinsically connected to the landscape, people never tire of contemplating what 'landscape' means to us, both mentally and physically, and how precisely we are connected. Issues such as these, regarding what landscape means to people in whatever guise or medium it comes, are especially debated within the Humanities and in contemporary visual art practices. Landscapes are designed, perceived, experienced, worshipped, analysed,

represented in texts and visual and material culture, digitized, and seen as metaphors (e.g. 'landscape of justice'). The term has given birth to an endless range of 'scapes', with a clear reference to Arjun Appadurai's quintet of fluid, nondelineated 'scapes' transgressing apparent realities in front of us. Some examples would be ethno-, media-, techno-, finance-, and ideoscape, to which I would like to add a sixth one, the 'artscape', to address the mass of art around the world in past and present. Landscapes can also be artscapes.

The 2017 LUCAS Graduate Conference was motivated by the topicality of the subject, and this is the second issue of the *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference* to be devoted to it. From 25 to 27 January 2017 Leiden University was the meeting place for an international host of speakers, artists, and participants attending nineteen panels with topics ranging from landscape and law, digitization and pixilation of landscapes, landscape and (national) identity, colonial landscapes, gardens and landscape design, and landscape poetics to a wealth of artists' presentations and performances. Similarly, the conference's keynote speakers reflected the scope of the topics: David E. Nye (University of Southern Denmark) in discussing how American cityscapes changed under the influence of electric lighting in the period from 1880 to 1910, and Elizabeth Losh (William & Mary, Williamstown, VA, USA) on digital landscapes. Issue #7 of this journal presents a second selection from this inspiring plethora.

Kitty Zijlmans
Leiden University

INTRODUCTION

> We are surrounded with things which we have not made and which have a life and structure different from our own: trees, flowers, grasses, rivers, hills, clouds. For centuries they have inspired us with curiosity and awe. They have been objects of delight. We have recreated them in our imaginations to reflect our moods. And we have come to think of them as contributing to an idea which we have called nature. Landscape painting marks the stages in our conception of nature. Its rise and development since the Middle Ages is part of a cycle in which the human spirit attempted once more to create a harmony with its environment.[1]

We have come a long way since art historian Kenneth Clark wrote this often-quoted passage to open the first chapter of his seminal work *Landscape Into Art* seventy years ago. Today, the breadth of research conducted on and through landscape signals that it is much more than an artistic genre reflecting the attempt to create harmony with the natural world. "Landscape," to quote a recent publication from Werner Bigell and Cheng Chang, "is more than a projection onto nature or the environment: it is a multivalent frame — territorial, political, aesthetic, etc. — determining how the environment is perceived and shaped".[2] The articles collected in our second issue on landscape show that this framing can also work the other way around: the landscape, too, can become a prism, even a critical tool for researchers to analyse, and possibly disrupt, the ways in which we perceive society and culture.

This second issue of the *JLGC* on landscape draws from the wealth of contributions to the fourth biennial LUCAS Graduate Conference that took place at the end of January 2017. The theme, *Landscape: Interpretations, Relations,*

1 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape Into Art* (London: John Murray, 1949), 1.

2 Werner Bigell and Cheng Chang, "The Meanings of Landscape: Historical Development, Cultural Frames, Linguistic Variation, and Antonyms," *Ecozon@* 5.1 (2014), 86.

and Representations, was chosen for its inherently interdisciplinary character. When analysed as a theoretical concept, landscape evokes strong spatial connotations and vivid imagery by means of our perceptions of the world. However, as the world undergoes impactful developments — often discussed with buzzwords such as industrialization, globalization, and digitization — the very notion of what defines, arranges, informs, and changes a landscape has altered in accordance with these dynamic processes. The conference aimed to interrogate the shifts in the conception of and approach to landscape throughout history and across disciplines. It attracted more than fifty scholars from nineteen countries considering landscape, and its cultural meaning, from different perspectives, eras, and regions.

Three public lectures set the tone for this academic exchange. The first by Dr Anja Novak (University of Amsterdam) on land art in the Netherlands drew connections between seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting and the recent, mostly state-commissioned, monumental works of land art in the polder landscape of Flevoland within the contexts of identity, modernism, and gender. Keynote speaker Prof. Dr David E. Nye (University of Southern Denmark) illuminated the history of the American electric grid in his lecture. He focused on capitalism's production of heterotopic spaces and their ability to reveal as much as they conceal poverty and industrial landscapes. Another keynote speaker, Dr Elizabeth Losh (William & Mary, Williamstown, VA, USA), discussed the timely subject of place-making in digital activism and the forms of solidarity that emerge from this practice. She presented new research and addressed recent events including Trump's into White House inauguration and the subsequent Women's Marches held around the world. To her we extend our special thanks: she kindly agreed to give a lecture on very short notice after she had just arrived as a Guest Lecturer at Leiden University.

In addition to scholarly contributions, artists were explicitly encouraged to present their work at the conference, which led to sometimes surprising takes

on the subject. One example is the project MANUFACTUUR 3.0 in which Belgian artist **Kristof Vrancken** created light-sensitive and drinkable emulsions using local plants to produce photographs of the land from which they grow to address environmental pollution. Thus, the landscape is not only pictured, but also materially embedded in the final print. The test tubes that adorn this issue's front cover contain the plant-based ingredients for his emulsions; they are, in a sense, a material interpretation of the landscape from which they were taken. Further details on this innovative project can be found in this issue in a two-page statement written by the artist.

While the *JLGC*'s first issue featured a selection of six articles exploring the links between *landscape and identity*, this issue's contributions converge around the theme of *projections and transformations*. Projection and transformation are common terms of inquiry in current academic debates surrounding landscape. As emphasized in the inherent nature of the terms themselves, the study of landscape as a dynamic concept is subject to constant revision, just as our relationship with land perpetually transforms. The articles collected in this issue offer a glimpse into the variety of research currently performed on and through landscape in the Humanities. Out of a number of applications, we selected the six articles that best approach landscape as a projection screen for nationalist sentiments and (post)colonial narratives, or as a site of transformation.

In "Literary landscapes in the Castilian Middle Ages: Allegorical construction as a feature of textual landscapes", **Natacha Crocoll** argues that literary landscapes existed prior to the Renaissance, despite their lack of acknowledgement especially in French and Spanish historiography. The Middle Ages are a particularly delicate point of scholarly dissension, due to the era's perceived theological relationship between humans and nature. Crocoll focuses on the particular case of thirteenth-century Castilian literature, and explores texts from the same period but across different genres, including *Cantar de Mío Cid*. According to Crocoll, medieval landscapes are characterized by symbolism, frequent

religious interpretation, and traditional constructions that rely on literary topoi. These characteristics should not be seen as obstacles between humankind and nature; rather, they offer another interpretation where transcendence adds meaning to the beauty of the world. Through this, the medieval perception of landscape demonstrates its earlier representation in literature.

Carolin Görgen examines how California Camera Club practices around 1900, which have often been neglected in the sociocultural studies of the United States, utilized the landscape to construct a triumphant history of national expansion. She argues that the California Camera Club contributed to an imagined history of the Western landscape. To illustrate this argument, Görgen looks at how magazines like *Camera Craft*, published between 1900 and 1942, lent themselves to the formulation of a dominating Americanized narrative reinforced by the massive influence exerted by Eastman Kodak over the perception of popular photography since the 1890s. Thus, Görgen suggests how the collectively produced images of the local environment in the early 1900s sought to articulate a selective, nationalistic portrayal of the American West.

Timea Andrea Lelik's essay focuses on the intricate entanglement between landscapes and depicted figures in Edvard Munch's paintings and the impact this effect has on viewers. Landscape, as Lelik explains, is an essential part of Munch's compositions. Nevertheless, many of these compositions exhibit features that resist a neat categorization into painting genres. Through a close reading of Munch's paintings, including *Melancholy* (1892), *The Scream* (1893), and *Red Virginia Creeper* (1898-1900), Lelik argues that neither portraiture nor landscape stand out to enforce compliance with the conventional canons of certain art genres. Instead, figures and backgrounds are often absorbed into each other, creating a viewing experience that is direct and confrontational, as if the viewer is being framed within the ongoing moment that the paintings suggest. Lelik's article enriches the understanding of landscape in Munch's paintings, both as a genre rule that needs be broken and as a compositional device that engages the viewer.

Kyveli Mavrokordopoulou investigates the treatment of landscape in the video work *The Wave* (2011) by Sarah Vanagt and Katrien Vermeire depicting the excavation of a mass grave from the Spanish Civil War era. Mavrokordopoulou interprets this video's examination of landscape and past violence by means of Fernand Braudel's concept of '*longue durée*' and Rob Nixon's 'slow violence'. By bringing the notion of temporality into their work Vanagt and Vermeire appear to explore a past that lacks resolution, and to extend this lack of resolution into the present. In this way, Mavrokordopoulou argues, this video work challenges traditional landscape aesthetics.

Tessa de Zeeuw's article analyses the architectural design of the newly constructed International Criminal Court (ICC) complex and specifically focuses on its defining element: a hanging garden containing seedlings from each of the Court's member states. She interrogates both the form and function of the hanging garden and poses the question: How does the ICC's courthouse garden and landscape design reflect on the problem of sovereignty that constitutes the institution as a court of international criminal law? De Zeeuw argues that the garden acts as a critical space that vests a powerful and paradoxical relationship between nature and culture and helps to shed a critical light on the constitution of the ICC.

In **Maxime Decaudin**'s article, he explores the role of nature in the process of Hong Kong's colonization through landscape descriptions produced by nineteenth-century visitors, travellers, and settlers. Decaudin traces the origin of the expression "barren rock", which was used to refer to the island's supposed lack of vegetation, discusses its implications, and uses it as the starting point for his contribution to the history of environmental changes in Hong Kong. From a viewpoint that avoids simplistic oppositions between nature and culture, the article studies the first encounters between colonists and natural environment, and how landscape descriptions could play distinct roles in the construction of colonial narratives used as a mechanism of legitimization for

the British colonial project, and their implications for land appropriation and dispossession. Decaudin also presents cases of cultural encounters that provide hybrid landscape interpretations, and questions simplistic assumptions of European cultural imposition on Hong Kong.

We, as the editorial board, hope that this issue contributes to interdisciplinary discussions on landscape and its capacity for political and aesthetic transformation. Landscape and the myriad projections related to it are far from being just a way of achieving harmony with our environment. These topics will continue to be debated in future scholarship, and we aim to spark fruitful discussions through the contributions offered by this issue's authors.

This issue would not have been possible without the help of various colleagues at LUCAS and elsewhere. First and foremost, we are grateful to our publisher, the Leiden University Library. We thank all the speakers who submitted their conference papers, and especially the six patient and cooperative authors who expanded their presentations for publication in this volume. We thank Kitty Zijlmans for contributing the foreword of this issue. Joy Burrough-Boenisch was of great help in guiding us in our editing work and building our enthusiasm for the editing process. The anonymous peer reviewers provided a gracious service to the editors and authors, for which we are grateful. We thank Jeneka Janzen for her help in the last stages of editing, and Tatiana Kolganova for designing this issue's layout. Finally, we thank the LUCAS management team, Anthonya Visser, Rick Honings, Jan Pronk, and Ylva Klaassen, for their continued support in producing this seventh issue of the *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference*.

Editorial Board: Anna Volkmar, Zeynep Anli, Ali Shobeiri, Amaranth Feuth, Ana Cardozo de Souza, Bareez Majid, Layla Seale, Tim Vergeer, Tingting Hui

STRAIN

A NEW APPROACH TO LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE AGE OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Kristof Vrancken
LUCA School of Arts, Genk, Belgium

This article presents the initial results of my artistic research project The Sustainist Gaze in which I examine the possibilities between organic photography, science, and participatory design to find a methodology for visualizing the Anthropocene, protesting against it, and enabling solidarity with nonhumans. It is a call for action against the framework within which humankind strongly influences the earth's climate, atmosphere, geology, and biodiversity. Considering photography from this perspective made me doubt the self-evidence of my predominantly digital work process, and prompted me to return to the anthotype, an organic process at the root of the discovery of photography. This old technique is in fact a suitable tool for approaching contemporary ecological topics because it adds layers of meaning that digital images cannot contain, such as the incorporation of time, entropy, and tactility, as well as a strong connection with ecology, the importance of sensory perception, and the ability to embed what was photographed in the print itself. These aspects are elaborated on and illustrated by my artistic project MANUFACTUUR 3.0.

Our society is currently confronted with the challenges of disruptive technological, economic, environmental, and social change. Global warming is accelerating, raw materials are becoming scarce, pollution is on the rise and social inequality is increasing: these are only a few of the problems that we are confronted with almost daily.[1] We currently find ourselves in the Anthropocene era in which humankind influences the earth's climate, atmosphere, geology, and biodiversity.[2] My artistic work reacts against this state of the Earth through

1 Giacomo D'Alisa, Federico Demaria, and Giorgos Kallis, *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (London: Routledge, 2014), 20–44.

2 Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2017), 5–18; T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene, Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2017), 10–22.

organic photography and participatory design methodologies. In this short article I elaborate upon my choice of the anthotype process as my preferred weapon to visualize the Anthropocene (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1
Kristof Vrancken
Strain, 2016
46 x 61cm, Anthotype: elderberry and gin emulsion on paper
Photographer's archive

The anthotype is an organic and traditionally analogue process that was first described by the prominent scientist, mathematician, botanist, and experimental photographer Sir John Herschel (1792–1871) in his paper "On the Action of the Rays of the Solar Spectrum on Vegetable Colours, and on Some New Photographic Processes", which was published in the scholarly journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* in 1842.[3] The anthotype process is an organic photographic process that affects the discoloration of natural pigments exposed to ultraviolet light (James, 2016).[4] An anthotype is created by applying a photosensitive emulsion made from the colour pigments of plants to a carrier and exposing it to sunlight for several days or weeks. Ultraviolet rays break down the colours, slowly creating an image (Fig. 2).

3 John Herschel, "On the Action of the Rays of the Solar Spectrum on Vegetable Colours, and on Some New Photographic Processes," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 132 (1842), 181–214.

4 Christopher James, *The Book of Alternative Photographic Processes* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016), 44–50, 670.

Fig. 2
Jenny Stieglitz
Wall Drawing of the Anthotype Process, 2016
200 x 200cm, Organic inks on plaster
Z33, Hasselt, Belgium

The anthotype print has a very special property. By actually using plants originating from the depicted landscape to create photos from that landscape, a self-referential relationship is established between the physical landscape and its photographic representation. The landscape actually works as an agent for the photographic image on different levels. The anthotype print not only *represents* the landscape, it is the landscape, since it is made from the flora that grows there (Fig. 3). Because plants are increasingly affected by environ-

Fig. 3
Kristof Vrancken
Harvesting Ingredients in a Contaminated Area, 2016
Digital Image. Photographer’s archive

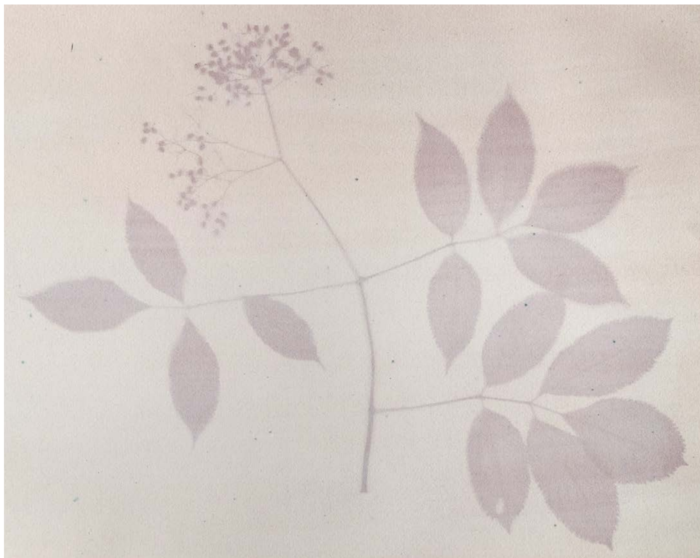

Fig. 4
Kristof Vrancken
Cameraless Photograph: Elderberry Plant, 2016
46 x 61cm, Anthotype: elderberry and gin emulsion on paper
Photographer's archive

Fig. 5
Kristof Vrancken
Experiments on Elderberry Anthotype Emulsions, 2016
46 x 61cm, Anthotype: elderberry and gin emulsion on paper
Photographer's archive

mental stressors, especially by the devastating consequences of global climate change, the anthotype, in which plants are used in the preparation of a photographic emulsion, acts as a suitable tool to tell the narrative of, and illustrate, the Anthropocene (Fig. 4).[5]

5 Parvaiz Ahmad and M.N.V. Prasad, eds, *Environmental Adaptations and Stress Tolerance of Plants in the Era of Climate Change* (New York: Springer, 2002).

The anthotype process thus enables us to not only experience the story of the landscape from a human point of view, but also allows us to open up and listen to the stories that plants and other organisms can tell us about the landscape. Using this organic photographic method allows for a more embedded attitude towards ecology than any other chemical or digital process. The use of the anthotype process was never an aesthetic choice for me, but rather a means to visualize invisible stories that are present underground.

The first project in which I applied the anthotype technique to create new artistic work was *MANUFACTUUR* 3.0. This exhibition was curated by Evelien Bracke and was held in the Z33 – House for Contemporary Art located in Hasselt, Belgium.[6] The departure point of the exhibition was the need to rethink our traditional methods of production and to provide some alternatives. The exhibition itself was a new type of manufacture, a production place where designers, artists, and architects created new work based on alternative production scenarios over the course of three months (from October to December 2016).[7] The focus shifted from presenting products as end results to showing production processes (Fig. 10).

The photographic series that originated from this project is entitled *Strain* (2016) (Figs 1, 7–9). It consists of five anthotype prints made with an emul-

6 See https://z33research.be/2016/11/manufactuur-3-0/, accessed 3 December 2018.

7 See http://z33research.be/2016/11/manufactuur-3-0/, accessed 21 April 2017.

Fig. 6
Kristof Vrancken
Experiments with potable Elderberry Anthotype Emulsions
Digital Image
Photographer’s archive

sion of elderberry and gin. The title refers to draining or sifting a substance, an essential part of producing a photographic emulsion. At the same time, it symbolizes a force that pulls or stretches something to an extreme or damaging degree. The series focuses on the complex relationship between humankind and nature, in which both are under pressure. The images showcase the damage caused by a severe storm that struck Wellen, Belgium on 23 June 2016. The rain, hail, and wind damage ran into the millions of euros. The municipality, located about 15 km from Hasselt, lies in Haspengouw, which is one of the largest fruit-growing regions in Western Europe. The heavy storm was disastrous

Fig. 7, 8
Kristof Vrancken
Strain, 2016
46x 61cm, Anthotype: elderberry and gin emulsion on paper
Photographer's archive

Fig. 9
Kristof Vrancken
Strain, 2016
46x 61cm, Anthotype: elderberry and gin emulsion on paper
Photographer's archive

for the farmers, who lost an entire harvest and their trees.[8] *Strain* shows the storm damage using bruised berries from the afflicted landscape. It witnesses the tension between humankind and natural forces in a direct and physical manner. Agriculture has turned the Haspengouw landscape, which is neatly divided into pastures, arable land, and fruit orchards, into a functional production site with a view to generating as much profit as possible. Nature — in the form of a storm — reclaimed the landscape, resulting in chaos and destruction. These tensions will continually increase in the future due to man-made climatological changes. Studies have shown that severe storms will increase in frequency due to global warming, and food production will be under even more pressure.[9]

Since *MANUFACTUUR* 3.0 focuses on projects that are locally embedded, and since Hasselt is historically known for its gin distilleries, it seemed obvious to connect my project to this tradition. As alcohol is often added to photographic emulsions, I thought of developing a mixture of Hasselt gin and created new photographic emulsions based on the historic method of preparation as described by Herschel. This resulted in a photographic emulsion that was both light-sensitive and drinkable. The plants I used were local juniper berries, nettle, blackberries, sloe, tansy, and elderberries. They not only have a place within the traditional gin-making process, but also have medicinal, ritual, and other useful properties.[10] It is a pity that such applications, and those of other edible plants near the city, have been forgotten due to our modern lifestyle in which nature and culture are drifting away from each other. With this project, I wanted to draw attention to these underutilized, free, and widely available sources of food and raw materials that also form an essential part of our local identity and history.[11]

I started experimenting with these local ingredients, aiming to develop an organic photographic emulsion with a balance between light-sensitivity, good image quality, and taste (Fig. 5). In my quest for the right formula I studied eigh-

8 Jozef C. Croughs, “Duizenden tonnen fruit verloren,” *De Standaard*, 27 June 2016, 28.

9 Kees Dorland, Richard S. J. Tol, and Jean P. Palutikof, “Vulnerability of the Netherlands and Northwest Europe to Storm Damage under *Climate Change*,” Climatic Change 43.3 (1999), 513–35.

10 Marcel De Cleene and Marie Claire Lejeune, *Compendium van rituele planten in Europa* (Ghent: Mens en Cultuur, 2008), 125, 219–27, 276, 386–97, 553, 564, 728; Andrzej Sidor and Anna Gramza-Michałowska, “Advanced Research on the Antioxidant and Health Benefit of Elderberry (*Sambucus Nigra*) in Food – a Review,” *Journal of Functional Foods* 18.2 (2015), 941–58.

11 Marcel De Cleene and Marie Claire Lejeune, “Rituele planten in ons dagelijks leven,” *in Compendium van rituele planten in Europa* (Ghent: Mens en Cultuur, 2008), 15–22.

teenth- and nineteenth-century traditions and recipes for homemade liqueurs based on gin, berries, and honey. For this occasion, I collaborated with the Hasselt Jenever (Gin) Museum and local distiller ‘t Stookkot which specializes in the use of local raw, organic ingredients which affect the taste of gin.[12]

This project built bridges between diverse domains that are not usually associated with one another. It combined photography and taste, as well as local history, biology, and alchemy. Although taste is still an unexplored parameter

12 See http://www.jenevermuseum.be/en; http://www.stookkot.be/, both accessed 21 April 2017. “The flavour of spirit drinks is mainly influenced by the quality and flavour of the raw materials, their varieties, and their geographical origin. Flavour quality is also influenced by the various special, mostly traditional technologie

Fig. 10 Kristof Vrancken *My MANUFACTUUR-studio in Z33, Hasselt, Belgium*
Scenography by Olivier Goethals

in photography, it proved to be a fascinating way to interact with an audience. Offering a drink as a means to strike up a conversation is a common social convention. A drinkable, light-sensitive emulsion made from edible berries collected in the photographed landscape appealed to the audience's imagination (Fig. 6). This opened a dialogue and the first step towards consciousness was established. In this series, one experiences the anthotype image using one's senses of vision, smell, touch, and taste. Drinking the emulsion creates a special connection between the observer, the landscape, and the image. This results in a powerful immanent relationship with the image.

By using the nineteenth-century anthotype technique in artistic photography I want to protest against the Anthropocene and contribute to a greater consciousness of our planet's problematic state. The anthotype image has the ability to embed what was photographed in the print itself and it can translate in a poetic way the narratives of the strained landscape.[13]

of fermentation, distillation, and maturation". Norbert Christoph and Claudia Bauer-Christoph, "Flavour of Spirit Drinks: Raw Materials, Fermentation, Distillation, and Ageing," in *Flavours and Fragrances Chemistry, Bioprocessing and Sustainability,* ed. Ralf Günter Berger (Berlin: Springer, 2007), 237.

13 I would like to thank Prof. Dr Jean Manca, Prof. Dr Roland Valcke, Jan Boelen, Evelien Bracke, Dr Dirk Reynders, Dr Veerle Van der Sluys, Dr Leen Engelen and Dr Leen Kelchtermans for their valuable remarks, and Edith Doove for the translation.

Kristof Vrancken is based at the LUCA School of Arts in Genk, where he is active as a researcher and teacher in Experimental Photography and Hybrid Media. He is currently preparing an artistic PhD dissertation on strategies to protest against the Anthropocene through Photography and Participatory Design Processes. In his most recent work Vrancken not only uses the landscape as a passive subject but also as an active ingredient of his work. By developing his tactile pictures with local plant extracts he strengthens the relationship between the physical place and the image.

"BRING YOUR CAMERA" THE WESTERN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE THROUGH CALIFORNIA CAMERA CLUB PRACTICE IN THE EARLY 1900S

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Drawing on the corpus of one of the most dynamic camera clubs in the United States around 1900, the California Camera Club, this article examines how photographers based in an isolated region used the landscape to formulate a triumphant history of national expansion. Through a focus on the Spanish missions of California and the Native American reservations in Arizona, the article demonstrates how the participatory practice of photography shaped a regional aesthetic iconography that not only promised access to the territory, but also proved useful to the formulation of national history. It retraces how the conflicted past of conquest over Native Americans was re-articulated through photographic practice and circulation on material supports. In a historiography of turn-of-the-century American photography dominated by artistic strivings, this study expands the analytical frame by considering camera clubs as privileged agents involved in the creation of new communities. Through a study of diverse practices, an exchange network will emerge that embeds the medium in the dense socio-cultural and economic contexts of the emerging American West. What is at stake here is the re-evaluation of often-neglected camera club practices and their contribution to carefully constructed and widely disseminated histories of the territory.

INTRODUCTION

In 1890, a group of professional and amateur photographers gathered in San Francisco to found the California Camera Club, which would become the larg-

est collective association devoted to photography on the West Coast.[1] With a membership exceeding 400 in the early twentieth century, the Club accepted professionals, Kodak 'snapshooters', and artists, male and female alike.[2] It set out to unite local photographers in order to improve their practice by drawing on the rich natural scenery of the region. At the time still a geographically distant location, isolated from the cultural centres of the East Coast, California's landscape and history became the shared focus of the practitioners. Their attraction to the particularities of the local environment reflected California's special position in national history since the mid-nineteenth century. In this period, the Gold Rush in Northern California and the subsequent exploration of the surrounding regions turned the West into a place of unparalleled opportunity for individuals, and a projection screen for an expanding nation. In this chronological configuration, California as "a new place" and photography as "a new medium" would "[come] of age together".[3] At the close of the nineteenth century, the long-standing notion of "California as a place apart, quintessentially different from mainland America" would thus become interwoven in the photographic industry of the state. By that time, the Northern regions around San Francisco housed more than 2,000 people involved in the photographic industry.[4] The turn-of-the-century members of the California Camera Club, including real estate managers, lawyers, and businessmen, but also professional photographers and writers, became embedded in this network of photographic production and circulation. What united these practitioners was an eagerness to disseminate the image of the state as a quintessentially American region: vacant for settlement, investment, and the cultivation of an idiosyncratic Western culture springing from its intimate connection to the landscape. During its most active period between 1890 and 1915, the Club reached out to practitioners across the state while it was based in the heart of San Francisco. Through print exhibitions, the monthly publication *Camera Craft*, regular lantern slide lectures, and an elaborate outing agenda with excursions to the Bay Area, Yosemite, or the Southern regions, the Club generated a vast corpus that is dispersed among numerous collecting institutions today.[5] The scale and

1 This research was generously supported by a travel grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

2 In 1900, the California Camera Club consisted of 425 active members, which qualified it as the largest club in the U.S.; Editorial, Camera Craft 1.1 (1900), 26; Michael G. Wilson, "Northern California: The Heart of the Storm," *in Pictorialism in California: Photographs 1900–1940*, eds Michael G. Wilson and Dennis Reed (Malibu and San Marino: The J. Paul Getty Museum and the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1994), 5.

3 Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 2.

4 Peter E. Palmquist, "The Pioneers: Landscape and Studio," in *Capturing Light: Masterpieces of California Photography, 1850 to the Present*, ed. Drew Heath Johnson (New York and Oakland: W. W. Norton and the Oakland Museum, 2001), 4–6. See also Dora Beale Polk, *The Island of California: A History of the Myth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

5 The majority of Club-related material is located at the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, the San Francisco Public Library, and the Huntington Library, San Marino.

output of this locally rooted, congenial activity confirms art historian Rachel Sailor's stance that resident photographers assisted in "the creation of culture in nascent Western communities [by] claiming, constructing, reconstructing, and appropriating the landscape they held in common".[6]

This article argues that the communal dimension of photographic practice within the California Camera Club contributed to the construction of an imagined history of the Western landscape that proved meaningful to the dominant local audience and, by the same token, just as relevant to the consolidation of an expanding American nation. Through its focus on the history of the state, which included the romanticization of its Spanish missionary past, the portrayal of Native Americans as dignified ancestors of the nation, and its landscape as a mirror of victorious settlement, the Club turned photography into an identity-shaping tool. With a focus on the photographic treatment of California's Spanish colonial heritage and of the Southwestern Indigenous peoples, this article retraces how the practices of a largely neglected group of photographers and their material manifestations shaped a dominant narrative of the landscape of the newly Americanized West and its most enticing state.

AN EXPANDED FRAMEWORK AND NEW METHODOLOGIES

If landscape photography of the American West is often referred to as a narrative of "masters", moving from Carleton Watkins in the 1870s to Ansel Adams in the 1930s, historians and curators of the medium conspicuously neglected the turn-of-the-century era during which a complex network of congenial photographic activity emerged in California.[7] Focusing predominantly on East Coast developments, the sparse scholarly works treating the California Camera Club over the past three decades have explicitly framed the practitioners' output through the lens of Pictorialism: the turn-of-the-century movement striving for the recognition of photography as an art form. Despite the visibility scholars have granted to West Coast camera clubs, their analysis remains rooted within

6 Rachel McLean Sailor, *Meaningful Places: Landscape Photographers in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), xxvii.

7 See Therese Thau Heyman, ed., *Picturing California: A Century of Photographic Genius* (San Francisco and Oakland: Chronicle Books and the Oakland Museum of California, 1989); Drew Heath Johnson, ed., *Capturing Light: Masterpieces of California Photography* (2001); Weston J. Naef, *Photographers of Genius at the Getty* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004).

a fine art approach that denies a more historically informed perspective on the highly eclectic output of the Club.[8] The research conducted for this article seeks to shed such a "framing discourse" that reduces the photograph to its formal qualities. Instead, it takes into consideration a contextual analysis that, as art historian Glenn Willumson put it, "calls for a new set of criteria rooted in the material existence of the photo-object at specific historical moments".[9] In the case of the California Camera Club, the critical focus is here set on the production context of photographs, their different material forms, as well as the discourses which accompanied their circulation. From this historically and materially informed perspective, we may retrace how Californian landscape photographs could articulate different meanings depending on their context of publication, be it in the photography magazine *Camera Craft*, in a print exhibition, or in a tourist guide. Thanks to this enlarged material scope and methodology, we exceed the previously restrained historiographical focus, and examine the California Camera Club's output from a socio-historical perspective.

Informed by recent research on camera club photography in Europe around 1900, the methodology of this article seeks to push the boundaries of the above-mentioned rigid categories and move toward new articulations of photographic corpora produced in a period defined by the concept of nationhood.[10] By looking at the articulation of a local portrayal in the context of emerging national thought, we may understand how the practice of photography became an orchestrated endeavour of a privileged group seeking to inscribe their locality into a coherent national set-up. Here, the collective exertion of a pastime and the production of tangible results became closely associated with the experience of the landscape. In the Californian case, it is crucial to recognize that the congenial production of photographs by a wealthy fraction of society was related to an emerging American imperialism, with the promise of an allegedly 'empty' Western landscape, its expansion, and prosperity at its heart. Through its long Pacific coastline, its varied landscape and Mediterranean climate, as well as its recent history of territorial seizure from Mexico

8 See Wilson and Reed, eds, *Pictorialism in California* (1994); Naomi Rosenblum, "California Pictorialism," in *Capturing Light* (2001); Stacey McCarroll and Kim Sichel, eds, *California Dreamin': Camera Clubs and the Pictorial Photography Tradition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

9 Glenn Willumson, "Making Meaning: Displaced Materiality in the Library and Art Museum," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, eds Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2004), 76–77.

10 See Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Christian Joschke, *Les yeux de la nation: Photographie amateur et société dans l'Allemagne de Guillaume II (1888–1914)* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2013).

and from Indigenous tribes, California stood as a terrain of national expectation.[11] From their isolated position on the continent's edge, pho- tographers used these prospects to formulate their own triumphant narrative of the state, which implied the fabrication of sentimentalized Spanish colonial and Indigenous pasts anchored in the local landscape. By merging national expectations with the local desire for recognition and demarcation, turn-of-the-century photographers embarked on what one curator has described as a "regional identity-building project as performed through photography".[12]

In order to understand how Club photographers contributed to and solidified the portrayal of a new national territory, we must reconstruct the variety of landscape photography practices and material supports. Here, Martha Sandweiss' notion of "the original narrative context" of photographs — that is, the discourses and material forms of publication with which they were associated — reveals their contemporary uses and reception.[13] Since the Club did not generate a single archival corpus but rather produced myriad materials, it is essential to embrace the heterogeneity of these sources. From their very complexity, we can derive the photographers' integration into the dense socio-cultural tissue of California and counter the assumption of their operating in a purely artistic framework.

PROMOTING THE HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE: CLUB EXCURSIONS TO MISSION RUINS

The late nineteenth century saw the intensification of a search for an American identity that was strongly rooted in the continent's environment. Lacking ancient historical structures that would point to centuries-old achievements, writers and artists turned to the landscape, its expanses of land and mountain vistas, to find "surrogates for historical heritage". The *tabula rasa* of the land would point to "potentialities"; its seeming emptiness demanded to be filled with coherent meaning. A strategy to achieve this national tale was to

11 See Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850–1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Barbara Berglund, *Making San Francisco American: Cultural Frontiers in the Urban West, 1846–1906* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

12 Jennifer A. Watts, "Picture Taking in Paradise: Los Angeles and the Creation of Regional Identity, 1880–1920," *History of Photography* 24.3 (2000), 243.

13 Martha A. Sandweiss, "Undecisive Moments: The Narrative Tradition in Western Photography," in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Martha A. Sandweiss (New York and Fort Worth: Harry N. Abrams and Publishers with the Amon Carter Museum, 1991), 126.

"[dismiss] history to embrace prehistory", which alludes to the first human settlements or the ruins of earlier populations.[14] In the American Southwest, notably the states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico, the landscape was dotted with architectural structures that could be smoothly integrated into this search for a prehistoric heritage: the Franciscan mission churches, built during Spanish colonial rule between 1769 and 1823 to force Indigenous populations into Christian conversion and labour. California alone had twenty-one missions, located between San Francisco and San Diego, that left behind what historians have termed "a legacy of genocide" in which the Indigenous population was decimated to one quarter of its original number through forced labour and introduced disease.[15] Gradually abandoned after 1821 when Mexico gained independence from Spain, the missions became ruins; their stucco structures and flower-bedecked arches became the most attractive feature of both regional historical research and tourism by 1900. The contemporary desire to create "a heroic national past with Anglo-Saxon dominance", especially in the Western-most areas of the United States, was reflected in the cultural-historical treatment of the missions, especially in illustrated accounts.[16] In this process of fashioning a sentimental past and a potential future endowed with a distinct national identity, the departed Spanish settlers and remaining Native Americans became 'artifacts' of a bygone era.[17] More importantly, the Indigenous population's conversion under Spanish rule was depicted as a European ideal of philanthropy, which Californian institutions like the recently established Stanford University sought to celebrate.[18]

As a popular organization with firm local anchorage, the California Camera Club cultivated close ties to the businesses and institutions sponsored by railroad capital, notably Leland Stanford's. To further their historical interest and to promote the attractive Southwestern landscape reachable via the railroad's lines, members would plan regular excursions to the missions by the 1900s. These activities — usually including dozens of fully equipped photographers embarking on a week-long round-trip — and their results, must be approached

14 David Lowenthal, "The Place of the Past in the American Landscape," in *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geosophy,* eds David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 96–103.

15 The 65,000 Native Americans that encountered the missionaries in this period were reduced to 17,000 by 1832. See James A. Sandos, *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Rupert Costo and Jeannette Henry Costo, *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1987).

16 Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), xii.

17 Phoebe Schroeder Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 5–10.

18 John Ott, *Manufacturing the Modern Patron in Victorian California: Cultural Philanthropy, Industrial Capital, and Social Authority* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 217–20, 228.

through the societal conditions they implied. As the Club's network consisted chiefly of bourgeois San Franciscans with a predefined conception of the landscape triggered by economic imperatives, the photographers must be considered as "representative of a more powerful, wealthy, and industrialized culture". As such, their depictions of the local landscape, its history, and its inhabitants, must be evaluated from their "position of mastery", which implies both the technical proficiency demanded by their cameras and equipment, and an authoritative vision of their subject matter.[19] Especially in the American West, the mastery of these and other technologies, such as an extensive railroad structure, has been a central vehicle to articulate the vision of a new, predominantly 'American' culture.[20] From this perspective, the following photographic activities embraced by Club members can be described through what W. J. T. Mitchell termed "a body of cultural and economic practices that makes history in both the real and the represented environment, [and] play[s] a central role in the formation of social identities".[21]

Numerous examples of photographic representation related to this identity-shaping landscape practice can be found in the monthly journal *Camera Craft*. Running for more than four decades (from 1900 to 1942), the magazine's first ten years intensely covered Club developments. As a major platform, the magazine allows us to reconstruct their outing agenda, material products of excursions, and their desired representation. In the absence of a coherent Club corpus, *Camera Craft* is a crucial source whose mélange of photographic exchange and commentary on local matters reveals the photographers' striving for recognition of both the practice *and* of the state's history. A decisive feature of the magazine's coverage were outings to the Californian and Southwestern missions, as well as to Native American reservations. While the magazine covered excursions to missions in both Arizona and California, it was in the photographers' home state that the on-site practice was most efficiently encouraged as a playing field. Here, the missions and their complex histories were re-framed in aesthetic terms. Members contributed to this reformula-

19 Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic Histories, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xxix.

20 David E. Nye, *Narratives and Spaces: Technology and the Construction of American Culture* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997); see also Peter Hales, *Silver Cities. Photographing American Urbanization, 1839–1939* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

21 W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2.

tion by simultaneously taking on the role of artists, promoters, and preservationists. National history writings in the early twentieth century included an active alignment with "the best of Spanish colonization, loving gentle efforts to usher Indians into the world of civilized and Christian men". Manifestations of popular culture, such as illustrated travel accounts and theatre, strikingly integrated this affiliation with the Spanish past.[22] In the American West — a landscape marked by ethnic diversity and recent territorial conflict — this alignment allowed new communities to envision a shared history and rely on a legitimate heritage of conquest. *Camera Craft* encouraged this process as it

22 Sherry Lynn Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 158–59.

Fig. 1 Howard C. Tibbitts, *San Luis Rey,* n.d. In Charles S. Aiken, "The California Missions and Their Preservation." *Camera Craft* 4, no. 2 (1901): 60. (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library)

urged readers to dedicate their photography to the historical exploration of the state's landscape.

By December 1901, a six-page illustrated article with a frontispiece of San Luis Rey mission taken by one of the Club's founding members and professional photographers, Howard Tibbitts (Fig. 1). The opulent facade of the building, covered in tones of terra cotta and shades of sundown, constituted an appealing motif not only to photographers, but also to the magazine's general readership. By reproducing familiar locations of the local landscape in an artistic framework, the public was incited to take up cameras, join the Club, and engage in on-site practice. As Tibbitts was instrumental in rallying participation in outings, his professional works attracted a public eager to achieve a comparable degree of artistry. In addition to recounting the history of the missions, the article's author, Charles Aiken, carefully laid out the historical interest in the Californian landscape and its Spanish heritage as "a project that should appeal to all artists of pen, pencil, brush or camera".[23] By cultivating an aesthetically sensitive eye to the mission's architectural features as well as its interior treasures including manuscripts and furniture, photographers were to take on the role of preservationists of a victorious "far-western history". By collectively committing to the missions, they were to maintain the historical goals of these structures: to "teach […] of civilization's march". In this process, the Californian landscape — where "the storied walls are few [and] all is new except Nature's own creations" — would gain historical density and become an integral part of a national narrative of settlement.[24]

The ambition to preserve and to disseminate the dominant narrative in aesthetically pleasing terms was invigorated by the collective exertion of landscape photography. As an increasingly accessible endeavour, heightened by the existence of popular organizations like the Club, photographic exploration became a powerful tool to perpetuate a local history of the landscape. Here, the Club's outing agenda envisioned with the support of local railroad compa-

23 Charles S. Aiken, "The California Missions and their Preservation," *Camera Craft* 4.2 (1901), 64.

24 Ibid., 60.

nies, integrated even broader publics. Howard Tibbitts was key to this development, as he was not only a founding Club member, but also an acclaimed professional photographer for the Southern Pacific Railroad, California's most powerful enterprise. What *Camera Craft* described in its mission history article as "the swinging ball of progress" in occupying new territories would resonate with the larger audience of railroad passengers on the Southern Pacific lines.[25] As a company that had originated in and operated from California, its managers proudly disseminated attractive Western imagery to lure settlers and investors to the region. To achieve this goal, Southern Pacific substantially increased its advertising budget and commissioned works by local photographers, notably members of the Club.[26] By 1898, it had launched its first magazine, *Sunset*, with the declared goal of providing "[p]ublicity for the attractions and advantages of the Western Empire".[27] By 1905, *Sunset* had a circulation of 58,000, of which New York City would receive some 3,000. The use of reproducible photographic imagery was key to this dissemination, as the editors of *Sunset* opted for the creation of an "immense circulating library" that was meant to be displayed "on the walls of railroad stations, in clubs, in hotels, in busy offices", with the desire to "weave in the brains of men visions and fantasies untold wherein California shall appear a signboard".[28]

The goal of advertising the Californian landscape for settlement and investment went hand in hand with the densification of its historical environment, which served as the breeding ground for an imperial future. As the missions bore witness to the process of 'civilizing' the West, they introduced the onset of an American settlement that controlled its Indigenous population and opened their formerly occupied land to investment, and thus, national prosperity. In this regard, the collaboration between Club member and Sunset photographer Howard Tibbitts, and his *Sunset* editor friend and *Camera Craft* contributor Charles Aiken, is unsurprising.[29] In their advertisements, the two magazines provided powerful platforms on which the coalition of aestheticized, romanticized mission imagery and the vocabulary of Western empire-building

25 Ibid., 60.

26 See Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 130–65; Peter Palmquist "William E. Dassonville: An Appreciation," in *William E. Dassonville, California Photographer, 1879–1957,* eds Susan Herzig and Paul Hertzmann (Nevada City: Carl Mautz, 1999), 15.

27 *Sunset* 1.1 (1898).

28 "Telling the World about California: How the Southern Pacific is doing it," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 January 1905, 43.

29 On *Sunset*'s early history, see Paul C. Johnson, ed., *The Early Sunset Magazine, 1898–1928: Selections from Sunset Magazine's First 30 Years* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1973).

could be articulated and made available to a larger public. These collaborative strategies reveal what Mitchell termed "the double role [of the landscape] as commodity and potent cultural symbol".[30] Since the Club presented its outing activities in various shapes, particularly illustrated accounts, they could target audiences within and beyond state borders. These endeavours show how the Western landscape and its most attractive historical features, the Spanish missions, attained not only a commercially useful, but also a culturally empowering character.

Beyond excursions and travel accounts, the Californian mission imagery also served the photographers' self-definition as Westerners. The isolated regions in which they operated, as well as their accessibility via the railroad lines of a California-native enterprise, helped the photographers define their practice as an idiosyncratic experience of the Western landscape. Next to the sentimental vistas and vocabulary circulating within Club circles, the photographers also integrated this Western paradigm into their artistic creation. When the Club organized a series of photographic salons in San Francisco between 1901 and 1903, its goal was to share a "representative collection of pictures that can be identified as Western", implying photographs of the local landscape and of Native American history.[31] A vast majority of works submitted to these artistic salons covered the state's natural surroundings and thus attested to the photographers' commitment to on-site work. Well attended by the local public, the salons served as rallying events that celebrated the region's "vast out of doors" in San Francisco's only art institution, the Mark Hopkins Institute.[32] As a sponsor of both the art institute and the Club, Southern Pacific was directly involved in these cultural manifestations, notably in the salon catalogue, which featured an elaborate advertisement for "the paradise of the photographer, traversed by the lines of the Southern Pacific".[33]

The salon contributors, for their part, carried this collaboration further in subject matter, by covering the locations on local train lines. Oscar Maurer,

30 W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 15.

31 "The Second San Francisco Photographic Salon, Its Strong and Weak Points with a Criticism of Its Striking Features," *Camera Craft* 4.3 (1902), 89–90.

32 Mabel Clare Craft, "The Popular Side of the Salon," *Camera Craft* 2.4 (1901), 300.

33 *Catalogue of the Third San Francisco Photographic Salon at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art, October 8 to 24, 1903* (San Francisco: San Francisco Art Association and California Camera Club, 1903).

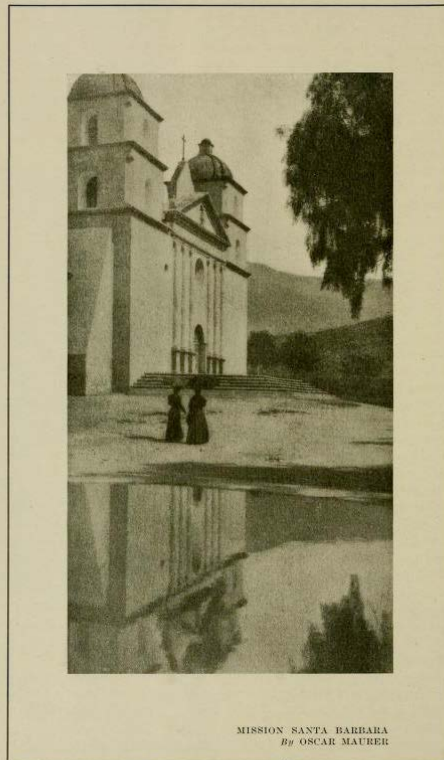

Fig. 2
Oscar Maurer, *Mission Santa Barbara*, ca. 1902. In *Camera Craft* 7, no. 3 (1903): 90. (San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library).

a Club member and regularly commissioned photographer, must have been among the first to benefit from the Southern Pacific connection to Santa Barbara that opened in 1902. His photograph *Mission Santa Barbara* (Fig. 2), and its inclusion in the 1903 salon, reflect the omnipresence of these structures in the process of community-building in the state. A "Spanish dream city", Santa Barbara's architectural design mirrored the location's colonial past and opted for an urban re-enactment of the state's popular mythology.[34] The Club photographer's work submitted to the salon combined both the artistic and

34 Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 260–64.

the popular promotional aspect embodied by the mission. Showcasing two female figures in elegant American attire approaching a monumental mission church, the photograph echoed the often-claimed 'mysterious' aura. The grand stucco facade is accompanied by a weeping willow to the right, both of which find their reflection in a pond in the foreground. The image thus merged the romance of discovery, promised by the train lines and by the photographer, with a sense of timelessness heightened by the pond's tranquil reflection. Adventurous discovery and accessibility were further underlined by the choice of two female visitors, communicating safety and sentimental attraction to a larger public.

As these examples emphasize, California's Spanish missionary past and its intimate connection to the state's environment became useful cultural and promotional rallying tools in photography. As a symbol of victorious conquest and an easily sentimentalized prop, the mission structures served the construction of a dominant regional cultural identity, while at the same time revealing the increasing commodification of the landscape for tourism and historical exploration. If the popular treatment of these structures and their remote placement expose the strategies of local photographers to articulate a national narrative, we must now turn to the actual populations, who formed the core of Western American heritage, yet were largely omitted.

THE SOUTHWEST AS KODAKING TERRITORY: REPRESENTATION OF THE HOPI AND NAVAJO

At the heart of the reformulation of the Southwestern American landscape's conflicted past stands the depiction of Indigenous peoples as objects of artistic study and performers in a romanticized local-patriotic narrative. By the close of the nineteenth century, a period referred to by cultural historian Alan Trachtenberg as the "age of attrition", Native Americans had been defeated even in the most remote areas of the nation's territory, and their existence reduced

to separated reservations. Having undergone a process of pacification, they no longer constituted a threat to national expansion. Instead, the Indigenous origins of the continent were inserted into an increasingly aggressive foreign policy agenda that pushed for the creation of an American empire. To legitimize imperial ambitions and to infuse the national character with a historical heritage of conquest, the country's Indigenous population was "assigned a key place in the emerging nationalist iconography as token of the triumph over savagism". As noble warriors with age-old traditions, the image of a bygone Native American dominated the emerging national identity in the 1900s and served as "a figure from whom authenticity might be derived".[35] In as much as the missions were to embody the dense historical fabric of the Western landscape, the generic figure of "the Indian" — robbed of his ethnic diversity — took on an ancestral function in the national imagination. Importantly, by relegating the conquest of Native Americans to the past and pacifying the Indigenous populations' contemporary condition, historical research and popular accounts of the time turned them into "authentic relics of another culture, not participants in the struggle" of modern society.[36] This progressive absorption of Indigenous populations into the historical and the imagined landscape became especially tangible in the tourist industries and popular culture of the American West, to which the Camera Club contributed in excursions and illustrated accounts.

Outings occupied a central place in the Club's agenda, and the variety of destinations revealed the members' desire to cover large parts of not only the Californian, but also the broader Southwestern landscape. A recurring element of the excursion schedule was the Grand Canyon in Arizona and its adjacent Native American reservations in Navajo County. By 1906, the Santa Fe Railroad, a competitor of the Southern Pacific, advertised a two-week round trip through this region, coming a total cost of $125, about twice the amount of a month's salary at the time. Advising photographers in big letters to "Bring your camera", the organizers promised a packaged tour that included the Grand

35 Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha,* 22–33.

36 Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850–1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 174–75, 194–97; Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, xxiv.

Canyon and a visit to the Hopi village of Oraibi, a part of the Hopi reservation in the surrounding Navajo County.[37] Shortly before the advertised trip, Oraibi had witnessed a split in its community between pro- and 'anti-Anglo' groups. The former group was less reluctant to embrace missionary endeavours and accepted American dominance, while the latter formed a new settlement not far from the village.[38] From the 1890s, Oraibi had been frequented by professional photographers, scientific explorers, and travel writers for its staging of the Snake Dance ceremony. By 1900, photographers were likely to be seen in crowded locations just off the ceremonial site in order to obtain the best shot. Regardless of objections to the documentation of these annual dances, Hopi villages saw ever-growing numbers of photographers flocking in. Since the reservation was marked by "small isolated groups" that were known to be "less hostile", the Hopi people became the preferred motifs of visitors.[39] During ceremonies, a photographer could be found "kicking down another fellow's tripod and sticking his elbow in the next fellow's lens", as one witness wrote in *Camera Craft*.[40] Regardless of such frustrating experiences, the magazine encouraged participation in these outings as a form of congenial competition and an opportunity to experiment with the camera on site, in what was called a "wild, exciting, and interesting" setting.[41]

Next to the intrusion into the Natives' personal space, the excursions promised access to the territory and its inhabitants. While participation in outings required both financial means and time expenditure, it also integrated a predefined conception of the landscape by its participants who would assume ownership of the local landscape and channel their encounters with the native population through a set of aesthetic, compositional features; what James Faris has termed "limited photographic registers". The circumscribed span of these motifs, ranging from "assimilation, pastiche, and adaptation", to "preservation, nostalgia, and pastoralism", became apparent not only in the aforementioned mission photographs, but were also integrated into illustrated accounts of Native Americans themselves.[42] In his 1909 publication *With a*

37 "Santa Fe Trip to Moqui Land and the Grand Canyon," *Camera Craft* 13.1 (1906), 268.

38 Trudy Griffin-Pierce, *Native Peoples of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 82–83.

39 James C. Faris, *Navajo and Photography: A Critical History of the Representation of an American People*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 158–61.

40 George Wharton James, "The Snake Dance of the Hopis," *Camera Craft* 6.1 (1902), 7.

41 "Santa Fe Trip to Moqui Land and the Grand Canyon," 267.

42 Faris, *Navajo and Photography*, 19, 40–41.

Kodak in the Land of the Navajo, the professional photographer, Club member, and long-standing *Camera Craft* contributor Frederick I. Monsen drew on these romanticizing registers to turn the Navajo reservation in Arizona into a playful terrain for the 'Kodaking' tourist. At the heart of this endeavour was the Eastman Kodak Company, which from the 1890s exerted a massive influence on perceptions of popular photography practice. With an annual advertisement budget of $750,000, Kodak would shape the uses of the medium in American society in following decades. Its mission "to redefine amateur photography in terms of ease and simplicity" worked toward a conceptualization of photography as a pastime to be exerted congenially in the outdoors.[43] The inclusive set-up of the California Camera Club, addressing both committed and beginning practitioners, reflected this goal and members rapidly jumped on Eastman Kodak's promotional bandwagon. Since commissions by railroad officials had been common procedure at the Club from the onset, the collaboration with photographic suppliers was a natural extension. What merged in Monsen's publication, however, was not only the Club's liberal perception of photo practice, but also its ideological roots in the dominant portrayal of the landscape.

Monsen's travelogue of Navajo County thus set out with the desired contemporary representation of an Indigenous male figure. Adorning the cover, the coloured reproduction of a Navajo man on horseback reflected the vivid patterns of Indigenous rugs used for the booklet's wrapper.[44] Covered in shades of red and grey, the man took on the emblematic posture of a warrior, ornamented by a headband and necklaces. While this kind of coloured reproduction was far from what was available to ordinary users of the Kodak camera at the time, the cover promised access to both a high-quality photographic production and to intriguing details of Native American life. The booklet itself would follow this pattern of merging seemingly simple photographs with insights into Arizona's remote regions. Referring to the instantaneous capacity of the pocket camera, Monsen and Eastman emphasized the authentic portrayal that was sought after by visitors. The author's promise of "a freedom

43 Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 15–40.

44 The author decided not to reproduce these depictions. Digital reproductions of Monsen's book can be accessed through an online search.

from studied poses" and "the charm of simplicity" was visually underlined by a portrait of himself surrounded by seven Navajo children, captioned "his Navajo Kindergarten".[45] Set against an arid landscape, the children clustered haphazardly around the photographer who attempted to strike a compassionate pose in directing his gaze toward one of the girls. These representations of alleged 'friendship' had become a common trope by the 1890s and were strongly defended by Monsen and other photographers in the region. Yet the enormous output of imagery these encounters generated (in the case of Monsen, up to 10,000 images by the mid-1900s), paired with their dominant textual depiction, leave little doubt about the photographer's expectations vis-à-vis his subjects.[46]

While the cover of Monsen's booklet may evoke notions of virility and dignity, his textual account and choice of imagery reduced the Navajo to a childlike condition. In reverse, the photographer himself assumed the dominating position, achieved through the description of his photographic practice. Tying in with Susan Sontag's notion of "the diligent hunter-with-camera" who seeks to "[track] down and [capture]" "[t]he view of reality as an exotic prize", Monsen's quest for historical authenticity was informed by his exertion of the practice in an Indigenous setting.[47] Wearing the camera like armoury fastened to his belt — as he put it, like a "rifleman" who "[hits] the target when firing from the hip" — the photographer re-enacted scenarios of conquest.[48] By carrying them out in the casual 'Kodaking' manner, these scenes serve to "normaliz[e]" the process of occupying the Western landscape and pushing out its original inhabitants.[49] By the same token, Monsen's Southwestern environment became a vacant territory for the photographer-explorer, and an invitation to potential Kodak tourists. It embodied the promise of the Western landscape as the source of the country's "unique cultural heritage", freely available for exploration and historical narration.[50] Contemporary audiences perceived his work in exactly these terms, by inserting him into "the trail of the Spanish pioneers" and giving his allegedly spontaneous photographs "the stamp of reality".[51] Through his adoption of the Kodak vocabulary of simple yet artful

45 Frederick I. Monsen, *With a Kodak in the Land of the Navajo* (Rochester: Eastman Kodak Company, 1909), introduction, n.p.

46 Faris, *Navajo and Photography*, 77, 152–53.

47 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 54–55.

48 Frederick I. Monsen qtd. in Thomas VanderMeulen, *Frederick I. Monsen* (Tempe: School of Art, Arizona State University, 1985), n.p.

49 Faris, *Navajo and Photography*, 15.

50 Martha A. Sandweiss, "Dry Light: Photographic Books and the Arid West," in *Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives of the Desert West*, ed. May Castleberry (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 26.

51 Sadakichi Hartmann, "Frederick I. Monsen: The Stamp of Reality," in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre: Selected Critical Essays on Photography and Profiles of Photographic Pioneers*, eds Sadakichi Hartmann, Harry W. Lawton, and George Knox (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 293–96.

production, Monsen made both the medium and his subject matter available to those who sought to inscribe their experience of the landscape into the celebrated history of national expansion.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the California Camera Club's landscape photography practices, we have seen how collectively produced depictions of the local environment have strengthened a dominant historical portrayal of the American West. The participatory club's production, the cultivation of a shared discourse on the landscape and its history, and the affiliation with a privileged network of local promotion demonstrate how the practice of photography around 1900 informed the creation of a nationally relevant narrative in isolated regions of the United States. By choosing the ruins of Spanish missions in California and the constrained living spaces of Native Americans in Arizona, the photographers sought to reshuffle the cards of history and create a lineage with both European civilization and Indigenous antiquity. The reliance on these motifs in aestheticized and fictionalized terms allowed them to develop an iconography that reflected the search for an American identity. What is at stake here is an appropriation of the landscape and its inhabitants for both the affirmation of a dominant regional identity and, in the words of Alan Trachtenberg, "a construction of the white imagination […] filling the need for a contemporary romance of nationality".[52]

Given the variety of Camera Club productions, we must re-evaluate initial uses and accompanying discourses. Whether accounts of group excursions in illustrated magazines, exhibition prints, or tourist booklets, these sources are textual-visual vehicles which consolidated authoritative narratives of the local landscape through their dissemination and thereby strengthened a new national history. The continuous neglect of Western Camera Club material in the history of turn-of-the-century American photography and the framing

52 Alan Trachtenberg, S*hades of Hiawatha*, 50.

of these sources along the lines of art-historical analysis has wider repercussions for cultural histories. They reinforce the oblivion of a practice, which contributed substantially to the popular imagery of the time through its diverse material supports and its reliance on communal identification. In challenging ourselves to move beyond the white noise of promotional rhetoric and the undeniable charm of the landscape photographs, and focus instead on the context of production, we come to see a complex cluster of photo-textual material which facilitated the persistence of dominant discourses on the landscape. Here, the contemporary "reality claims" of the medium and its adaptability to "a discourse of authenticity and stability" came to merge and favour notions of cultural domination.[53] And these were the exact ingredients required to imagine the history of a new national landscape in the West.

53 Elizabeth Edwards, "Afterword," in *Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation*, eds Costanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 322.

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FOUNDING THE BARREN ROCK

LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMATIONS AND DISCOURSES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL HONG KONG

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Based on a holistic definition of landscapes, this article explores descriptions of Hong Kong's natural environment by early colonists and travellers as a way to convey the history of its environmental transformations. Contrasting landscape descriptions and debated understandings of nature cast a new light on the process of colonization, revealing a symbolic and territorial mechanism of simultaneous dispossession and appropriation. After discovering the vernacular landscapes of Hong Kong, colonists perceived natural features as either threatening to the colonial project or offering opportunities to justify it. Following the famous formula of 'a barren rock', which refers to the island's noticeable absence of forest, this historical investigation reveals the role that scientific, aesthetic, and moral discourses played in the complex mechanism of colonial domination. They serve as a foundation for the construction of colonial narratives, some of which are still in use today. Nuancing the tale of simple domination, the study of Chinese landscape aesthetics and geomantic principles offers a point of cultural encounter between colonized and colonizer.

INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong appears in contemporary popular culture and mass media as the archetype of the Asian financial centre. The view of the island's sharp skyline against the backdrop of a luxuriant tropical forest from across the tranquil waters of Victoria Harbour is repeatedly employed to illustrate this stereotype (Fig. 1). Such images emphasize the striking contrast between the city's artifi-

Fig. 1.
View of the Central District of Hong Kong island seen from across the harbour.
Photograph by Leon Xu, 2018

cial architecture and seemingly untouched natural surroundings. Although the achievement celebrated in these views remains open to interpretation — the victory of modernity over the hardships of nature, or the balance between urbanization and conservation — the depicted landscape is historically constructed, both physically and symbolically, and results from a long process of British colonization. For instance, the piece of greenery backing the city is the consequence of 150 years of urban development and was never part of the precolonial landscape. Many scholars have already investigated the history of Hong Kong's environmental transformations: changes in agricultural and forestry practices, the development of engineering solutions, the construction of colonial infrastructure, as well as the planning and regulations that have shaped the city's urban landscapes. Others have addressed the larger strategies deployed by the British to rule the colony until 1997, revealing complex economic, political, and social dynamics between numerous stakeholders: colonial administrators, interested businessmen, and collaborative Chinese elites.[1] But few have considered the role of nature in the process of colonization. Focusing on English descriptions of Hong Kong landscapes by nineteenth-century travellers, visitors, and settlers, this article investigates the scientific, aesthetic, and ultimately moral discourses on nature as a way to convey the

1 See for example: John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007); Wing-sang Law, *Collaborative Colonial Power: The Making of the Hong Kong Chinese* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Christopher Munn, *Anglo-China: Chinese People and British Rule in Hong Kong, 1841–1880* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

history of environmental changes. In other words, what can be learnt from the colonists' depictions and understanding of nature within a context of dramatic landscape transformations? Is there a link between Hong Kong's natural features, such as geology, vegetation, and climate, the practices and beliefs behind the production of precolonial landscapes, and the colonial narratives that supported its extensive transfiguration, from topographic changes and agricultural and botanical manipulations, to waterways diversion and coastal alteration?

As a guiding theme, this investigation follows the historical development of a famous expression still commonly employed to describe Hong Kong: a barren rock. Over the past thirty years, several publications concerning the history of local economic, social, and technical accomplishments have been referring to this formula in their titles.[2] While contemporary landscape iconography seeks to accentuate the contrast between nature and the city, these studies stress environmental transformations as indicators of progress. The celebrated transformation of a 'barren island' into a 'colonial miracle' was first developed by early historians and has been conveniently revived recently in the context of postcolonial government.[3] Finding its origin with the taking of Hong Kong Island by the British in 1841,[4] this phrase has been progressively incorporated into historical narratives to ultimately become a powerful instrument in the process of colonization.

This article is divided into five parts. To better understand the foundation of the 'barren rock' myth, the first part of this article traces its origins. After retrieving the earliest observations of the lack of vegetation by sailors and travellers, descriptions of Hong Kong's vernacular landscapes are discussed in order to identify the reasons behind this particular feature. The following two parts narrate the first encounters between British settlers and the natural environment. The main body of historical sources is composed of numerous published landscape descriptions, written by European men serving in the imperial army

2 Tony Fu-Lai Yu, *From a "Barren Rock" to the Financial Hub of East Asia: Hong Kong's Economic Transformation in the Coordinating Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2005); Huaide Ye, *From a Barren Rock to a Little Dragon: The Evolution of Hong Kong Society*, University of Texas MA thesis, 1992; Kam-Wing Fung, T. Y. W. Lau, C. M. Chan, *Upon the Plinth of a Barren Rock: 130 Years of Engineering Development in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa, 2015); Peiran He, *Water for a Barren Rock: 150 Years of Water Supply in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Commercial, 2001); Donald Wise, *Above the Barren Rock: Spectacular Hong Kong from the Air*, 4th edn (Hong Kong: FormAsia, 1996); *The Astounding Beauty of a Barren Rock* (Hong Kong: Geotechnical Engineering Office, Civil Engineering Dept., 1990).

3 Such as, for instance: *Ernest John Eitel, Europe in China: The History of Hong Kong from the Beginning to the Year 1882* (London: Luzac & Co., 1895; Hong Kong: Kelly & Walsh, 1895); Arnold Wright and H. A. Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Hong Kong: History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1990).

4 See the first iteration of the "barren rock" quoted from Capt. Elliot's correspondence in the section of this article titled "Colonial Anxieties: Miasma, Ravines, and Floods".

or as experts for the colonial government. The second part focuses on natural features that were described as threats to the colonial enterprise while paying particular attention to environmental and infrastructural improvements justified and ultimately caused by the understanding of this natural menace. The third part examines how natural advantages, such as a convenient harbour, provided opportunities to naturalize British presence while delegitimizing the local Chinese. As a result, poetic celebrations of Hong Kong's natural beauties in various nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts are examined to better understand their role in the process of familiarization with a rather foreign and somewhat inhospitable landscape. Through scientific objectivity, moral imperative for improvement, and aesthetic appreciation for picturesque sceneries, colonial discourses around nature play an important role in the complex mechanism of appropriation and dispossession that supports colonial legitimacy. The fourth part attempts to theorize on these observations by studying the formation of colonial myths, especially through early twentieth-century

Fig. 2.
Typical vernacular landscape setting of Hong Kong with rice fields in the valley, a village is situated at the foot of hills and backed by a sacred woodland. Note the effects of colonization on this 1950s' photograph: the roads carved into the mountains and passing through the fields, the police station built on a promontory adjacent to the village and the numerous topographic changes they generate.
Ng Bar Ling
Sha Tin c. 1950s – 1960s
Special Collections, University Libraries, The University of Hong Kong

historical narratives. Finally, in the fifth part, cases of cultural encounters and hybrid landscape interpretations will help refine the reductive view of European culture simply imposed onto the Chinese landscapes of Hong Kong.

Throughout this article, specific attention is given to early decades of British colonization, but overall, sources from the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century will be discussed. The period spanning from 1841 to the 1920s is crucial to understanding Hong Kong's colonial history for two reasons. Firstly, the expansion of Hong Kong's territory was the most extensive in these years. Taken during the First Opium War (1839–1842) by Captain Charles Elliot, the island quickly became too small to accommodate British military and commercial ambitions in the region. The initial enclave extended its boundaries northward twice during the subsequent fifty years through unequal treaties imposed by the British on Qing China. At the end of the Second Opium War (1856–1860), the Kowloon peninsula, located in the immediate vicinity of Hong Kong Island, was added to the colony. Again, in 1898 after the signing of the Convention of Peking, a territory of almost 100 km2 was leased for ninety-nine years to the British authorities, which resulted in a twelve-fold increase of the size of the colony. Secondly, radical landscape transformations were carried out during this period. Unquestionably, the post-war urban development on the hillsides of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island, and the subsequent New Town scheme taking place in the New Territories from the 1970s onward, display landscape transformations at much larger scales when it comes to the number of buildings and the scale of infrastructure built, as well as in terms of displaced population. However, and despite their smaller sizes, Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon peninsula are prominent examples of colonial landscapes. Shaped by the complex mechanisms of cultural and scientific appropriation, they are largely the product of nineteenth-century environmental transformations, best symbolizing colonial domination. The same cannot be said of the New Territories which from the early 1900s constituted an exception in many respects.[5]

5 James Hayes, *The Great Difference: Hong Kong's New Territories and Its People, 1898–2004* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 22–27.

The broad definition of landscape embraces both physical realities of a given territory as well as values and meanings attributed to natural elements through symbolic representations. Drawing from this concept, the present investigation proposes to distinguish two components that concomitantly perform any landscape transformations. First, physical transformations are the result of very specific practices within a specific geological, hydrological, ecological, and climatic context. Operating within cultural realms but relying on technical and objective knowledge, these practices include, for instance, agricultural methods, water and forestry management, land reclamation, terracing, and levelling hills. Second, these practices are guided, justified, or opposed by many discourses. Mixing scientific production of objectivity with cultural references and representations, discourses vary between historical periods, among stakeholders, and depending on expertise. This methodological approach aims at bypassing the opposition between scientific objectivity and cultural subjectivity. It allows, furthermore, for a juxtaposition of both British and Chinese landscape practices and discourses, as equally legitimate understandings of the environment, which is particularly important in a colonial context.

Fig. 3.
The Tanka and Hokklo communities lived on their boats their entire lives.
Colonial Office
Chekwan Deep Bay Kowloon
1898
The National Archives, Kew, U.K.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BARREN ROCK: DISCOVERING HONG KONG'S VERNACULAR LANDSCAPES

The earliest published descriptions of Hong Kong in English date to 12, 13, and 14 February 1764 when Captain Walter Alves of the ship London "hauled to the ESE, to go to the Northward of the Island of Heong-kong, and At 6 PM, the Tide being done, anchored in 6 Fath. mud, distant from Heong-kong about a mile".[6] Not many details are given regarding natural features, but the presence of a fresh water source on the south side of the island is mentioned in later travellers' logbooks. This particularity seems to have first appeared in a letter from Mr Howel to Mr Gordon dated 10 September 1793 and titled "Harbour of He-ong-kong":[7] "Opposite to this Place, the Tide flows up a low Valley on the Island Ching-fang-Chow [former name of Hong Kong island on the charts], into which a large Stream of fresh water descends, which may be approached with any sized Boat at high water." In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the island was famous to sailors for its supply of fresh water and its friendly inhabitants, eager to sell their products to foreigners. Ships regularly visited the Pokfulam waterfall and replenished their stocks at the nearby town of 'little Hong Kong',[8] later renamed Aberdeen (Fig. 8). Ironically, the same letter indicates that the British might not have been the first to rename this place as it "appears to have been unknown until Capt. Kendrick (an American) entered it in September 1792; he revisited it in February 1793, and named it Port Independence".[9] The lack of vegetation was recorded for the first time when naval surgeon John Macleod "passed on to an anchorage among the Hong Kong islands" in 1816 and noted how "few places present a more barren aspect than these islands."[10] Another member aboard H. M. S. *Alceste*,[11] botanist Clark Abel offered a relatively more detailed description:

> The general surface of the mountain, and indeed of every part of the island of Hong-kong that I was able to visit, is remarkably barren, although in the distance it appears fertile, from a fern which I believe to

6 Alexander Dalrymple, *Observations on the South Coast of China and Island of Hainan* (London: William Ballintine, 1806), 17.

7 Believed to refer to what is known today as the Aberdeen Harbour.

8 In Chinese: 香港仔.

9 Dalrymple, *Observations on the South Coast of China and Island of Hainan*, 21.

10 John Macleod, *Narrative of a Voyage, in His Majesty's Late Ship Alceste, to the Yellow Sea, along the Coast of Corea, and through Its Numerous Hitherto Undiscovered Islands, to the Island of Lewchew; with an Account of Her Shipwreck in the Straits of Gaspar.* (London: John Murray, 1817), 20.

11 Along with Basil Hill and Henry Ellis, both were members of the diplomatic mission led by Earl Amherst who "was chosen to proceed to Peking as British envoy, to represent to the Emperor Kea K'ing [Jiaqing] the wrongs which British subjects were suffering under his rule". This extraordinary embassy eventually failed because Lord Ahmerst refused to perform the 'kowtow', or 'ko-tou', which he considered degrading. Robert Kennaway Douglas, "Amherst William Pitt," ed. Sidney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885–1900* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1904), Wikisource.

be the *Polypodium trichotomum* of Kaempfer, which supplies the place of other plants.[12]

The absence of trees is found in many precolonial descriptions of the island and was later confirmed by early 1860s photographs of the colony (Figs 3, 4, 5, and 9). If there is no doubt that Hong Kong was effectively stripped of mature vegetation, it is relevant to investigate the reasons behind such particularity. Why was the island, and in fact most of the coast, clear of any forest? Which livelihood and beliefs justified such environmental management?

During the late eighteenth century and for most of the nineteenth century, the territory was largely shaped by local livelihood and managed according to the geomantic principles of *fengshui*.[13] Part of a long scholarly tradition and divided into several schools of thought across China, *fengshui* can be understood as "a system for the placement of either the dead or the living to ensure good fortune".[14] It relies on two distinctly Chinese principles: the imperative of "the nourishment of the spirit of the dead"[15] which arises from a Confucian society,[16] and the correlative cosmology[17] or analogous ontology[18] of traditional Chinese philosophy. *Fengshui* can be defined as a "cosmology applied to the study of landforms and the art of sitting buildings and burials"[19] which is based on the relationship between astrological principles and specific landscape features, such as the shape of hills or the curvature of rivers. Often regarded as mere superstition by mid-nineteenth-century Western scholars, local inhabitants of precolonial Hong Kong took great pride in consulting fengshui specialists and thoroughly followed their recommendations for generations when setting out their houses, fields, and sacred woodlands.[20]

Sometimes surrounded by walls, villages were generally composed of several parallel rows of brick houses and were ideally located at the foot of hills, backed by sacred woodlands.[21] Facing winding waterways running through the valleys, they were separated from rice paddy fields by large open terraces for

12 Clarke Abel, *Narrative of a Journey in the Interior of China, and of a Voyage to and from That Country, in the Years 1816 and 1817; Containing an Account of the Most Interesting Transactions of Lord Amherst's Embassy to the Court of Pekin and Observations on the Countries Which It Visited* (London: Longman et al., 1818), 61.

13 Xiaoxin He and Jun Luo, "Fengshui and the Environment of Southeast China," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture and Ecology* 4.3 (2000), 213–34.

14 Michael John Paton, *Five Classics of Fengshui: Chinese Spiritual Geography in Historical and Environmental Perspective,* Sinica Leidensia 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 3.

15 Ibid., 90.

16 Michel Strickmann and Bernard Faure, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 21–23.

17 Paton, *Five Classics of Fengshui*, 93.

18 Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 287–88.

19 John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 39.

rice drying and processing (Fig. 2). Less fertile land on low hillsides was used for other forms of agriculture. The local population was divided into several ethnic groups according to their places of origin and dialects. The best land was often farmed by Cantonese-speaking Punti — literally meaning local people — who mostly immigrated from the neighbouring province of Guangzhou during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Less desirable grounds were left to the Hakka who came from various other maritime provinces such as Fujian or Shandong and did not speak Cantonese.[22] The rest of the landscape — mostly steep hills and mountaintops — was bare of any mature vegetation as grass and shrubs were regularly collected for fuel.[23] Bays provided natural shelters for the Tanka and the Hokklo communities, which remained on boats their entire lives (Fig. 3).[24] They lived off trade and fishing as they were not allowed to farm. Beaches provided a point of encounter where markets and temples were often erected. The resulting landscape was an agricultural one, shaped by traditional Chinese values and the daily practices of local inhabitants (Fig. 4).

In a 1984 publication, geographer J. B. Jackson defines the vernacular landscape as "a scattering of hamlets and clusters of fields, islands in a sea of waste or wilderness changing from generation to generation, […] an impressive display of devotion to common custom and of an inexhaustible ingenuity in finding short-term solutions".[25] Based on his study of European and American landscapes, this description also applies to the environment encountered by nineteenth-century travellers and early British colonists. What Jackson calls "waste or wilderness" in Western cultural terms corresponds to the unproductive grassland that formed most of the territory. Furthermore, since fengshui was a respected field of study practised by regional experts, much of the local folklore and superstition characterized Hong Kong's rural life. In that sense, its landscapes can be described as vernacular. "Land […] meant being a member of a working community; it was a temporary symbol of relationships".[26] Today, the ruins of these past landscapes are still found in some parts of the New Territories and are commonly referred to as 'vernacular' by activists and intel-

20 Patrick H. Hase and Man Yip Lee, "Sheung Wo Hang Village, Hong Kong: A Village Shaped by Fengshui," in *Chinese Landscapes: The Village as Place*, by Ronald G. Knapp (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 79–94.

21 Richard Webb, "The Use of Hill Land for Village Forestry and Fuel Gathering in the New Territories of Hong Kong," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 35 (1995), 144.

22 Stephen F. Balfour, "Hong Kong before the British: Being a Local History of the Region of Hong Kong and the New Territories before the British Occupation," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 10 (1970), 137.

23 Patrick H. Hase, *Custom, Land and Livelihood in Rural South China: The Traditional Land Law of Hong Kong's New Territories, 1750–1950* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 11–12.

24 Balfour, "Hong Kong before the British," 138.

25 John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 151.

26 Ibid., 152.

lectuals advocating for their preservation from the constant threat of urban and infrastructural development.

However, archaeologists have revealed that agricultural landscapes are relatively new in the history of Hong Kong's human occupation. Recent progress in paleo-environmental sciences allows the partial reconstruction of prehistoric landscapes. Archaeologists believe that the first inhabitants most likely arrived in Hong Kong approximately 5000 years ago following the displacement of the coast, which was located 200 km south by the end of the last Ice Age.[27] Prehistoric communities settled systematically on sandy back beaches above shallow lagoons fed from small streams. Although no known remains of prehistoric boats have been unearthed, they might have lived off fishing and hunted game in surrounding forests. Palms, bamboo, bananas, fresh water roots, and tubers constituted main sources of starch.[28] It is even believed that agriculture was not practised until the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127),[29] and that coastal settlements might have been occupied only seasonally as "no definite house structures or settled village sites have been found in Hong Kong".[30]

The island entered Chinese history after it was conquered by the Han Dynasty in 111 BCE, with little impact on local livelihood. Despite remaining largely uninfluenced by Chinese culture, progressive integration into the empire encouraged economic development of coastal industries such as pearl-fishing[31] and salt and lime production.[32] It is only after approximately 900[33] that clans from Guangdong province — later identified as Punti — were rewarded with land by the authorities, and introduced rice farming and features of Chinese culture such as language and geomancy.[34] Only a series of immigration waves, from prehistoric hunter-gatherers to Cantonese-speaking Han, is found when searching for the vernacular throughout the history of human occupation in Hong Kong. Each group developed specific technological and cultural practices in order to manipulate the existing environment and to adapt it to their cosmological and physiological needs, from seasonal fishing to rice agriculture, and

27 William Meacham, *The Archaeology of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 77, 81–85.

28 Mick Atha and Kennis Yip, *Piecing Together Sha Po Archaeological Investigations and Landscape Reconstruction* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 42–44.

29 "Some indications of prehistoric manipulation of certain local plants were found at Sha Ha (AMO 2005), but the first convincing evidence for the establishment of rice-farming communities in Hong Kong still dates to the Northern Song." Ibid., 39.

30 Meacham, *The Archaeology of Hong Kong*, 115.

31 Xianglin Luo, *Hong Kong and Its External Communications before 1842: The History of Hong Kong Prior to British Arrival* (Hong Kong: Institute of Chinese Culture, 1963), 7.

32 Ancient kilns have been unearthed all over Hong Kong by archaeologists but there is no consensus as to which industry they served. See: Hugh Cameron, "Discussion of Tang Lime Kilns at Sham Wan Tsuen," in *Archaeological Investigations on Chek Lap Kok Island,* ed. William Meacham, Hong Kong Archaeological Society Journal Monograph 4 (Hong Kong: HKAS, 1994), 223–30.

33 Ken M. A. Barnett, "Hong Kong

from Bronze Age petroglyphs to *fengshui* woodlands.

Similarly, the profound transformations caused by British colonization could be understood as yet another immigration wave, and they likewise adapted the existing landscape to their needs. However, following Jackson's definition again, the political, legal, and scientific rationalizations behind these alterations are radically opposed to processes of vernacular landscape production. Colonization and its environmental transformations are more appropriately associated with what Jackson calls "Landscape Two", or "the political landscape": "those spaces and structures are designed to impose or preserve a unity and order on the land"[35] and "to be self-contained and shapely and beautiful. […] Landscape Two insists on spaces which are homogeneous and devoted to a single purpose".[36] Indeed, and contrary to vernacular practices, scientific discourse, experts' prescriptions, and progressive views on improvement played key roles in the production of colonial landscapes. A key feature noted by Jackson that fits the colonial context of nineteenth-century Hong Kong is that Landscape Two "makes distinctions between city and country, between forest and field, between public and private, rich and poor, work and play; it prefers the linear frontier between nations rather than the medieval patchwork of intermingled territories".[37]

COLONIAL ANXIETIES: MIASMA, RAVINES, AND FLOODS

The earliest record of the expression 'a barren rock' is found in a letter dated 21 April 1841 addressed to Captain Charles Elliot, her Majesty's plenipotentiary to China responsible for the taking of Hong Kong. Lord Palmerston, then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, "borrowing from the letter in the Times, coined the immortal words about Hong Kong 'a barren island with hardly a House upon it'".[38] This formula later became, by contrast, a symbol of colonial success. But in the 1840s and 1850s, much uncertainty surrounded the future of the newly acquired island. Firstly, this was the result of unstable political

before the Chinese," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 4 (1964), 43.

34 Balfour, "Hong Kong before the British," 136.

35 Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 150.

36 Ibid., 152.

37 Ibid., 152.

38 Susanna Hoe and Derek Roebuck, *The Taking of Hong Kong: Charles and Clara Elliot in China Waters* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 158.

and economic relationships with Imperial China. This was partially mitigated by the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, which officially recognized British sovereignty over Hong Kong. Secondly, the considerable number of deaths that tropical diseases inflicted on settlers and soldiers was a major source of anxiety: "Numerous were the intimate friends and companions who were cut off, during the sickness and mortality which occurred in the summer of 1843 at Hong-Kong; scarcely a house that was not visited by death, none in which sickness was unknown".[39] Influenced by the variety of medical theories that existed simultaneously in the second half of the nineteenth century, experts relentlessly speculated on the causes of this unusually high mortality rate. For botanists, such as Robert Fortune, the lack of vegetation emerged as the main source of miasma — believed to be the prevailing cause of contagious disease before microbes were discovered — converting the vernacular landscapes into a threat to the colony: "I have always thought that, although various causes may operate to render Hong-kong unhealthy, yet one of the principal reasons is the absence of trees and of the shade which they afford".[40] Many other

39 Arthur Augustus Thurlow Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China, a Residence in Hong Kong, and Visits to Other Islands in the Chinese Seas* (London: Saunders and Otely, 1844), vol. 2, 84.

40 Robert Fortune, *A Journey to the Tea Countries of China Including Sung-Lo and the Bohea Hills; with a Short Notice of the East India Company's Tea Plantations in the Himalaya Mountains* (London: John Murray, 1852), 5.

Fig. 4. View of a typical vernacular landscape of Hong Kong with its barren hilltops, Fengshui woodland in the forefront and village facing fields and a bay
Colonial Office, *Panorama Kowloon,* 1898, The National Archives, Kew, U.K.

natural features of the island were also held responsible for its insalubrity. For instance, in his report to Prime Minister Lord Stanley, Hong Kong's first Treasurer, surgeon, and amateur geologist, R. M. Martin, identified the nature of the rocks as the ultimate source of the problem:

> Gneiss and felspar are found in fragments; that the granite is rotten and passing, like dead animal and vegetable substances, into a putrescent state, is evidenced from the crumbling of the apparently solid rock beneath the touch, and from the noisome vapour which it yields when the sun strikes fervidly on it after rain. On examining the sites of houses in Victoria, whose foundations were being excavated in the sides of the hills, the strata appeared like a richly prepared compost, emitting a fetid odour of the most sickening nature, and which at night must prove a deadly poison.[41]

The hardships of the climate, such as heat, harsh sunlight, and heavy rains, also contributed to these detrimental effects: "When it was not blowing or raining, the heat was intolerable; and we all suffered more or less in health from its evil effects."[42] Martin saw an insurmountable obstacle in the combination of both:

> This strata quickly absorbs any quantity of rain, which in it returns to the surface in the nature of a pestiferous mineral gas. The position of the town of Victoria […] prevents the dissipation of this gas, while the geological formation favours the retention of a morbific poison on the surface, to be occasionally called into deadly activity. There is no extent of marsh on the island capable of generating miasm; but the heavy rains are annually washing large portions of the mountains through deep ravines into the Bay, and thus continually exposing a fresh rotten surface to the sun's rays, and preserving a focus of disease which will finally become endemic.[43]

41 Robert Montgomery Martin, "Report on the Island of Hong Kong," *Papers relating to the Colony of Hong Kong, Reports, Minutes and Despatches, on the British Position and Prospects in China* (Hong Kong, 24 July 1844), 4.

42 Laurence Oliphant, *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's Mission to China and Japan in the Years 1857, '58, '59* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1860), 64.

43 Robert Montgomery Martin, "Section V — Hong Kong," *in The British Colonies: Their History, Extent, Condition, and Resources*, Vol. 6, Ceylan, East India and Mediterranean Settlements, 6 vols (London: London Printing and Publishing Co., 1851).

The choice of site for the new city of Victoria, located on the north-western coast of Hong Kong Island, was also suspected of participating in the deleterious air quality. The hills immediately behind the settlement "[screen] it during the summer from the prevailing winds, the south-west, they cause it to be very hot, not allowing a breath of air to circulate freely through the streets."[44]

Fig. 5.
John Thomson
Praya or Des Voeux Road, Hong Kong
c. 1868
Wellcome Collection. CC BY

The difficulties met by the British and the anxiety over the success of the colonial project supported arguments in favour of the island's abandonment. The taking of Hong Kong by Captain Charles Elliot was highly controversial and created much uncertainty about the colony's future, chiefly owing to diplomatic tensions with China and severe health issues suffered by the colonizers. Many considered his request to the Qing Emperor a worthless retribution for the First Opium War and would have much preferred to demand the opening of more trading ports along the Chinese coast, or the concession of land in strategically located cities such as Amoy or Shanghai. This position was supported by R. M. Martin, who, after listing all possible natural disadvantages, summarized

44 Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China*, 75.

his argument in these words:

> Hong Kong is a barren rock producing nothing, not leading to any place [...]. The limited size, and rocky nature of the island; the absence of agriculture, manufactures or commerce, and the fluctuating and predatory character of the population, forbid the hope of an income being raised.[45]

However, many early colonists did not share the treasurer's views and saw Hong Kong as an opportunity. In his introduction letter to Martin's report, Governor J. F. Davis "regret[s] the strength of expression which Mr. Martin has made use of in this paper" and concludes: "I cannot give the sanction of my opinion on its general tenor".[46] Indeed, most experts expressed optimistic views regarding the future of the colony and called for perseverance. According to botanist Robert Fortune: "Already a great improvement has taken place in the houses of the merchants, and in the barracks of the soldiers, and the results have been most satisfactory. But the colonists must not stop at this stage in their improvements".[47]

Several opium merchants, such as the famous company Jardine Matheson & Co., had supported Elliot in his decision to seize the island and make it the centre of British trade with China. In order to develop commercial opportunities and ensure military success to this profitable enterprise, a natural obstacle had to be overcome: topography. The steepness of the terrain restricted the amount of land available for construction and effectively inhibited the growth of the city: "the island is small; but moreover, unfortunately, it is very mountainous, rendering thereby sites for buildings exceedingly difficult to obtain".[48] The lack of flat land after the first auction of 1841 encouraged harbour-side lessees to extend their properties by reclaiming linear strips over the sea. This practice was soon made illegal and, to encourage land speculation, reclamation quickly became a government monopoly. Similar to today, collecting rent from land leases and sales was already the principal source of revenue for the government.[49]

45 Martin, "Report on the Island of Hong Kong," 11, 12.

46 Ibid., 3.

47 Robert Fortune, *Three Years' Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China, Including a Visit to the Tea, Silk, and Cotton Countries; with an Account of the Agriculture and Horticulture of the Chinese, New Plants, Etc.* (London: J. Murray, 1847), 16.

48 Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China*, 73.

49 Roger Nissim, *Land Administration and Practice in Hong Kong*, 4th edn (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016), 11.

In 1851, the first reclamation scheme consisted of filling a small creek in the Bonham Strand area. It was followed by smaller interventions where shallow bathymetry was found and filling material was readily available. By 1886, the City of Victoria exhibited nearly 8 km of reclaimed land along its north coast averaging a width of 100 m.[50] Protected by sea walls, these so-called *Prayas* allowed public loading and unloading of ships, thus attracting many commercial activities (Fig. 5). Land reclamation over the harbour culminated with the adoption of the Praya Reclamation Ordinance in 1904 and eventually lead to the Praya East Reclamation Scheme. Proposed by interested businessman and Executive Council member Paul Chater, the scheme created 36 ha of flat land in the district of Wanchai. Initiated in 1921 and completed in 1929, filling the shallow bay eventually required the blasting and levelling of nearby Morrison Hill, which has completely disappeared today (Figs 6 and 7).[51] Besides the steep topography and lack of flat land, health remained the main obstacle to colonial

50 Michael C. Guilford, "A Look Back: Civil Engineering in Hong Kong 1841–1941," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 37 (1998), 86.

Fig. 6.
Morrison Hill seen from across Happy Valley and the Race course
Colonial Office
Race Course Hong Kong
c.1869
The National Archives, Kew, U.K.

51 Adam Anderson and Harnold T. Creasy, "Praya East Reclamation Scheme Final Report," Special Report 1931 (Hong Kong: Public Works Department, 13 June 1930), 3–11.

progress for much of nineteenth-century Hong Kong. Sensitive to the severe mortality rate experienced by colonists and soldiers, debates around environmental transformations relentlessly focused on the improvement of public health. After 1880 the "growing consensus in medicine that most disease-germs were 'bacteria'", and the definition of "the germ theory of disease" in 1881, changed the recommendations made by the Colonial Surgeon regarding water management:

> It is possible that the existence of a large amount of subsoil water […] may have something to do with the development of malarious fevers,

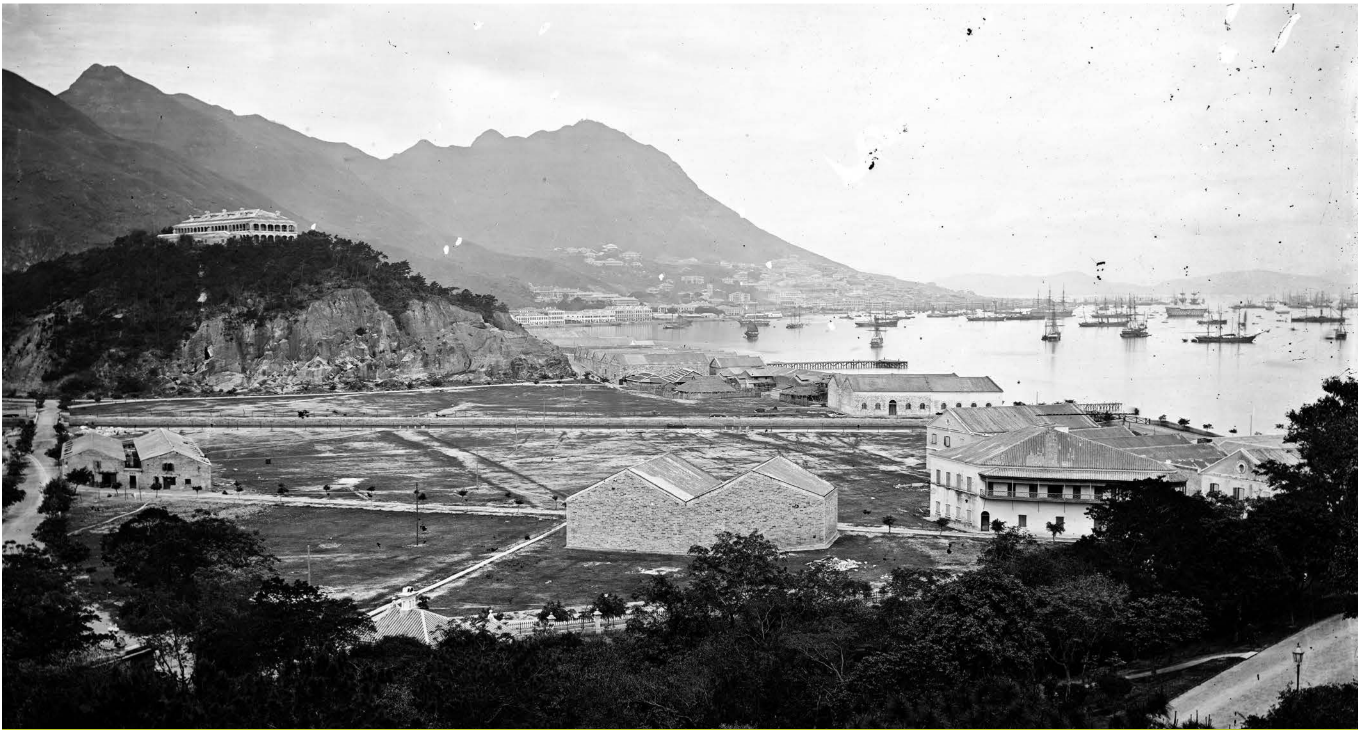

Fig. 7. From East Point, Bowrington canal surrounded by newly reclaimed land with Morrison Hill in the background
John Thomson *The harbour, Hong Kong,* 1868 25.5 x 30.5 cm, glass photonegative, wet collodion
Wellcome Collection. CC BY

> which, according to universal popular repute, invariably prevail whenever the surface is disturbed by excavation.[52]

In 1843 drainage works began as one of the responses to prevent destruction caused by flash floods during heavy rainfalls. Drains originally consisted of large open channels called *nullahs*, such as Stone Nullah Lane in Wanchai or the Bowrington Canal in Causeway Bay planned in 1842 (Fig. 7).[53] Drainage eventually became compulsory for homes in 1896 with the implementation of building regulations[54] as a consequence of the major plague outbreak of 1894.[55] With steep slopes and a granitic geology, the island of Hong Kong lacks rivers, lakes, or any major subterranean water source. Traditionally, local inhabitants depended on stream run-off and wells, sometimes supplying water to their homes and fields through bamboo aqueducts.[56] In 1848 the government only spent a negligible part of its budget to supply water, and in 1851 the drilling of five wells was planned, but only four were reported the following year.[57] At the time of Governor John Bowring (1854–1859), many private companies started to invest in public utilities, such as electricity supply or public transport. However, due to high construction costs and long-term investments, the government had to take on the task of supplying water. Consequently, on 14 October 1859, the Colonial Secretary announced the prize of $1000 "for the best and most practicable Scheme for providing the City of Victoria with constant and sufficient supply of pure water."[58] It was awarded in 1860 to British engineer S. B. Rawling, who proposed to build a thirty-million-gallon reservoir and dam in the Pokfulam Valley, located immediately above the previously mentioned waterfall (Fig. 8). The project was completed in 1863, when the population of Victoria reached 86,000 and the reservoir could supply only four days of water to the community, making it highly inadequate.[59] To increase storage capacity, the first dam was raised in 1877 and a second reservoir was built in the Tai Tam Valley between 1883 and 1888.

The improvement of health was not only reserved for medical professionals,

52 Osbert Chadwick, "Report on the Sanitary Condition of Hong Kong," Further Correspondence on Sanitary Condition of Hong Kong (House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1 January 1882), sec. 1, para. 5.

53 Guilford, "A Look Back," 91.

54 Cecilia Chu, "Combating Nuisance: Sanitation, Regulation, and the Politics of Property in Colonial Hong Kong," in *Imperial Contagions: Medicine, Hygiene, and Cultures of Planning in Asia*, ed. Robert Peckham and David M. Pomfret (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 17–36.

55 Guilford, "A Look Back," 92.

56 Auguste Borget and Eugène Ciceri, *La Chine et les Chinois: dessins exécutés d'après nature* (Paris: Goupil & Vibert, 1842), fig. 3.

57 He, *Water for a Barren Rock*, 11.

58 William Thomas Mercer, "Government Notification No. 98," *The Hong Kong Government Gazette* 5.230 (15 October 1859), 60.

59 He, *Water for a Barren Rock*, 20.

Fig. 8.
William Pryor Floyd
Hong Kong: the waterfall at Pokfulum
c. 1873
20 x 25 cm, photoprint, albumen
Wellcome Collection. CC BY

such as the colonial surgeon or hospital staff; its severity also required the involvement of many other experts. Among them were botanists such as Robert Fortune, who identified the lack of "trees or bushes"[60] as a potential source of harm. He thus recommended, when first visiting Hong Kong in 1843, "to clothe the hill-sides in and around the town with a healthy vegetation; let them plant trees and shrubs […] in every place available for such purposes".[61] Until the 1860s, planting was mostly limited to roadsides and "was undertaken using local Chinese labour, with eleven-foot-high tree specimens bought from horticultural nurseries in Canton".[62] In 1864, Hong Kong Botanical Gardens opened under Governor Hercules Robinson (Fig. 9). In 1871, Governor Richard McDonnell named British botanist Charles Ford as Superintendent of the Botanical and Afforestation Department. He collected seeds, developed nurseries, experimented with different sowing methods, and performed acclimation tests for imported species such as the Australian eucalyptus. Ford exchanged with botanical gardens and experts from all over the British Empire, and sent many specimens to the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew in England. He was instrumental in the afforestation of the colony, planting millions of trees over the hillsides

60 Fortune, *Three Years' Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China*, 15–16.

61 Ibid., 16.

62 Matthew Pryor, "Street Tree Planting in Hong Kong in the Early Colonial Period (1842–98)," *Journal of Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 55 (September 2015), 34.

surrounding the city of Victoria. Overall, indigenous plants resulted most effectively in afforesting the colony, as banyans were systematically planted alongside roads, and an indigenous pine, Pinus sinensis, thrived on most steep slopes.

NATURE'S BIAS: WASTELAND, PRODUCTIVITY, AND APPROPRIATION

These largescale physical transformations of the landscape characterized the early development of the colony and were designed to facilitate colonization against a series of natural disadvantages: the tropical climate, deadly fevers, insufficient fresh water sources, and an absence of forests. On a more discursive level, however, these improvements participated in the enforcement of colonial power and set the basis for the construction of a colonial society. For instance, traditional landscape practices carried out by local inhabitants were regularly associated with natural calamities. Again, based on miasma theories,

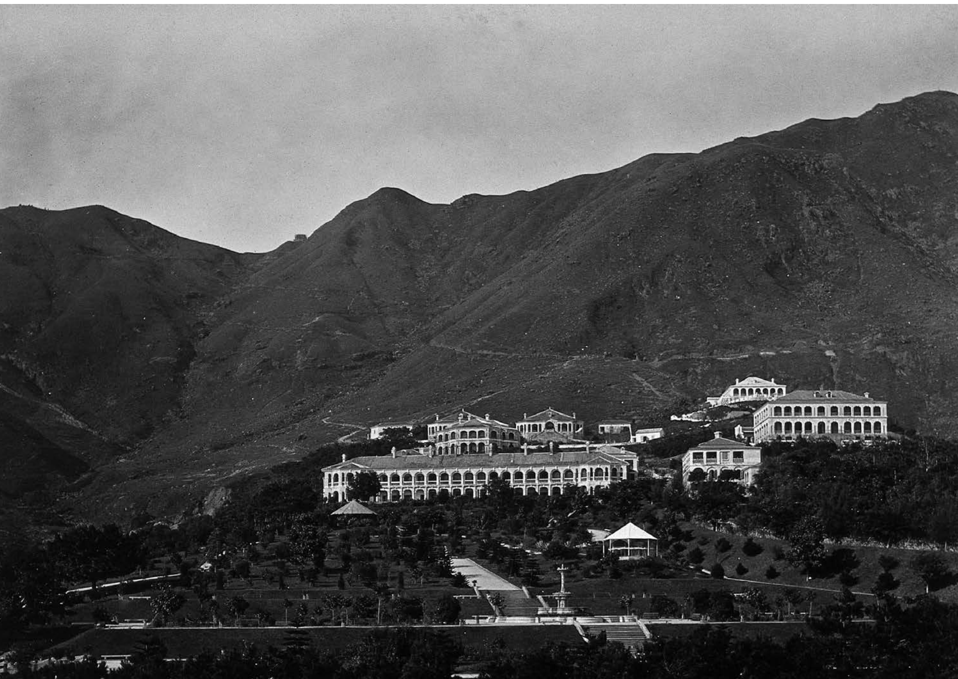

Fig. 9.
William Pryor Floyd
Hong Kong: Botanical Gardens and Albany, looking south from Government House
c. 1873
20 x 25 cm, photoprint, albumen
Wellcome Collection. CC BY

rice cultivation and its extensive use of stagnant water was perceived as a threat even before the role of mosquitoes in malarial fever was discovered:

> [I]n a valley called by the Chinese, Wang-ni-chong, or the 'Valley of the Winding Shore'; most of them [the houses] have as yet proved very unhealthy, and in consequence been little inhabited. This I believe to be chiefly owing to two causes, […] partly by reason of the paddy cultivation which still exists in the valleys in their vicinity, and secondly from the neighbouring hills being encumbered with shrubs and tangled woods, miasma from the paddy-fields and decayed vegetation being extremely prejudicial to health.[63]

The Wong Nai Chung valley, ironically named Happy Valley, "proved to be very unhealthy; and the Government, supposing that the malaria might proceed from the water necessary to bring the crops to maturity, prohibited the natives from cultivating them, and set about draining the land".[64] Regardless of the scientific accuracy behind this decision, most of the fields were drained and replaced by a horse race course which still remains in the same location today (Fig. 6). This large environmental transformation of the vernacular landscape was an economic tragedy, as by 1845 "villagers were complaining that, with the prohibition on rice cultivation, they were forced to make a living from cutting grass on the hills nearby and were entirely unable to pay the high rent now demanded by the government".[65] It was, moreover, also a major symbol of colonial power; horse racing was not part of the local tradition. Even more than agricultural practices, the lack of vegetation was systematically blamed on the locals and they rapidly became the largest threat to afforestation. In 1848 Robert Fortune also commented on this local practice:

> In a communication which I had the honour to make to the Government here in 1844 I pointed out this circumstance [the absence of trees and the shade which they afford], and strongly recommended them to pre-

63 Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China*, 76–77.

64 Fortune, *Three Years' Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China*, 7.

65 Munn, *Anglo-China*, 94.

> serve the wood then growing upon the island from the Chinese, who were in a habit of cutting it down annually, and at the same time to plant extensively particularly on the sides of the roads and on the lower hills. […] The Pinus sinensis, which is met with on the sides of every barren hill, both in the south and north of China, and which is generally badly used by the natives, who lop off its under branches for fuel, is here [Dent's Garden] growing as it ought to do. The Chinese have been prevented, not without some difficulty, from cutting off the under branches, and the tree now shows itself in its natural beauty.[66]

According to Fortune, the Chinese were to be held responsible for the desolation of the land, and consequently for aggravating the spread of epidemics. As Robert Peckham established in his historical analysis of colonial afforestation, "the destruction of the forests is attributed to the negligent Chinese",[67] instituting a natural divide between colonizer and colonized. Early botanical experts claimed the primeval forest that ought to be covering the land of this tropical coast had been prevented for centuries by Chinese misconduct. "There is a moral dimension to this landscape; efforts to surmount physical impediments with assiduous labour acquire an ethical tinge".[68] The "task of afforesting the colony was conceived as an attempt to surmount the 'deficiencies' of Hong Kong's 'waste lands'".[69] In fact, the concept of wasteland cited here from John Pope Hennessy's *The Governor's Report on the Blue Book*[70] plays a central role in the production of colonial legitimacy. In her historical investigation, Vittoria Di Palma explains the significance of this notion for seventeenth-century England and its political importance during the Enclosure Movement:

> Because improvement was framed as both an economic and moral imperative, wasteland was not merely lands that had not yet been improved, but was in fact understood as land that was in need of — and even calling out for — improvement. Thus, England's barren and mountainous tracts and the un-colonised areas of the globe were equally

66 Fortune, *A Journey to the Tea Countries of China*, 5, 7.

67 Robert Peckham, "Hygienic Nature: Afforestation and the Greening of Colonial Hong Kong," *Modern Asian Studies* 49.4 (2014), 17.

68 Ibid., 17.

69 Ibid., 8.

70 John Pope Hennessy, "Governor's Report on Blue Book," *Hong Kong Administrative Reports*, 29 April 1881, para. 128.

> identified as wastelands — a formulation that ultimately was used to legitimise both enclosure and the colonial enterprise.[71]

Reproducing the English model, the barren aspect of the landscape was progressively, and quite automatically, perceived as a wasteland and therefore demanded improvement. The local Chinese farmers, often blamed for their ignorance and superstitions, had neglected the potential offered by Hong Kong's natural assets. The British then stood on the side of nature, equipped with scientific knowledge as heirs to a long tradition of landscape improvement from the Enclosure Movement in England. This particular form of colonial legitimization is clearly evidenced by George Newenham Wright in his description of Hong Kong Island:

> The maximum length of the isle is about eight miles, its breadth seldom exceeding five; its mountains of trap-rock, are conical, precipitous, and sterile in aspect, but the valleys that intervene are sheltered and fertile, and the genial climate that prevails gives luxuriance and productiveness to every spot, which, by its natural position, is susceptible of agricultural improvement.[72]

Interestingly, in this extract the annexation of the island ceases to be a bitter miscalculation or strategic mistake, as R. M. Martin lamented in his pamphlet against the keeping of Hong Kong; the island is instead naturally fertile and productive, making it a suitable addition to the imperial dominions and naturalizing it as a British possession:

> A rugged ridge of lofty granite hills, rising almost sheer out of the waters of the estuary of the Canton River […] Hongkong is well fashioned by Nature to serve as an outpost of the British Empire in the Far East.[73]

71 Vittoria Di Palma, *Wasteland: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 39.

72 Thomas Allom and George Newenham Wright, *China in a Series of Views, Displaying the Scenery, Architecture and Social Habits, of That Ancient Empire* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1843), 17.

73 Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Hong Kong*, 145.

G. N. Wright never visited Hong Kong and his texts are largely based on accounts from other travellers' publications or field notes.[74] Although his writings cannot provide reliable historical accuracy, they present the advantage of best revealing the mechanisms behind the elaboration of colonial legitimacy. Amid a fierce controversy about the annexation of Hong Kong, Wright's romanticized sceneries often praise the merits of the island as a sort of patriotic justification for a British audience. In the following passage selected from among many other examples, the geology, so terribly blamed as the source of all evil by R. M. Martin, evolves into an abundant supply of building material and potential revenue:

> [T]here is a valuable export of granite […] found in huge debris scattered over the level and the lower regions. As there is not necessity for

74 In particular his co-author, the English architect Thomas Allom, who provided the illustrations for this publication.

Fig. 10. View of the harbour of Hong Kong from Victoria Peak
Colonial Office, *Hong Kong 1890's*, 1890, The National Archives, Kew, U.K.

> blasting or quarrying […] it only remains for the labourer to hew or split each bolder […] in a manner long practised by the granite hewers on the shores of Dublin bay [...].[75]

Here Wright, relying on his Irish origins, projects his own observation of stone-cutters in Dublin onto this foreign and mysterious island, rendering it recognizable, almost familiar. This cultural familiarization, which finds its scientific equivalent in the universality of natural laws, is part of a mechanism of appropriation, making its occupation a natural fact. With a similar optimism, some descriptions of Hong Kong aimed at depicting a naturally welcoming environment. Favourable natural features were celebrated by enthusiastic colonists in order to legitimize their presence. For example, the morphology of Victoria Harbour, the channel separating Hong Kong Island from the Kowloon Peninsula, announced a prosperous future and was later designated as "the raison d'etre for Hong Kong's foundation" (Fig. 10).[76] Already recorded in eighteenth-century logbooks as a "safe place to run into the approach of a Ty-foong",[77] its advantageous nature promised great success to the nascent colony:

> Hong Kong for some years to come is likely to be the centre of British trade; it is eligibly situated, and easily defended. Ships can get into harbor, or out again, with almost any wind, and the passages are so narrow that a vessel could be riddled with balls and sunk in the waters at a moment's warning.[78]

Beyond practical trade and military convenience, the harbour was a natural call for imperial aspirations as patriotically emphasized by aide-de-camp Arthur A. Cunynghame in his *Recollections*:

> The harbour is one of the best in the world, containing sufficient anchorage ground for all the fleets in the universe, with a depth of water averaging from seven to ten fathoms. This is naturally the cause why

75 Allom and Wright, *China in a Series of Views*, vol. 1, 18–19.

76 Guilford, "A Look Back," 86.

77 James Horsburgh, *Directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope, and the Interjacent Ports* (London: Black Parbury, 1811), 267.

78 Osmond Tiffany, *The Canton Chinese: Or, The American's Sojourn in the Celestial Empire*, Nineteenth Century Books on China (Boston: J. Munroe and Co., 1849), 261.

> Hong-Kong was chosen as the most appropriate spot for the greatest maritime nation in the world, and a dwelling-place for her most adventurous of children.[79]

Analogous to Wright's exaggerations of Hong Kong's productivity, Cunynghame's taste for conquests finds in its generous harbour the argument to naturalize British presence. Here, it is not the familiarity with the universal qualities of agrarian societies that turn the island into a familiar place but it is the military superiority of a nation that justifies the occupation. The following section investigates further the role played by aesthetic values and cultural projections in the construction of discursive legitimization of colonization.

FEELING AT HOME: ROMANTIC SENSIBILITY AND SCOTTISH GLENS

The rapid transformation of what used to be a quiet and largely unknown harbour, included the rather new and incongruous spectacle of hundreds of ships anchored in its waters. Their presence was the manifestation of Hong Kong's new role within the British imperial commercial and military network. The view of the harbour, appreciated both by visitors from their ships and by residents from the top of Victoria Peak, became a symbol of success and the object of numerous poetic descriptions:

> Those who have anchored in the Bay of Hong-kong by moonlight will agree with me that the scene at such a time is one of the grandest and most beautiful which can be imagined. On this evening the land-locked bay was smooth as glass, scarcely a breath of air fanned the water, and as the clear moonbeams played upon its surface it seemed covered with glittering gems. Numerous vessels, from all parts of the world, lay dotted around us, their dark hulls and tall masts looming large in the distance. The view was bounded on all sides by rugged and barren hills, and it required no great stretch of fancy to imagine oneself on a highland lake.[80]

79 Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China*, 73.

80 Fortune, *A Journey to the Tea Countries of China,* 3.

With a similar pride to that of Cunynghame, Fortune's poetic depiction abounds in superlatives: "grandest", "most beautiful", "from all parts", and "on all sides". He highlights the concentration of wealth present in the harbour: "glittering gems" and "vessels from all parts of the world". However, beyond the celebration of grandeur, Fortune emphasizes the vague and illusory character of the scene. He describes the view at night, which by then could only be appreciated under clear moonlight, where the distinction between real and fantastic is blurred. This description starts and ends with the word "imagine", creating an atmosphere much like a dream or a memory. Details are barely perceptible: "smooth", "scarcely", "seemed covered", "dark hulls", "looming […] in the distance". This particular accentuation of imagination and creativity over the cold facts of reality as a source of poetry is emblematic of the Romantics. If Robert Fortune imagines a highland lake, others have dreamed of a more Mediterranean Hong Kong: "Hong-Kong and its adjacent island reminded me forcibly of the Grecian Archipelago, possessing the same rocky appearance, and springing out of the water in the same fantastic shapes".[81]

Writers who visited or settled in Hong Kong and eventually published their narratives brought along a very particular literary style and aesthetic taste. Most of them were — if it cannot be ascertained that they had read previous explorers' accounts on China or even Hong Kong — at least aware of the literary aesthetic of their time. In mid-nineteenth-century England, as in many other European countries at that time, authors and artists saw the world through a Romantic lens (c. 1789–1832),[82] which also became the lens through which they perceived and judged the landscapes of Hong Kong. Romantic poets and painters had a very particular appreciation of nature. While the development of the natural sciences during the Enlightenment had radically transformed the relationship with the natural environment to one determined by universal laws, Romantics longed for the mysticism and powerful imagination of medieval times. Descriptions of nature, both visual and literary, often fell into two categories. The powerful and humbling forces of storms and volcanoes, the

81 Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China*, 82.

82 Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions 245 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

danger of mountains and seas, provoked a sense of sublimation. Associated with terror and vastness, the sublime was often celebrated as a symbol of masculinity and bravery. It was generally opposed to the beauties of the picturesque which displayed more familiar, serene, and gentle landscape views of curved hills, farmed valleys, and well-tended countryside. Despite its inhospitable aspect, the barren island was often described in picturesque terms:

> This last [Shek Pai Wan village] is beautifully situated, in a romantic and land-locked deep harbour, towards the south, and contains about 200 houses; on a small island, facing this town, is a joss-house, which spot is the frequent rendezvous of pic-nic parties from Victoria.[83]

The impression left by Hong Kong's vernacular landscapes on the first British settlers was not one of unexplored wilderness: "What a contrast betwixt this scenery and the hills and valleys of Java, where I had been only a few days before!"[84] Even before colonization, British visitors had recognized the serene beauties of Hong Kong's natural environment. The rocks and their ornamental crown of greenery seemed to have reminded British naturalist George Bennet, who visited the island in 1832, of some eighteenth-century landscape painting:

> On the 10th we were off Hong Kong Island. It is lofty, bold, and occasionally its barren appearance is diversified by the verdure of the ferns and other plants, which give some beauty to the huge piles of rocks, towering towards the heavens in gently sloping as well as abrupt declivities.[85]

Nothing in his scientific exploration of the island, while searching for species previously identified by Clark Abel, seems to have inspired the least sense of danger: it was merely "lofty", and "diversified". Even the "bold" appearance and the "abrupt declivities" are nothing but an occasional bareness. More than fifteen years earlier, Ellis made a similar description of a welcoming place. Usually, waterfalls are associated with the sublime forces of nature

83 Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China*, 78.

84 Fortune, *Three Years' Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China*, 2.

85 George Bennett, *Wanderings in New South Wales, Batavia, Pedir Coast, Singapore and China: Being the Journal of a Naturalist in Those Countries, during 1832, 1833 and 1834* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), 18.

in explorers' literature, but here the ease of supply and access to water is highlighted: "The situation of the watering place is picturesque. A stream of water falls down the mountains forming the island, and the casks may be filled when the tide serves, close to the beach."[86] This "picturesque" waterfall is nothing of a danger, and its approach is recommended to future visitors. "Beauty" and "picturesque" are aesthetic categories used to tame and civilize the foreign landscape of Hong Kong. Much later, R. N. Wright further exploited picturesque aesthetics in the context of the controversy over its colonization:

> Few areas so limited include so many scenes of sylvan beauty as the sunny island of Hong-kong. The country immediately behind Queen-town is peculiarly rich in romantic little glens, or in level tracts, adorned with masses of rocks, in the fissures of which the noblest forest-trees have found sufficient soil for their support.[87]

He makes full use of picturesque qualities and romantic imagination to overstate the natural beauties of the island. This description seems opposed in every point to all the anxieties and difficulties met by early colonists. All the qualities and beauties of a traditional English agrarian landscape are used in Wright's texts as a counter argument to failure and hardship threatening colonial progress, and are intended to render the landscape if not more familiar, at least easier to appreciate. While Cunynghame imagined a Grecian archipelago when navigating the waters of Hong Kong, the analogy with a highland lake made by Fortune is much more commonly found, as many other British have imagined themselves in a Scottish landscape:

> The scenery reminded me forcibly of that of the N. W. coast of Scotland; and if, instead of vessels with mat sails, painted bows, and high trelliced sterns, there had been compact boats, with well-set tanned canvas spread to the breeze, the association would have been complete.[88]

86 Henry Ellis, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Late Embassy to China; Comprising a Correct Narrative of the Public Translations of the Embassy, of the Voyage to and from China, and of the Journey from the Mouth of the Pei-Ho to the Return to Canton* (London: John Murray, 1818), 85.

87 Allom and Wright, *China in a Series of Views*, 33.

88 Granville G. Loch, *The Closing Events of the Campaign in China: The Operations in the Yang-Tze-Kiang and Treaty of Nanking* (London: J. Murray, 1843), 18.

The detailed description of a typical Scottish coastal scenery when travelling to Hong Kong by a member of the military participating in the First Opium War demonstrates the power of imagination. However, the resemblance was already noted by Basil Hall in 1816, before the conflict with China and before Hong Kong had become a British possession. One night, Hall was magically transported to Scotland while describing the harbour; to him, "it seemed as if the ships had been transported by some magical process to the centre of a solitary lake, lying in the bosom of a Highland glen."[89]

The darkness of the night contributes to the "magical" process of imagination. In a lecture delivered on 5 November 1872, Reverend James Legge remembered his first impression of Hong Kong: "[W]hen we had passed Green Island, I contemplated the ranges of hills on the north and the south, embosoming, between them the tranquil waters of the bay. I seemed to feel that I had found at last the home for which I had left Scotland; and here has been my abode, with intervals occupied by visits to the fatherland, for nearly thirty years.[90]

This allusion to Scotland reveals that, rather than being a literary trope systematically copied from previous readings, the natural resemblance between Hong Kong and some parts of the coast of Scotland favoured a specific visual appreciation of the Chinese vernacular landscape. Similar to Reverend Legge, British settlers, when imagining a Highland glen, probably looked for a sense of familiarity and reassurance, a feeling of aesthetic comfort, an approximation of home. Seeing Hong Kong as Scottish was probably an attempt to create, at least symbolically, a safe haven on the other side of the globe, right at the edge of what had been for centuries a powerful and hostile empire. Similarly, when Laurence Oliphant accompanied Lord Elgin during the Second Opium War, Scottish landscapes appeared on his way to Canton[91] in the midst of diplomatic tensions and constant military threats:

> The scenery in the immediate neighbourhood of Hong-Kong, and for

89 Basil Hall, *Voyage to Loo-Choo, and Other Places in the Eastern Seas, in the Year 1816: Including an Account of Captain Maxwell's Attack on the Batteries at Canton; and Notes of an Interview with Buonaparte at St. Helena, in August 1817* (London: Constable & Co., 1826), 23.

90 Rev. James Legge, "The Colony of Hong Kong," *Journal of Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 11 (1971), 172–93.

91 Today Guangzhou.

> the first eight or ten miles after leaving it [on 6 July 1857], is not unlike that of Western Highlands of Scotland. We dexterously steered between high grassy islands, round sharp corners, past little hamlets at the end of secluded bays, and through narrow devious channels, till at last we might fancy ourselves threading the Kyles of Bute, instead of Capshui-Moon […].[92]

FOUNDING THE MYTH: EMPTY LANDS, COLONIAL MIRACLES, AND HYBRIDITY

However effective the natural resemblance between Hong Kong and Scotland was, this cultural projection also participated in the process of colonial appropriation. If the discourse of improvement allowed the alienation of local Chinese farmers from their territories and naturalized the colonial presence, landscape appreciation was also a way to incorporate Hong Kong into Romantic aesthetic categories, make it more British, and therefore less Chinese. Colonial domination, other than through more direct forms of violence, often relies on a series of complex discursive mechanisms that relentlessly strive to produce legitimacy. In this respect, the absence of forest, first observed by sailors and scientists before colonization and then used by Lord Palmerston to disapprove of the possession of the island, offered a solid base for the construction of a powerful colonial myth: the barren rock. During the early decades of colonization, this botanic and ethnographic fact was recurrently used in opposition to colonial success:

> Perhaps no place in the history of ages can boast of such a rapid rise as the town of Hong-Kong. In August, 1841, not one single house was yet built, not a portion of the brush-wood had been cleared away from this desolate spot. By June, 1842, the town was considerably more than two miles long, containing store-houses and shops, here called "Godowns," in which almost every article either Eastern or European could be procured,

92 Oliphant, *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's Mission to China*, 43.

> and most of them, at not very unreasonable prices.[93]

The inhospitality of the island argued by R. M. Martin in favour of abandoning Hong Kong, increasingly became, by contrast, a marker of prosperity for the optimists:

> When it is remembered that six years before Hong-kong was but a barren island, with only a few huts upon it, inhabited by pirates or poor fishermen, it is surprising that in so short a time a large town should have risen upon the shores of the bay containing many houses like palaces, and gardens, too, such as this, which enliven and beautify the whole, and add greatly to the recreation, comfort, and health of the inhabitants.[94]

In his remembrance of early colonial beginnings, Rev. James Legge celebrated the triumph of "human energy and skill" over the "difficulties of natural position".[95] Early colonists' emphasis on desolation, infertility, and natural hazards was first used to glorify their victory over challenging beginnings, later developing into more elaborate colonial narratives. Aiming at making Hong Kong better known to British investors and tourists, an early twentieth-century publication provides one of the first iterations of what could be called a foundation myth:

> It was in the year 1839 that the British, driven from Canton by the persecution of the Chinese and denied asylum in Macao, were compelled in their adversity to seek refuge in the sheltered haven of Hongkong. At that time the barren inhospitable appearance of the island seemed to preclude any hope of a permanent settlement.[96] […] Upon this Captain Elliot gave orders for the removal of the entire fleet to Hongkong, the splendid harbour of which had in years immediately preceding been frequently used by British vessels.[97]

93 Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China*, 83.

94 Fortune, *A Journey to the Tea Countries of China*, 9.

95 Rev. James Legge, "The Colony of Hong Kong," 175.

96 Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Hong Kong,* 145.

97 Ibid., 48.

This historical account is particularly powerful in reversing the relationship between England and China regarding the unfair outcomes of both Opium Wars, but more particularly effective at dissimulating what was a hardly justified conquest. Just as Moses crossed the Sinai, Capt. Elliot led homeless British merchants, persecuted in China and rejected in Macau, to the "sheltered haven" of Hong Kong. However inaccurate, this narrative finally stabilizes the myth of the barren rock by attributing a double function to its "inhospitable appearance". It simultaneously emphasizes the tremendous achievements of colonization while making Elliot a sort of biblical saviour, pacifying the debate around its achievements. More than half a century later, this historical interpretation did not, however, completely reverse the public image of Capt. Elliot, who remained largely dishonoured. Even in the last decades of colonial rule, his name was not found in any public square, official building, or on the pedestal of any statue. To effectively erase all traces of illegitimate invasion, this myth transforms Hong Kong into a natural refuge, necessarily empty when found. However, vernacular landscapes were a constant reminder of Chinese affiliations and their foreign practices. In order to delegitimize their claims, it was necessary, if not physically, at least symbolically, to dispossess them.[98] While exploring the gendered dimension of colonial dispossession in other contexts, Anne McClintock designates this narrative as the 'myth of empty lands':

> The myth of the virgin land is also the myth of the empty land, involving both a gender and a racial dispossession. […] Within colonial narratives, the eroticizing of "virgin" space also effects a territorial appropriation, for if the land is virgin, colonized peoples cannot claim aboriginal territorial rights, and white male patrimony is violently assured as the sexual and military insemination of an interior void.[99]

Hong Kong landscapes were only occasionally identified with a specific gender in British travellers' and colonists' literature: "It was provoking that a place

98 This was legally achieved by declaring all land property of the Crown and only issuing leases of limited tenure. Nissim, *Land Administration and Practice in Hong Kong*, 4.

99 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30.

possessing so many scenic attractions should have been so entirely devoid of other charms. Like a beautiful woman, with a bad temper, Hong Kong claimed our admiration while it repelled our advances".[100] However, in Romantic aesthetic categories, the picturesque landscapes of the island and its numerous scenic beauties were considered traits inherently feminine. Together with scientific objectification and moral imperative for improvements, they participated in a discursive process of dispossession. McClintock's explanation helps to understand how the symbolic emptying of the land worked in tandem with delegitimizing the natives:

> Since indigenous peoples are not supposed to be spatially there — for the lands are "empty"—[…] [they] do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic "primitive".[101]

This was not only true for cutting trees or farming rice in 'malarious' paddy fields, but also applies to local superstitions and practices such as fengshui, which were often ridiculed or reprobated. For indigenous inhabitants, the observation of geomantic principles was related to their ancestry and guided their fate. Disturbances to the local fengshui seemed detrimental to them and numerous confrontations resulted from the authorities' disregard. Its importance is such that even today its principles are integrated into contemporary planning and architectural projects. Ernest Eitel, a preeminent German sinologist who served the colonial government in the last decades of the nineteenth century, recalls the case of Gap Road:

> When the Hongkong Government cut a road, now known as the Gap, to the Happy Valley, the Chinese community was thrown into a state of abject terror and fright, on account of the disturbance which this amputation of the dragon's limbs would cause to the Feng-shui of Hongkong;

100 Oliphant, *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's Mission to China*, 65.

101 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 30-31.

> and when many of the engineers, employed at the cutting, died of Hong-kong fever, and the foreign houses already built in the Happy Valley had to be deserted on account of malaria, the Chinese triumphantly declared, it was an act of retributory justice on the part of Feng-shui.[102]

Several accounts depicted the Chinese belief as a sign of backwardness, hindering colonial progress. During the construction of the Beacon Hill tunnel "it proved very difficult to persuade local workers to work underground inside the tunnel because of fung shui [*sic*] objections".[103] However, advised by experts such as Eitel, the colonial government saw the respect of *fengshui* as an opportunity to better legitimize its actions:

> When foreign residents of Hongkong began to build villages in Pok-fool-lum (which Feng-shui declares to be the best site of the island), when the Government began to build a reservoir there, when tanks were built on the north side of Hongkong, and the hill-side studded with trees, when the cutting of the earth was forbidden in places where there is much decomposed rock, the Chinese in all of these cases supposed foreigners to know more about Feng-shui than they would tell, and the Surveyor General was put down as a profound adept in Feng-shui.[104]

Among the various discursive strategies employed by the British to legitimize their power, the partial — as it did not constrain development — adoption of fengshui principles by the colonial authorities offers an interesting case of cultural hybridization. Indeed, not only did environmental transformations and their justifications involve the cultural imposition of European scientific, aesthetic, and moral imperatives, but Hong Kong was also a point of cultural encounter where hybrid discourses formed. For instance, Robert Peckham notes in his study of afforestation how colonial officials discussed the possibility of exploiting the cultural significance of Chinese garden aesthetics to prevent the locals from cutting newly planted trees:

102 Ernest John Eitel, *Feng Shui, or, The Rudiments of Natural Science in China* (London: Trübner, 1873), 2.

103 Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation & MTR Corporation Limited, "One Hundred Years of Railway Operations in Hong Kong" (Hong Kong, 2010), 11.

104 Eitel, *Feng Shui, or, The Rudiments of Natural Science in China*, 3.

> Ford's suggested creation of a 'Japanese or Chinese tea garden' as a focal point to attract visitors [...] is to create a colonial picnic ground made safe from marauding Chinese woodcutters by the construction of idealized Asian topographic features (Chinese or Japanese), and the presence of patrolling forest guards.[105]

Furthermore, the case of the quarrying industry in the nineteenth century exemplifies a sort of non-interventionist approach. Quarrying was a traditional activity that mainly remained in the hands of the Chinese after colonization.[106] The district of The Four Hills was regionally famous for its quarries where "it appears that for ten years the French had been permitted to quarry stone [...] for the Roman Catholic cathedral in Canton, apparently ending in 1885".[107] As "an early British report of 1844 states: 'The stone cutters have been working here for many years before our arrival'".[108] For this reason, and probably because they benefitted from the growing construction boom, little was done by the authorities to alter this practice.

CONCLUSION

After investigating the livelihoods behind the precolonial landscapes of Hong Kong and discussing their categorization as vernacular, this article explored encounters between British visitors and settlers during the first few decades of colonization. Recurrently, they considered natural features — topography, geology, and climate — as obstacles to the colonial endeavour which in part justified large environmental transformations such as reclamation, afforestation, and the construction of reservoirs for water supply. However, nature also played an important role in the construction of colonial narratives and its advantages — such as a generous harbour — were praised by optimistic colonists, who saw Hong Kong as a natural certainty. Furthermore, the framework of Romantic aesthetic categories when describing nature, and in particular the

105 Peckham, "Hygienic Nature," 1200.

106 "The quarrying business was dominated by local Chinese and there were few occasions of exception in the industry. Chinese customs were fused into the British administration and technology in the practice of quarrying during the first hundred years"; Sun Wah Poon and Koon Yiu Ma, "Report on The History of Quarrying in Hong Kong 1840-1940" (Hong Kong: The Lord Wilson Heritage Trust, August 2012), 20.

107 James Hayes, Hong Kong Region, *1850-1911: Institutions and Leadership in Town and Countryside; with a New Introduction* (Hamden: Archon Books, 2012), 153.

108 Ibid., 154.

frequent allusion to the picturesque beauties of the island, indicate the need of familiarity with the foreign landscapes of Hong Kong, often associating them with the Scottish coast. Finally, through scientific objectification, moral imperative for improvement, and aesthetic considerations, the nature of Hong Kong, and in particular the lack of vegetation, offered a solid foundation to colonial narratives. First celebrating the success of the British enterprise in contrast with an assumed original sterility, the formula later supported a powerful foundation myth. The latter simultaneously provided a justification for British presence while delegitimizing the local Chinese. This simplistic opposition of the British and Chinese needs to be nuanced through the exploration of several cases of cultural encounters, in which European landscape culture was not one-sidedly imposed onto the locals. As a matter of fact, in many cases, hybrid discourses were produced by colonial authorities.

This historical enquiry into the formation of Hong Kong's landscape identity is particularly relevant today. As noted by several scholars, the decades after 1997 are characterized by a collective search for cultural identity and uniqueness.[109] This is particularly evident through the multiple social movements advocating for the conservation of buildings and intangible heritage. From colonial architecture to the specificity of the Cantonese dialect, conservation claims have recently been associated with debates around Hong Kong's cultural uniqueness and, to some extent, its independence from the rest of China.[110] Introduced by international activists and experts in the 1980s, the protection of local ecology has been brought to the attention of the government and is now a public concern. Over the past fifteen years, the preservation of natural assets, and more interestingly the conservation of landscape heritage primarily in the New Territories, appeared in various protests as a form of resistance against speculative or infrastructural development, sometimes associated with political contestations.[111]

109 Ackbar Abbas, Hong Kong: *Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 4.

110 Sebastian Veg, "Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong, the Rise of Activism and the Contradictions of Identity," *China Perspectives*, 15 April 2007.

111 Images purchased with the support from the Centre André Chastel.

Maxime Decaudin analyses the role of nature in the process of colonization in Hong Kong through descriptions of landscapes produced by nineteenth-century visitors, travellers, and settlers. The author traces the origin of the expression “barren rock”, which was used to refer to the island’s supposed lack of vegetation, discusses its implications and uses it as the starting point for his contribution to the history of environmental changes in Hong Kong. From a viewpoint that avoids simplistic oppositions between nature and culture, the article explores the first encounters between colonists and natural environment and how landscape depictions could play distinct roles in the construction of colonial narratives, working as a mechanism of legitimization for the British colonial project and with implications for land appropriation and dispossession. Decaudin also presents cases of cultural encounters that provide hybrid landscape interpretations, and questions simplistic assumptions of European cultural imposition in Hong Kong.

BETWEEN *NOMOS* AND NATURE

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT'S GARDEN AS A CRITICAL LEGAL *TOPOS*

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This article studies the architectural design of the new ICC courthouse complex that was constructed in The Hague in 2015. It focuses on the design's defining element: a hanging garden that contains seedlings from all of the Court's member states. It analyses the garden as a topos *that establishes a powerful and paradoxical relation between nature and culture,* physis*, and* nomos*. Using Giorgio Agamben's critique of sovereignty, it evaluates the constitution of the International Criminal Court. The article combines existing theories of the garden as a space that mediates power (Aben and de Wit 2001) and as a critical space (Foucault 1986) in an analysis of legal institutions. It finds that the garden defining the ICC's courthouse architecture is both a sign of the radically democratic potential of its jurisdiction and where that potential sadly falters and sovereign violence is reintroduced into the ICC's order.*

INTRODUCTION

December 2015 saw the completion of the new International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, The Netherlands. The ICC is an international tribunal with jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for international crimes such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. According to the Preamble to the Rome Statute, the multilateral treaty that founded the Court and provides its procedural and substantive law, its main mission is to "put an end to impunity" for crimes "of concern to the international community as a whole".[1] The Court effectively seeks to counter the legal irresponsibility of heads of state and

1 "The Rome Statute," accessed 23 February 2017, https://www.icc-cpi.int/nr/rdonlyres/ea9aeff7-5752-4f84-be94-0a655eb30e16/0/rome_statute_english.pdf, 1.

other state representatives who escape punishment under their own national laws because they have the power to make exceptions to those laws. Whereas international law had formerly only considered states as legal subjects, the Rome Statute successfully established a principle of international criminal responsibility for individuals.

Enacted in 2002 with the entry into force of the Rome Statute, the Court first held proceedings in a large former office building of a Dutch telecommunications company that was adjusted to the Court's needs. In 2007 the Assembly of Member States, the Court's governing body, agreed that after five years of relative success the institution deserved a building that would "reflect the character of the International Criminal Court".[2] A design competition was launched, and the winning architects, the Danish firm Schmidt Hammer Lassen, were commissioned to start realizing plans for a courthouse that would represent the institution of international criminal law to the public. The defining element of the complex's design, as seen from the outside, is a garden that clads the main building, the Court Tower, with seedlings from each of the institution's member states. The design was realized at the site of the former Alexanderkazerne, military barracks in the outskirts of the city of The Hague, and is close to what is known as The Hague's 'International Zone'. This area also hosts the Peace Palace, the ICTY, EUROPOL, the World Forum, and other international institutions. The ICC has held proceedings there since its official opening in 2015.

The ICC's constitution was contested from the start and has become increasingly vulnerable in recent years. Important powers, including the United States, China, and Russia, have never signed up for participation. Recently, a number of states including South Africa, Burundi, and the Philippines announced their intention to withdraw from the Rome Statute, often in response to the Court's investigations of political violence in their state.[3] The African Union even debated withdrawing in its entirety. It accused the ICC of having a bias

2 "Report on the Future Permanent Premises of the International Criminal Court," accessed 23 February 2017, https://asp.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/asp_docs/library/asp/ICC-ASP-5-16_English.pdf.

3 Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Rodrigo Duterte to pull Philippines out of international criminal court," *The Guardian*, 14 March 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/14/rodrigo-duterte-to-pull-philippines-out-of-international-criminal-court-icc.

against Africa; until January 2016 the Court had only investigated situations on the African continent, whereas political violence also takes place in many other member states.[4] Only in recent years has it undertaken investigations elsewhere.[5]

Given the Court's vulnerable constitution, and the Assembly's statement that the design of the new courthouse for the ICC should 'reflect' the character of that institution, the question arises: How does the design's defining element, the hanging garden, reflect the ICC as the institution that administers international criminal law? How can it be read for the problems the Court is facing in vesting and maintaining its power to punish individuals' transgressions of international law?

Various scholars have reflected on the way that courthouse architecture bears meaning for the law, both as an abstract 'sign' for the demarcation between the orderly fashion of law and its procedures and the "chaotic swarm of a world of everyday events",[6] and for the way individual courthouse architecture reflects on a specific legal regime, as for example in Fischer Taylor's study of the *Palais de Justice* in Paris, France, and Leif Dahlberg's study of a lower level and appellate court in Stockholm, Sweden.[7] However, these studies have not yet considered how courthouse architecture may also reflect on the nature of legal power, that is, on the problem of sovereignty, or how it may function as a means of studying that institution critically. In this article I do this by studying the design of a specific courthouse, that of the ICC. Both its defining element, the garden, and the nature of the jurisdiction, international criminal law, raise specific questions concerning sovereignty.[8]

To address these questions, I will analyse images of the architectural plans for the Court in order to consider how the ICC's courthouse garden and landscape design reflect on the problem of sovereignty that constitutes the ICC as a court of international criminal law. The garden traditionally mediates between a

4 Associated Press in Addis Ababa, "African leaders plan mass withdrawal from international criminal court," *The Guardian*, 31 January 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/jan/31/african-leaders-plan-mass-withdrawal-from-international-criminal-court.

5 "Situations and cases," *International Criminal Court,* accessed 5 December 2018, https://www.icc-cpi.int/pages/situations.aspx.

6 Piyel Haldar, "In and Out of Court: On Topographies of Law and the Architecture of Court Buildings," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 7 (1994), 186.

7 Katherine Fischer Taylor, *In the Theatre of Criminal Justice: The Palais de Justice in Second Empire Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), and Leif Dahlberg, *Spacing Law and Politics: The Constitution and Representation of the Juridical* (London: Routledge, 2016).

8 The garden has so far been considered as a metaphor in relation to law, e.g. Daniela Carpi, "The Garden as the Law in the Renaissance: A Nature Metaphor in a Legal Setting," *Pólemos* 6 (2012), 33–48, and Eve Darian-Smith, "Legal Imagery in the 'Garden of England'," *Indiana Journal of Global

given human order and the dangerous wilderness that surrounds it, figuring as a symbol for the relationship between culture and nature, between human order and what human order seeks to control. As a *topos*, then, I argue that the garden reflects on the nature of power, and especially the power to establish and maintain order, to distinguish order from disorder, and to establish limits between them, both temporally — through the myth of original wilderness — and spatially — through the demarcation of a territory with borders. In his book, *Homo Sacer*, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben considers how the distinction between *nomos* and *physis*, order and nature, or 'right' and 'might', traditionally structures what in legal theory is called sovereign power.[9] Sovereign power is the absolute power that constitutes a state. One of the mechanisms in which it is expressed is in the criminal trial, as the institution of the state's power to punish those who transgress its laws of conduct, or its established social order or *nomos*. However, in itself, that very power to punish is one form in which sovereign power inscribes in the *nomos* a violence which, according to Agamben, belongs to the sphere of *physis*.

The ICC, as an institution, struggles with a specific problem of sovereignty. The international order, which in the twentieth century has taken the form of assemblies of sovereign states such as the United Nations (UN), is not established as a sovereign order. It does not intend to constitute a form of absolute power. It does, however, seek to impose limitations on the exercise of sovereign power by individual states, through multilateral treaties on the rules of warfare and the use of weapons, for example. The ICC developed out of twentieth-century attempts to establish judicial mechanisms for the settlement of disputes between states, and to give force to those treaties by countering impunity for transgressions by signatory states. As such, it wields a power to punish that resembles one expression of the sovereign authority that structures nation states. The crucial question for the Court, then, is how to balance a respect for national sovereignty with the exercise of power needed to maintain the order of international criminal law.

Legal Studies 2 (1995), 395–412. In this article, however, I study the garden not as a textual or visual instance, but as a space, a *topos*. I am less interested in the meaningful associations the garden establishes as a (textual) image, but rather in the topological questions raised by the garden as presenting a particular spatial logic, and in the symbolism of the design choices of this specific garden for the institution it 'decorates', the ICC.

9 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 35.

The ICC can be seen as an institutional answer to attempts to establish war crimes tribunals, such as the initiative to put Kaiser Wilhelm I on trial after the First World War, the Nuremberg Trials, and Tokyo Military Tribunals, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and especially addresses critiques of the legitimacy of such attempts. In contrast to what came before, the ICC seeks to establish a legitimate and balanced new order as a court that derives its jurisdiction from the consent of member states that participate of their own free will, that prosecutes and rules on the basis of written law (the Rome Statute), and that also has thoroughly codified legislative procedures. The permanent character of the Court, in contrast with the *ad hoc* tribunals that preceded it, effectively produces an international community of accountable individuals through the free and willing subjection of states to its power. The question is, however, if this free and willing subjection at the international level solves or precludes the problem of sovereign violence that structures the power of national criminal courts.

This defining element of the Court's juridical 'architecture' is reflected in the element of its architecture that this article discusses: the hanging garden, which consists of plants from all of the member states under the Rome Statute. In my reading of this element of the ICC's new courthouse architecture, I analyse how the garden can be read as a reflection of the Court's ambiguous constitution and the special problem of sovereignty it faces. I take theories of the garden as a *topos*, from Aben and de Wit's *The Enclosed Garden* and Michel Foucault's essay, "Of Other Spaces", as an invitation to approach the Court, and the kind of power it wields, topologically and critically, and to consider the relation the Court vests between *nomos* and *physis*, positive 'right' and natural 'might'. This reading allows me to argue for the urgency of understanding law not only as 'text' or as 'image', as has been done in the field of law and literature, but also as 'space' or 'spatial'. In other words, I propose that approaching law as landscape, not only metaphorically but *topologically*, may be informa-

tive about the power relations of a particular legal institution, in this case the ICC, and its project of countering impunity for breaches of international law.

THE GARDEN AS TOPOS AND SYMBOL OF SOVEREIGN POWER

The design of the new permanent premises for the ICC in The Hague relies heavily on a garden motif. The defining element of the design is a parterre garden that starts at ground level and rises up, cladding the Court Tower in an enclosed and enclosing hanging garden. This parterre garden is planted with seedlings of plants and flowers from each of the ICC's member states.[10] A frontal perspective drawing of the Court projects the premises as making an incision into the coastal dune landscape that continues to the sides and to the back of the buildings, as indicated by the single line that strikes through the sketch.[11] The image shows a garden that surrounds the premises on the ground level and encapsulates the Court's main building, where it is enclosed by a glass wall.[12]

Schmidt Hammer Lassen's visualizations project the main building as reflecting or harbouring forest growth and plants in what looks like a greenhouse construction that separates the inside of the building from the outside.[13] The building's central hall is imagined as an open place in this natural growth that admits sunlight, while trees also provide shade.[14] The building is closed yet transparent, due to its glass construction. A plaza with plants and trees in front of the Court is open to the public.[15] The visualized vegetation near the building consists not only of trees, but also of plants, flowers, and blooming shrubs that create a colourful and lush arrangement. The cladding continues up the building, as can be seen in the visualization of the courtroom which is located a few floors above ground level and opens up to a view of the dune landscape and the sea behind the bench.[16] The plants figure as a frame for the window. The ceiling is made of glass panes opening up to the sky above. The garden is oriented vertically, but also connects to the horizontal nature of the

10 Rose Etherington, "International Criminal Court by Schmidt Hammer Lassen," 8 March 2010, accessed 23 February 2017, https://www.dezeen.com/2010/03/08/international-criminal-court-by-schmidt-hammer-lassen/.

11 Schmidt Hammer Lassen, "The International Criminal Court," accessed 27 December 2018, http://www.shl.dk/the-international-criminal-court/.

12 Ibid.

13 Rose Etherington, "International Criminal Court by Schmidt Hammer Lassen," 8 March 2010, accessed 23 February 2017, https://www.dezeen.com/2010/03/08/international-criminal-court-by-schmidt-hammer-lassen/.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

surrounding landscape. It connects the built environment of the courthouse to the supposedly wild, open landscape of the dunes and the sea. The design thus also emphasizes the Court's natural surroundings, an area of dunes that connects the Court's premises to the North Sea, which lies to the north-west. The shape and size of the buildings, and the way they are positioned, imitate the landscape of the surrounding dunes. The ICC's project website states how the overall form "can be seen as an undulating composition of volumes on the horizon, reminiscent of the dune landscape".[17] Although not clearly visible in the drawings, what appears in a rendered photograph of the finished building is indeed a landscape design of artificial dunes that blends the building with the landscape to the north of the Court, the dunes that lie between the city and the North Sea.[18] These artificial dunes project an image of what lies outside of the Court Tower hanging garden's enclosure: a potentially dangerous and barren natural environment. The garden is intended, by the Assembly of States Parties who initiated the project of the courthouse and by the architects, to represent the ICC as an institution. The question is, then, what does this garden construction represent about the Court? In order to answer this question, a prior question must be addressed: What kind of *topos* is a garden in the first place? In what way might it represent a form of power also at play in the constitution of law and processes of adjudication?

The garden that encapsulates the Court Tower, and is itself encased in glass, resembles the form of the archetypical garden, the medieval *hortus conclusus.* In their book, *The Enclosed Garden*, Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit trace the historical development of this garden type and discuss its logic as a specific kind of place and space, a *topos*.[19] Etymologically, the word 'garden' refers to an enclosure, the English *geard* meaning a construction of plaited twigs, a woven fence, while the French *jardin*, from the Vulgar Latin *gardinus*, means 'enclosed'.[20] As an enclosure the garden shuts out nature, while at the same time representing and collecting it within itself, in ordered form. It at once excludes nature, and brings it into view. It represents the infinite outside in

17 ICC Permanent Premises Project Website, "Design," accessed 20 July 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20170227220533/http://www.icc-permanentpremises.org/design.

18 Schmidt Hammer Lassen, "The International Criminal Court," accessed 27 December 2018, http://www.shl.dk/the-international-criminal-court/.

19 Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden: History and Development of the Hortus Conclusus and its Reintroduction into the Present-day Urban Landscape* (Rotterdam: 010, 2001), 17. For a discussion of the *hortus conclusus* as a literary figure (rather than a type of garden design), and for the gendered implications of this figure, see Liz Herbert MacAvoy, ed. "The Medieval *Hortus conclusus*: Revisiting the Pleasure Garden." Special issue, *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 50 (2014).

20 Ibid., 10.

finite form. As such, Aben and de Wit argue, the garden is a “paradox”.[21]

Gardens have traditionally assumed the task of mediating between a natural and a built environment. The enclosed garden, especially, functions as an intermediary between nature and culture. According to Aben and de Wit, the enclosed garden establishes a vertical hierarchy. The space of the garden is closed off with high walls that archetypically connect the earth and the sky, and seek to protect that connection from the dangers and violence that emanate from the vast wilderness surrounding it.[22] As a microcosm, the enclosed garden projects the macrocosm as a similarly enclosed system, a totality which the garden as a structure claims it is possible to represent and thus control. The garden expresses the power to cultivate nature, to establish order, and to maintain that order in contrast with the natural wilderness and potential violence they exclude.

The same relationship between nature and culture expressed in the *topos* of the garden has structured theoretical debates about law and governance. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben considers a tradition of discussions in philosophy and jurisprudence of the Greek concept of *nomos*, and the antithetical relationship it establishes between law and violence. Traditionally, *nomos* was named the power that divides violence from law, “the world of beasts from the world of men”, or nature from culture.[23] As such it was opposed to the principle of *physis*, which is understood as ‘nature’, but also as ‘violence’ and natural might, the power that comes with physical strength. The Sophists, Agamben writes, preferred *physis* (nature), which for them was anterior to any political form, to *nomos*. Their thought influenced theories of natural law into the Middle Ages. The modern political theorist Thomas Hobbes, by contrast, identified the state of nature with an anarchical violence between all: violence that justifies the power of the sovereign to establish a state that excludes nature, a *nomos*.[24] According to Hobbes’ myth of the origins of sovereign power proposed in his book *Leviathan*, with the constitution of the state, the state of nature becomes

21 Ibid., 10.

22 Ibid., 22 and 25.

23 Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 25.

24 Ibid., 35.

exterior to society. The sovereign draws a limit, both temporally and spatially, between the order of the law and the state of nature. The state of nature becomes at once an (albeit mythical) precursor to the state and the sphere that lies beyond its borders. Yet, paradoxically, the state of nature also survives, namely in the person of the sovereign.[25] Whereas society consists in the exclusion of the state of nature and the violence that defines it, that exclusion, Agamben shows in his reading of Hobbes, cannot but have taken place through violence: the violence through which the sovereign constitutes himself. The constitution of a separation between nature and law can only happen through force, through the violence that characterizes nature, and takes the form of an 'exception' to the law that is thereby being established. In other words, the act or decision that constitutes law, in fact violates it. "Sovereignty," Agamben argues throughout the book, consists of "a state of indistinction between nature and culture, between violence and law".[26]

That state of indistinction is a paradox, according to Agamben, and he argues that this paradox can best be understood topologically, as a relationship between spheres or zones. Schematically, Agamben draws the relationship between order and nature as two spheres, nature and culture, that first appear distinct, but through the figure of the sovereign, the constitution of the state, one turns out to be included in the heart of the other.[27] As the power that mediates between nature and culture, the sovereign thus renders the two indistinct in his own person. This paradox of the distinction between nature and culture that can only be expressed in a figure that, in fact, blurs that very distinction, can also be traced in the topology of the garden, and especially in the logic of the act of cultivating, of gardening. The separation that the garden's enclosure establishes between cultivated and wild nature can only exist because the violence of wilderness that the garden excludes — what Agamben refers to as 'the world of beasts' — was also necessary to establish that garden. By implication, the garden contains a reference to that kind of violence at its heart, a violence that is repeated in every act of cultivation, be it the act of

25 Ibid., 35.

26 Ibid., 35.

27 Ibid., 38.

weeding, pruning, or sowing. The construction of a wall, and the cultivation of plants, can be seen as violent acts necessary to create and maintain order. Because of its topology, however, and the paradoxical relation it vests between inside and outside, nature and culture, the garden also invites reflection. In "Of Other Spaces", Michel Foucault considered the garden as a type of space that he calls *heterotopia*, an 'other' place or space.[28] *Heterotopias* are places that relate to society in such a way that they represent, contest, or invert it.[29] Foucault proposes a theory of counter-sites, spatial configurations that reflect the social, i.e. that work as cultural mirrors. Mirrors, Foucault proposes, are simultaneously real and mythical; they are in real space and project a virtual space. Because of this double and contradictory nature, they can question certain cultural practices that appear before them, and thus provoke reflection. The *heterotopia* effectively puts society at a critical distance from itself. According to Foucault, the garden is "perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites", and that has the capacity to juxtapose in a single place several sites, even several conceptions of space or different scales.[30] The garden is not only a built reality, but also contains projections of spatial abstractions, such as the universe or totality, and spatial fantasies about order, balance, and harmony. Because of the contradictions between built reality and projected virtuality, it is a space that unhinges itself, much like the mirror; in other words, the garden is a *critical* space.

How might we consider the *topos* of the garden, a sign of sovereign power and a critical space in that it puts society at a reflective distance from itself, as a critical *topos* for the specific problem of sovereignty that structures the ICC? In order to consider this, I will now analyse the features of the ICC's courthouse garden in the context of its specific jurisdiction.

THE ICC'S FANTASY OF A DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY OF STATES

What becomes clear from studying the history of the *hortus conclusus* is that

28 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986), 22–27.

29 Ibid., 24.

30 Ibid., 25.

gardens rarely stand by themselves. Although discussed as thing in their own right, the enclosed gardens studied in Aben and de Wit always connect to and supplement a building, for example monasteries, castles, palaces, villas, or after the rise of cities, an urban built environment. They also imply a person or institution that enacts the power to cultivate what the garden stands for — the Church, for example, or land ownership and capital. This supplementary function makes the garden bear meaning in how it reflects on the institutions it is connected to, how it reflects on an owner or cultivator as being someone with the power to create order out of, or in the midst of, the chaos that surrounds them, which seems to be the garden's most important representational or symbolic function. I suggest that the garden, as a space in itself and as a supplementary space, produces a double mirror; in supplementing a building, gardens are not just mirrors in relation to "all other spaces that remain" in Foucault's terms (i.e. to spatial abstractions like 'the universe' and 'totality') they also mirror the institution they supplement as relating to those abstractions, and project fantasies about order and balance, for example, onto the image of that institution.[31]

The ICC's garden is not one for taking a stroll. Protected as it is by a glass construction, a kind of greenhouse, and given how it grows up against the walls of the Court Tower, the garden is an object of contemplation from which the general public remains removed. Different from the gardens Aben and de Wit analyse, the ICC's hanging garden is not only enclosed by walls, it enacts the enclosure; it is itself the wall. As such, the garden can be said to protect and fortify the Court Tower from the potential chaos of the outside world, as does the wall in the topology of the enclosed garden. It does so by protecting or fortifying what the wall consists of: the assembly of seedling plants from member states to the Rome Statute. The garden thus figures the limit, the primary conditions, of the ICC's jurisdiction: the fact that states willingly sign and ratify the Rome Statute so as to participate in and subject themselves to the order of international criminal law it establishes. It addresses not so much

31 Ibid., 25.

the general public, not the city stroller looking for a place to withdraw from the urban environment, but rather it addresses representatives of member states. The garden reflects something in which member state representatives may recognize themselves, namely, that they are part of a particular constitution, a composition of states that make up a normative social order and a form of political community.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben considers how sovereign power is constitutive of a polis, a political community.[32] Criminal law lays down the ground rules for such communities; it establishes a normative social order by determining transgressive behaviour. The punishment of transgressions of the law maintains that social order and is calculated to have a deterrent effect. One of punishment's primary goals is didactic; it makes an example of the one who broke the rule so as to confirm that rule. According to the logic of the rule of law, those rules are transparent to the law's subjects: they are written down and can thus be known.

In the same spirit, the Rome Statute provides the body of rules to which signatory states subject themselves. That law, then, establishes a social order, which in this case consists of state representatives. The Court only has jurisdiction, according to its Statute, over individual state representatives. Yet, unlike at the level of the nation state — in which individuals are forced to become subjects to a legal regime for the mere fact of being born in a particular state, and which forces the state or sovereign to be the sign and guarantor — at the international level, states are free to sign the law, the Rome Statute, should they wish to subject themselves to it, and there is no sovereign power to enforce that subjectivity, neither the beginning of it, nor the sustenance of it. States are as free to sign up to the Rome Statute as they are to withdraw from it. While a member state is signed up, however, the Court has the power to investigate, prosecute, and punish its representatives for breaches of international law. As such, it does exercise the kind of punitive power that at the national level

32 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2-3.

maintains a sovereign order. That means that a state that signs the Rome Statute gives up some of its sovereignty, but in doing so confirms its sovereignty as well.

Participation in the Rome Statute also allows a state to participate in the Assembly of States Parties, the Court's legislative body, and to contribute to the Court's offices. Judges and other officials of the Court come from any of the member states and are elected by the Assembly. As such, the community of subjects to the Court's normative order legislates and judges itself. Member states thus participate equally in the Court and legislation has a democratic form, comparable to legislation mechanisms in the UN. That democratic form also reflects the intended democratic nature of the Court's punitive power. The Court Tower's hanging garden can be seen as a representation of this equality between member states, as each state gets an equal share in the garden's natural growth. It can be seen as a representation of states' freedom in subjecting themselves to the Court and symbolizes that freedom as constitutive of the Court's power. As the garden protects the Court Tower, the logic of participation protects the Court's democratic intentions. The garden can be said to be a symbol of the ICC's fantasy of a radically democratic international community, of a community of nation states that willingly and freely make their representatives accountable, i.e. a publicly self-critical community.

THE EXCEPTIONAL ORGAN

Yet when we compare the Court's figurative architecture, the garden and its expression of a radically democratic community, and the fantasy of equality between states in their subjection to a common social order, to the architecture of the Court's jurisdiction as laid down in the Rome Statute, it appears that one element corrupts the 'for us by us' logic of that fantasy. This is an element that remains painfully absent from the hanging garden, because it cannot be captured in the form of a native seedling. In the part of the Statute

that concerns the Court's jurisdiction, a set of articles defines who can refer situations for investigation and thus initiate prosecution. The articles stipulate some ground rules for the exercise of the Court's jurisdiction. Article 11, for example, limits jurisdiction temporally (jurisdiction "*ratione temporis*"): the Court may only investigate situations with respect to crimes committed after the Rome Statute's "entry into force" (i.e. after 2002), or after a particular state in which a crime was committed signed and ratified the Rome Statute.[33] Article 12 states that the Court has jurisdiction over states which have become Party to the Statute, or if a State that is not a Party to the Statute accepts the Court's jurisdiction by formal declaration.[34] Article 13 mentions the parties that may refer a situation to the Court:

> Article 13
> Exercise of jurisdiction
>
> The Court may exercise its jurisdiction with respect to a crime referred to in article 5 in accordance with the provisions of this Statute if:
>
> (a) A situation in which one or more of such crimes appears to have been committed is referred to the Prosecutor by a State Party in accordance with article 14;
>
> (b) A situation in which one or more of such crimes appears to have been committed is referred to the Prosecutor by the Security Council acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations; or
>
> (c) The Prosecutor has initiated an investigation in respect of such a crime in accordance with article 15.[35]

Beside State Parties, the Court's free and willing members, and the ICC's Prosecutor, who is elected by an absolute majority vote in the Assembly of States Parties, the article introduces a third party with the right to refer situations to the Court: the UN Security Council. It also refers to another body of law to legitimate that right: the Charter of the UN. Furthermore, whereas the State

33 "The Rome Statute," 11.

34 Ibid., 11.

35 Ibid., 11.

Parties' right of referral is limited by Article 14 to situations under the jurisdiction of the Court, that is, to situations in State Parties and within the "*ratione temporis*" stated in Article 12, the Security Council's right of referral is not restricted by those limitations. The Security Council may refer situations in states regardless of whether they are party to the Rome Statute. That means that, in contrast to the intended limitations on the Court's jurisdiction by the condition of free and willing membership, the Statute creates the possibility of making an exception, and thus the potential to overrule the freedom of states to subject themselves to the Court's jurisdiction. The Security Council may refer situations to the Court in states that do not have the complementary privilege of having a democratic vote in international criminal legislation.

In the same set of articles concerning the Court's jurisdiction, the Security Council is granted another exceptional right:

> Article 16
> Deferral of investigation or prosecution
>
> No investigation or prosecution may be commenced or proceeded with under this Statute for a period of 12 months after the Security Council, in a resolution adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, has requested the Court to that effect; that request may be renewed by the Council under the same conditions.[36]

Article 16 renders the Security Council the only party with the right to veto an investigation or prosecution. Although that right is limited to a period of twelve months, the possibility of renewal renders the right of deferral limitless if the Security Council decides to keep requesting it. That right of deferral effectively gives the Security Council the power to overrule the Prosecutor in the exercise of their democratically granted powers to start a procedure, and the States Parties in maintaining the order they to which they have democratically estab-

36 Ibid., 12.

lished and subjected themselves. In other words, it establishes a supra-sovereign body: a body that is more sovereign than others.

The UN Security Council is one of the UN's main organs. Created after the Second World War together with the United Nations as a whole, it is charged with the task of maintaining international peace and security. It consists of fifteen members, five of which have a permanent seat: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (the powers that came out of World War II as victors). Ten seats are taken up by rotating, temporary members elected from the UN member states. Only the Security Council's permanent members have the infamous right of veto; they can prohibit any substantive Security Council resolution from entering into force, regardless of the result of voting procedures. As the Security Council decides on crucial matters such as peacekeeping missions and the admission of new member states, that right of veto can have significant consequences. In his book on the international order, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Jacques Derrida has called the Security Council the 'roguish' element in an otherwise democratic project.[37] The power embodied by those World War II victors that became permanent members of the Security Council is not legal power: it is not constrained by law, or 'right', rather, it is 'natural might', a combination of physical, military, and economic strength. Given the number of cases which the Security Council has discussed but decided not to refer to the ICC — examples include the situations in Syria, Sri Lanka, and Gaza — the question arises if the relationship between the two bodies does not effectively politicize the Court; referral becomes a question of protecting friends and prosecuting enemies for those states 'permanently' in the Security Council.

Translated to the logic of the courthouse garden, the Rome Statute introduces a power in the constitution of the Court that radically disturbs the equality between the community of member states who willingly hold themselves accountable. That power is associated with, yet cannot be represented by, the

37 According to Jacques Derrida: "Universal democracy, beyond the nation state and beyond citizenship, calls in fact for a supersovereignty that cannot but betray it. The abuse of power, for example that of the Security Council or of certain superpowers that sit on it permanently, is an abuse from the very beginning, well before any particular secondary abuse. Abuse of power is constitutive of sovereignty itself", Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 101-102. In a footnote to that passage, Derrida discusses the Security Council's attempts to forestall the establishment of the ICC, which took place as he was writing the book. Amongst other parties, the US found the Court's jurisdiction threatening. The US went so far as to install a federal law, 'The American Service-Members' Protection Act,' also known as the 'Hague Invasion Act,' which authorizes the US President to use 'all means necessary' to release US or allied personnel from detention on behalf of the ICC. The US request for a permanent deferral of actions by peacekeeping forces, granted by the Security Council, effectively exempts interventions, such as took place under the name of the 'War on Terror', from the Court's jurisdiction.

garden and the assembly of native seedlings, since it is not a national power. Although the Security Council is made up of states that could potentially be party to the Rome Statute and thus subject to the ICC's jurisdiction, as an organ of the UN it cannot fall under the ICC's jurisdiction (or become a member under the Rome Statute). Consequently, not only the Rome Statute's member states, but also all recognized states, are potentially exposed to the ICC's punitive power; all states may also be protected from such exposure, should it suit the 'permanent' members of the Security Council. As such, the Court exposes itself to a power that blurs its order of positive right with a form of natural might that compromises its independence and impartiality, as well as its intentions of being based on a democratic constitution.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben writes that modern sovereignty not only decides on the distinction between *nomos* and nature, nor only maintains an element of nature at the heart of its *nomos*, but rather it blurs the possibility of distinguishing between nature and *nomos* altogether. According to Agamben, the mechanism of the 'exception' by means of which the sovereign has the power to temporally or spatially suspend the law, and which traditionally explains sovereignty as the supreme power, has become the norm in modern politics. It is precisely this power to suspend the law which enabled some nation states in the course of the twentieth century to organize genocides: the kinds of atrocities that, for others, elicited dreams of a legal institution that could impose limits on national sovereignty and hold accountable those who decide to commit such atrocities. However, the legal institution that developed out of that dream, the ICC, now appears to be compromised by that same power, a power that unhinges the fantasy of balance and equality that structures the architecture of the ICC's courthouse garden.

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LITERARY LANDSCAPES IN THE CASTILIAN MIDDLE AGES

ALLEGORICAL CONSTRUCTION AS A FEATURE OF TEXTUAL LANDSCAPES

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The study of landscapes in literature is hardly an innovation; countless monographs and articles analyse this notion from its widely accepted birth in the sixteenth century to today. Despite its abundant bibliography, the notion of landscape in literature before the Renaissance is still considered impossible by several scholars, especially those working in French and Spanish historiography. The Middle Ages is a particularly delicate point of dissension, due to the theological relationship between human beings and nature. The purpose of this article is to tackle the assertion that landscape is a Renaissance invention and to argue for an acknowledgement of landscape in medieval texts. It will challenge the reluctance to acknowledge medieval landscapes by focusing on the particular case of Castilian literature in the thirteenth century, using texts from the same period but across different genres, to show the numerous possibilities of landscape creation in the Middle Ages.

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the study of landscape was the territory of artists and art historians. In his monograph *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter,* the German philologist Ernst Robert Curtius opened up the study of landscape to literary disciplines.[1] Curtius' classical study was innovative for yet another reason: by analysing the greatest landscapes of ancient times, such as the Virgilian

1 For this article, an early Swiss re-edition was consulted. Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: A Francke, 1948), 189–207.

locus amoenus, and their echoes in later texts, he challenges the scholarly consensus, which asserts that the birth of landscape as a literary motif occurred during the early Renaissance and was fully developed in the seventeenth century. However, Curtius reduced medieval settings to mere erudite repetitions of ancient *topoi*: "After Curtius, it was impossible to assume that a landscape or background description in medieval literature was drawn from life. It was more likely to be an imitation or allusion to a previous literary work or tradition".[2] One obstacle to the recognition of a medieval landscape would therefore be its lack of originality, despite the fact that the notion only emerged as a distinct concept in the Renaissance.

Recent scholars, such as Emilio Orozco Díaz, Augustin Berque, and Paul Zumthor,[3] deny the existence of a medieval landscape for another reason: the symbolic perception and interpretation of the world in the Middle Ages is seen as an obstacle between human beings and nature, since it impedes the purely aesthetical observation that, in their opinion, substantiates landscape construction. This signifies that the posture of man should be exclusively contemplative and that any other anthropological or intellectual projection, such as allegory, should be left out. Nevertheless, landscape does not follow a fixed set of rules; it is a concept in a constant state of flux. Over time, it can be perceived and expressed differently. Thus, the first challenge that awaits the scholar interested in the subject, and which constitutes the core of the initial section of the present paper, is to provide a general definition of landscape and determine if texts from the Middle Ages show such constructions. Only then can the question of the allegorical interpretation of the world and its influence on the perception of nature be addressed. The second and third parts of this article focus on this aspect, analysing the relationship between human beings and nature in medieval texts and determining whether allegory is a real impediment for the creation of literary landscapes.

Choosing a Castilian corpus from the thirteenth century to support this argumen-

2 John M. Ganim, "Landscape and Late Medieval Literature. A Critical Geography," in *Place, Space and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2007), xvii.

3 Emilio Orozco Díaz, *Paisaje y sentimiento de la naturaleza en la poesía española* (Madrid: Prensa Española, 1968); Augustin Berque, "De paysage en outre-pays," *in Théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 346–59; and Paul Zumthor, *La mesure du monde. Représentation de l'espace au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

tation is based on methodology. The texts selected to substantiate the present paper are from different contexts and literary genres — epic and religious poetry — and therefore demonstrate the various possibilities of spatial treatment in a relatively short period of time and in a limited geographical area. Moreover, as stated above, landscape evolves through time, as do allegory and symbolism.[4]

LITERARY LANDSCAPE: A PROBLEMATIC DEFINITION

The literary landscape is difficult to define. What does it represent and what are the factors that determine its production? In literature, landscape can represent an existing space — the author's surroundings, for example — or a completely fictional one.[5] In both cases, however, the scenery is not transmitted directly to the reader, but undergoes a process of narration as it is transcribed into words. Thus, textual landscape is an artistic construction that evokes an image in the reader's mind, using description and enumeration as its main expressive resources.[6] As the French geographer Armand Frémont states, a fundamental characteristic of the definition of landscape is its subjective conception:

> Landscape is not just a simple "object", nor the eye that observes it, a cold lens, an "objective". It is also an oeuvre and a universe of symbols. Modelled by mankind, felt as much as observed, a collective poem engraved on earth as much as a functional network of fields and paths, it evokes so much more.[7]

Consequently, what we call landscape implies human intervention. It is the reproduction of a real or fictional space presented through mankind's filter. As such, it requires an emotional as well as an intellectual interpretation.[8] Then what is the nature of the images that authors aim to convey? According to Tim Cresswell, a specialist in the study of the concept of place, "landscape refers to the shape — the material topography —of a piece of land [...] We do not

4 This study is indebted to previous innovative articles on the existence of a medieval landscape in Spanish literature, such as Javier Huidobro Pérez-Villamil, "Conceptos de naturaleza y paisaje," *Espacio, tiempo y forma* 2 (1989), 63–71; Claudio Guillén, "Paisaje y literatura, o los fantasmas de la otredad," in *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: Barcelona, 21–26 de agosto de 1989*, vol. 1, ed. Antonio Vilanova (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992), 77–102; María Teresa Rodríguez Bote, "La visión estética del paisaje en la Baja Edad Media," *Medievalismo* 24 (2014), 371–94.

5 Roger Brunet, "Analyse des paysages et sémiologie. Eléments pour un débat," in *La théorie du paysage en France* (1974–1994), ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 8. A distinction repeated in Aline Durand, "Paysage," in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Age*, ed. Claude Gauvard, Alain de Libera and Michel Zink (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), 1057

6 On landscape as a human construction, see, for example, Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1986), vi; Paul Zumthor, *La mesure du monde. Représentation de l'espace au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 88; Claudio Guillén, "Paisaje y literatura, o los fantasmas de la otredad," in *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Asociación Internacional*

live in landscapes — we look at them".[9] Thus, landscape confines a portion of representational space, be it wild or urbanized, and distinguishes itself by its fundamentally visual nature.[10] Cresswell provides a definition that is primarily intended for geographers yet is applicable to literature, for it integrates the beholder's gaze into the perception and construction of landscape, be it geographical or literary. Similarly, the Spanish scholar Claudio Guillén had previously offered another definition, saying that "landscape means man's glance at open spaces", which are relatively extended. In those open spaces, it "is possible to describe the value of realities [...] not predominantly human".[11] With this proposition, Guillén affirms the possibility of considering the same conception — that is, landscape — across various settings as long as the observer positions himself outside of the frame he creates. In other words, although landscape is a human creation, its visual nature implies that the source of the description — that is, the narrator — must remain outside of the depicted composition.

To conclude this reflection, it is crucial to provide a working definition for the present study. One might suggest that literary landscape is a subjective and artistic construction that evokes in the reader's mind a visual space, which the observer is partially or completely absent from, in a state of aesthetic contemplation. Indeed, words have the same power as paint brushes in representing real or imagined settings, and it is through the author's (or the copyist's) construction that the reader gains access to the representation of space. Moreover, it is compelling that the description focuses (primarily, yet not solely) on the aesthetic facets of the scenery, thus marginalizing the beholder.

The anonymous *Poema de Mío Cid* (c. 1207), considered to be the first text written completely in Castilian Spanish, offers an opportunity to apply this suggested definition to a medieval text. Indeed, as Don Rodrigo receives his wife and daughters in the newly conquered city of Valencia and leads them to the citadel's highest tower to celebrate his triumph, the poet gives the following panoramic description:

de Hispanistas: Barcelona, 21–26 de agosto de 1989. Vol. 1. Coord. Antonio Vilanova (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992), 77; María Teresa Rodríguez Bote, "La visión estética del paisaje en la Baja Edad Media," *Medievalismo* 24 (2014), 375.

7 Armant Frémont, "*Les profondeurs des paysages géographiques," in La théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 21–22. Originally: "Le paysage n'est pas qu'un simple 'objet', ni l'œil qui l'observe, une lentille froide, un 'objectif'. Il est aussi œuvre et univers de signes. Modelé par les hommes, ressenti autant qu'observé, poème collectif gravé sur la terre autant que réseau fonctionnel de champs et chemins, il évoque autant et plus que ce qu'il est". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

8 Peter Dunn, "Don Juan Manuel: The World as Text," *Modern Language Notes* 106.2 (1991), 223–40.

9 Tim Cresswell, Place: *A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 11.

10 Ibid., 10.

11 Claudio Guillén, "Paisaje y literatura, o los fantasmas de la otredad," in *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: Barcelona, 21–26 de agosto de 1989*. Vol. 1. Coord. Antonio Vilanova (Bar-

v.1610 [After] the Cid led them to the citadel,

where they climbed to the highest point.

Their beautiful eyes observe everything,

v. 1615 they look at Valencia, how the city extends over [one side],

and they look at the sea on the other side,

they look at the garden, thick and exuberant;

they raise their hands to thank God

for this conquest, as it is good and extraordinary.[12]

This extract holds symbolic meaning, in the sense that these lines, unlike any other in the epic poem, celebrate the peak of the Cid's regained honour. As the Hispanicist Juan Manuel Cacho Blecua explains:

> The view of Valencia acquires a value that transcends any contemplation of the landscape. The Cid is showing them [his family] his foremost conquest, that is how he went from being a banished lord to occupying one of the main cities of the medieval world. To do so, the viewpoint from where the surroundings are observed is strategically situated: from the city's highest point, symbolically meaning his power, he can show them his new possessions.[13]

Despite the obvious intention to demonstrate the superiority of the Cid in this fragment, the description of Valencia and its surroundings also corresponds with all above-mentioned aspects of literary landscape. Firstly, the subjec-

celona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992), 77. Originally: "[...] el paisaje supone la mirada del hombre a espacios abiertos [...], relativamente extensos [...| en que puede descubrirse el valor de realidades [...] no predominantemente humanas". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

12 *Poema de Mío Cid*, ed. Colin Smith (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005), 104. Originally: "Adeliñó mio Cid con ellas al alcácer, / allá las subié en el más alto logar. / Ojos vellidos catan a todas partes, / miran Valencia, cómmo yaze la cibdad, / e del otra parte a ojo han el mar, / miran la huerta, espessa e grand; / alçan las manos por a Dios rogar / d'esta ganacia, cómmo es buena e grand". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

13 Juan Manuel Cacho Blecua, "El espacio en el *Poema de Mío Cid*," *Revista de Historia Jerónimo Zurita* 55 (1987), 33. Originally: "La visión de Valencia adquiere un valor que transciende una contemplación del paisaje. El Cid les está enseñando su principal conquista, en definitiva cómo ha pasado de ser un desterrado a ocupar una de las principales ciudades del mundo medieval. Por ello, el foco desde donde se contempla el paraje está situado estratégicamente: desde lo alto de la ciudad, simbólicamente desde su dominio, les puede mostrar estas nuevas posesiones". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

tive construction is respected: space is evoked through the perspective of the beholder and is organized within a narrative frame. Then, the lines evoke an image in the reader's mind as a result of the construction of space: on one side is the city, on the other the sea (there is also a garden, described by two epithets that characterize it, which serves to emphasize the wealth of the city). Finally, in addition to this careful spatial distribution, the observers—in this case the Cid and the women—are abstracted from the picture, since they are not part of the description, but rather its point of departure. Therefore, this fragment suits all the requirements of being considered a landscape.

THE DELICATE SUBJECT OF ALLEGORICAL LANDSCAPES

Despite evidence to the contrary, some scholars are reluctant to recognize the existence of medieval literary landscapes, and would rather situate the notion's inception in the Renaissance or Baroque period. Indeed, one of the most quoted Spanish scholars for the study of textual space, Emilio Orozco Díaz, claims that landscape only appears fully incorporated in texts during the Renaissance.[14] Orozco Díaz, who specializes in the history of Spanish Golden Age literature, concedes, however, that it is possible to appreciate the development of a "feeling of nature" between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, even though this minor shift of perception does not compensate for the absence of a purely aesthetic contemplation of nature in this era.[15]

Díaz's objection is one commonly shared by scholars far and wide. For example, French geographer and philosopher Augustin Berque was one of the leading scholars in the study of landscape in the 1990s. Invited to participate in a 1994 congress on the evolution of landscape theory in France, he stated that the lack of a purely aesthetic vision of nature impedes the apparition of landscape until the Renaissance. In his work, Berque does not focus on literature, however, but on artistic representations such as paintings and manuscript illuminations.[16] Swiss philologist Paul Zumthor also follows this line of thought in *La Mesure du*

14 Emilio Orozco Díaz, *Paisaje y sentimiento de la naturaleza en la poesía española* (Madrid: Prensa Española, 1968), 107. Díaz's diachronic approach to landscape, from which the Middle Ages are usually absent, or only briefly exposed, has inspired younger scholars: see Ramón Pérez Parejo, "Simbolismo, ideología y desvío ficcional en los escenarios y paisajes literarios: el caso especial del Renacimiento," Anuario de Estudios Filológicos 27 (2004), 259–74; Javier Huidobro Pérez-Villamil, "Conceptos de naturaleza y paisaje," Espacio, Tiempo y Forma 7.2, 1989, 68; José Antonio Hernández Guerrero, "Los paisajes literarios," *Castilla: Estudios de literatura* 27 (2002), 73–84.

15 Emilio Orozco Díaz, *Paisaje y sentimiento de la naturaleza en la poesía española* (Madrid: Prensa Española, 1968), 26.

16 Augustin Berque, "De paysage en outre-pays," in *Théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 346.

Monde. *Représentation de l'Espace au Moyen Age.* In his book about spatial perception in the Middle Ages, Zumthor writes that the medieval author is ignorant of the notion of landscape, since the belief in God's omnipresence invites humankind to bypass this state of aesthetic contemplation in favour of the addition of interpretative values to described surroundings: "Landscape would be the representation of a natural beauty in which man basks, without looking for further signification. If we hold to this definition, then we must say quite simply that the Middle Ages are unaware of landscape."[17]

If a conclusion is to be drawn from these three scholars, Zumthor's quote would be its core: a frequent objection to the recognition of a medieval (literary) landscape is the allegorical interpretation of nature. Indeed, if their line of thought is to be followed, the medieval man tended to look for a theological interpretation of his surroundings, which then is an obvious impediment to the evolution of landscape.[18] However, was there ever a completely disinterested consideration of landscape? Are there romantic landscapes, in which nature mirrors the protagonists' tormented emotions? Are there pastoral landscapes, where pasturelands are only depicted to show the author's skilfulness? The answer is no, and this might be because, as Armant Frémont proposes, landscape is a human construction and, as such, cannot be separated from the historical and cultural perception of nature and of God as its designer.[19] Maybe the real question is not whether nature was objectively observed in the Middle Ages, but rather whether allegory was an insurmountable obstacle to its contemplation and its representation at that time.

To consider allegory as an obstacle between humans and the observation of nature is an oversimplification of the complex relationship that united humans to their surroundings in the Middle Ages. In the medieval mind, the visual world was seen as a meeting point between the sensible world and an ideal world created by God. Henceforth, all the elements of divine creation were to be celebrated: "God created the world and he made it perfect. Nature, as God's work,

17 Paul Zumthor, *La mesure du monde. Représentation de l'espace au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 88. Originally: "Le paysage serait la représentation d'une beauté naturelle dans laquelle l'homme se complait sans lui chercher d'autre signification. Si l'on tient à cette définition, il faut dire tout net que le Moyen Age ignore le paysage". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

18 This requirement is also present in Raffaele Milani, *El arte del paisaje,* trans. Javier Maderuelo (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007), 61.

19 Armant Frémont, "Les profondeurs des paysages géographiques," in *La théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 21–22.

is perfect; and this perfection is fully valued through its affective contemplation", as José Antonio Hernández Guerrero argues.[20] While the beauty of a rose could, for instance, symbolize Mary's perfection as a holy figure, the natural beauty of the rose was equally celebrated. Famous in Spain for its re-elaboration of Marian miracles in the typical Castilian form of the *Mester de Clerecía*, the thirteenth-century text *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (attributed to Gonzalo de Berceo), opens with a detailed description of forty-four stanzas about an orchard in which the speaker, a tired pilgrim, can find some rest:

e. 3 The perfumed flowers gave off a magnificent scent,
refreshing the [flesh] and mind of men;
from each corner ran clear streams,
in summer quite cold, in winter warm.

e. 4 There was a great abundance of generous trees,
pomegranates and figs, pears and apples,
and many other fruits of various kinds,
but none was rotten [nor] sour.
[…]

e. 7 Lying in the shade, all my cares left me,
I heard the sound of birds, sweet and modulated:
men had never heard organs so finely serene,
nor any that could make sounds better tuned.[21]

20 José Antonio Hernández Guerrero, "Los paisajes literarios," *Castilla: Estudios de Literatura* 27 (2002), 78. "Dios creó el mundo y lo hizo perfecto. La naturaleza, como obra de Dios, es perfecta; y esta perfección se aprecia plenamente en su contemplación afectiva". Trans. Natacha Crocoll. This is echoed in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, *NRSV,* Cor 1:20.

21 Gonzalo de Berceo, *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, ed. Michael Gerli (Madrid: Cátedra, 2006), 69–70. Originally: "Davan olor sovejo las flores bien olientes, / refrescavan en omne las [carnes] e las mientes; / manavan cada canto fuentes claras corrientes, / en verano bien frías, / en invierno calientes. / Avién ý grand abondo de buenas arboledas / milgranos e figueras, peros e manzanedas, / e mucchas otras fructas de diversas monedas, / mas non avié ningunas podridas [nin] azedas. […] Yaziendo a la sombra perdí todos cuidados, / odí sonos de aves, dulces e modulados: / nunqua udieron omnes órganos más temprados, / nin que formar pudiessen sones más acordados". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

In the first fourteen stanzas, the poet describes the garden as a *locus amoenus,* which is a traditional *topos* involving a pleasant or idealized place of safety or comfort: the orchard is characterized by its soothing shade and breeze, the abundance of fruit, and the agreeable sounds of streams and birds described with a musical vocabulary. In the passage quoted above, an eye for detail stands out, for example, in the copious use of epithets to describe different elements in order to create a scenery filled with synaesthesia. The list of fruits and the comparison between bird songs and instruments show the attention given by the poet to nature, even though the text is steeped in a long tradition that extends back to ancient times.

The thirty-two other stanzas comprising the prologue have a unique goal: explaining the allegory of the orchard. Berceo decodes the natural elements as religious symbols, given that the wider reality of the divine world was unreachable for humankind save through an intellectualization of the tangible one. Here, the garden represents the Virgin; the four streams are the Gospels; the shade is Mary's prayers protecting humankind; the trees are the miracles, and the birds are the voices that spread the Holy Word. Therefore, all the details underlined in the previous paragraph aim for the praise of the Virgin, who welcomes men and shields them from harm. Berceo's extract is thus an excellent example of how allegorical descriptions were constructed in the late Middle Ages, following an intellectual practice already present in the Bible and in Augustinian tradition.[22] Nevertheless, it also demonstrates that even if sceneries were created — or interpreted — through an allegorical prism, they could be sophisticated thanks to the same process that determines the sensitive apprehension of nature: a close attention to detail and the will to recreate the most precise image possible in the reader's mind. As a consequence, the lack of laicism, or allegorical reading of sceneries, is not an obstacle to the existence of a literary landscape in the Middle Ages, but rather a sign of a double reading of space: the observation or imagination and, on another level entirely, the interpretation of the created surroundings. As the American medievalist

22 For example, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, XLV, 7 and De libero arbitrio, II, 16.43. See respectively Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos I-L*, eds. Eloi Dekkers and Jean Fraipont (Turnholt: Brepols, CCSL 38, 1956), p. 522 and Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, ed. William MacAllen Green, (Turnholt; Brepols, CCSL 29, 1970), pp. 266–67. For more details on the correspondences between the tangible and the ideal world, see Vincent Giraud, "*Signum* et *vestigium* dans la pensée de Saint Augustin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 95.2 (2011), 251–74.

John Ganim writes:

> The medieval way of seeing landscape, place and space has become newly important as a result, not because of its mimetic accuracy, but because of its explicit signage, because it asks us to respond intellectually as well as emotionally, conceptually as well as naturally.[23]

Does Berceo's introduction respect the definition of landscape presented in this article? Space is well constructed with careful emphasis on different senses, which helps readers mentally recreate a visual scene. Moreover, the observer, just as in the *Poema de Mío Cid*, is the description's point of departure, and yet does not form part of it. In essence, the allegorical interpretation does not seem to impede the consideration of this extract as a landscape, even though the second part of the introduction, where Berceo explains the correspondences between natural elements and the Virgin, would not fall into the same category.

WHEN ALLEGORY BECOMES A LITERARY TRICK

Not all landscapes that resort to allegory in Spain's medieval literature do so with a theological perspective. As a matter of fact, already in the *Poema de Mío Cid*, written at least fifty years prior to Berceo's prologue, the author plays with the *topos* of the *locus amoenus* to mislead the public, forcing the wrong interpretation of events to come. After having recovered his lost position at court, the Cid offers his daughters in marriage to the Carrión 'infantes' whose foulness lead them to abandon their young spouses after having robbed them of their virginity:

> The *Infantes* have entered the oak grove at Corpes[24],
>
> [where] the mountains are high, the branches [on the

23 John Ganim, "Landscape and Late Medieval Literature. A Critical Geography," in *Place, Space and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), xvi.

24 Although there is a municipality called Robledo de Corpes in Castilla–La Mancha, the author refers here to a natural environment that answers the classical *topos* of the *locus horribilis.*

trees] reach to the clouds,

and the beasts that wander [there] about are wild.

v. 2700 They found an orchard with a clean fountain,

[and there] they ordered [the soldiers] to set up their tents,

and at night lay there with all that accompanied them,

with their wives in their arms, showing them love.

They did not act accordingly when the sun came up![25]

This fragment has been considered ambiguous by scholars because of the opposition of two *topoi*: the *locus horribilis* — the high mountains, the threatening trees, the clouds, and the wild beasts— and the *locus amoenus,* only insinuated in verse 2700 when the orchard and the fountain are mentioned.[26] Considering this example in light of the present discussion, it offers a new element to the argumentation, as neither allegory refers to a transcendental reality, but instead present a setting that sustains the narrative action. Indeed, the vileness and dishonesty of the 'infantes' are both foreshadowed by the unwelcoming forest where they decide to stay — a conventional medieval omen of misfortune — and compounded by the fact that they do not respect the code of the orchard. The public of the thirteenth century, certainly used to amorous encounters in orchards, did not expect the princes to break their marriage vows in such an environment.

This fragment shows that neither allegorical interpretation nor resorting to traditional literary motifs are obstacles between humans and nature. Here, the relationship is more subtle, as description and narration are tightly entangled to produce a rhetorical effect, foreign to a theological interpretation of nature.

25 *Poema de Mío Cid,* ed. Colin Smith (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005), 165. Originally "Entrados son los ifantes al robredo de Corpes, / los montes son altos, las ramas pujan con las núes, / e las bestias fieras que andan aderredor. / Fallaron un vergel con una linpia fuent, / mandan fincar la tienda infantes de Carrión, / con quantos que ellos traen ý yazen essa noch, / con sus mugieres en braços, demuéstranles amor / ¡mal ge lo cunplieron cuando salié el sol!". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

26 The debate is centred on the question of whether the topography was inspired by a real place or was a purely literary construction. For the first hypothesis, the leading study is that of Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *Los godos y la epopeya española: "Chansons de geste" y baladas nórdicas* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1956), 251–55, whereas a good argumentation for the second hypothesis is made by Colin Smith, the editor of the consulted edition of *Poema de Mío Cid* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005), 309.

Even if the *locus amoenus* is only hinted at, the orchard grove is without a doubt a landscape, observed by the narrator and constructed to create an oppressive atmosphere in the public's mind.

TOWARDS THE RECOGNITION OF A MEDIEVAL LITERARY LANDSCAPE

Towards the end of this analysis, the inexistence of a sensibility of nature in the Castilian Middle Ages has become hard to sustain. While it is true that around the thirteenth century there are sceneries that could be considered as exclusively mental images — for example, the texts by the clerk Gonzalo de Berceo where theological allegory prevails over a purely aesthetical motivation — the observational link between humans and nature is still present, as is the care given to the artistic construction depicting the scene.

In other texts, such as the epic poem the *Poema de Mío Cid*, symbolic spatial expression is not meant to be read with a religious interpretation, but rather as part of a medieval literary tradition of *topoi*. In some cases, surroundings even appear deprived of any allegorical touch, as in the example of the panoramic view from atop the Valencian citadel.

Each of the examples discussed here effectively demonstrate that literary elements generally considered to be part of landscape in the Renaissance and thereafter were already present in the Middle Ages. Yet, while the medieval landscape shares characteristics with Early Modern and modern ones, it is also distinct in terms of a deep — though not omnipresent — symbolism, frequent religious interpretation, and traditional constructions that rely on literary *topoi*. None of these characteristics serve as an obstacle between humankind and nature, but are instead the fruit of another interpretation, where transcendence adds meaning to the beauty of the world.

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LANDSCAPES, TIME, AND VIOLENCE
UNEARTHING THE PAST IN SARAH VANAGT AND KATRIEN VERMEIRE'S *THE WAVE*

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This article reads the notion of temporality back into the landscape through a close reading of the video work The Wave *(2012) by Sarah Vanagt and Katrien Vermeire. The piece scrutinizes a landscape intrinsically linked to a violent event — an execution during the Spanish Civil War — through the alternation between vertical landscape views and horizontal views of the exhumed grave. Rather than moving across the landscape's surface,* The Wave *cuts through it, privileging aesthetic experimentation over narrative specificity and grappling with historical violence at both micro- and macro-levels. This paper tests the productivity of putting in dialogue Fernand Braudel's* 'longue durée' *and Rob Nixon's 'slow violence' in the examination of past violence bound to a landscape. While Braudel underlines the importance of 'slow' history and its interdependence with landscape, Nixon highlights the invisibility of certain forms of durational violence. Redressing the relative paucity of accounts on landscape and temporality, this analysis introduces an element often absent from traditional landscape aesthetics: time. Braudel and Nixon are relevant to this attempt; their work provides theoretical tools to understand the persistence of the past in the present, thus shedding light on the cross-temporal configuration of the past at work in* The Wave.

INTRODUCTION

The word landscape brings to mind panoramic views of prairies and grasslands, images of natural settings: it has a deeply-rooted association with the genre

of landscape painting. This immediate link, which inescapably ties landscape representations to a static instead of fluctuating entity, is derived from modern art history and its theorization of the genre of landscape art. This genre has evolved from the fifteenth century to the present day, and is linked to an idealized visualization of the relationships between culture and nature.[1] Idealized visions of landscapes have shaped our imaginaries and, more often than not, shrouded the multiple socio-political phenomena at play in them. In this sense, the element of temporality, and the accompanying alterations it brings to perceptions of landscape, has been remarkably absent from traditional landscape aesthetics and its larger theorization as a genre.[2]

The extensive literature on landscape cuts across a wide range of fields — cultural geography, history, archaeology, architecture, and art history, among others — and attests to the fact that the tradition of landscape study is animated by the different stakes in these disciplines. Over the past thirty years, the field of cultural geography has been one of the main forces behind a political understanding of landscape,[3] doing away with the idea of a 'primordial' landscape and introducing temporality into its study.[4] Still, the current perception that landscape is a political category undergoing perpetual change has been a long time in the making. Prominent examples are the classical landscape in the seventeenth-century paintings of Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, and the Dutch tradition (Fig. 1), and the contemporaneous explosion of naturalistic landscape painting throughout the nineteenth century both in Europe and North America, perfectly exemplified in the work of John Constable or the American Hudson River School.[5] Keeping in mind the differences among these artistic movements, it could be argued that what unites these painterly traditions is an overall static idea of landscape, in which it functions, if not as a mere background to human life, at least as a frozen, idealized image of nature.

This article is based on the premise that temporality is an essential component of landscape and that by not accounting for it we run the risk of not

1 John Wylie, *Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2007), 190.

2 Two key references on the relationship between time and landscape come from the field of archaeology and anthropology, both of which engage in a phenomenological approach to landscape as an inherently temporal entity. Two prominent examples are concerned with the passage of time and the construction of archaeological knowledge; see Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25.2 (1993), 152–74; and Barbara Bender, "Time and Landscape," *Current Anthropology* 43.4 (2002), S103–12.

3 For a comprehensive study of these schools of thought in cultural geography, see: "Landscape," in *The Cultural Geography Reader,* eds Timothy S. Oakes and Patricia Lynn Price (London: Routledge, 2008), 147–200.

4 Jan Kolen and Johannes Renes, "*Landscape Biographies: Key Issues," in Landscape Biographies: Geographical Historical and Archaeological Perspectives on the Production and Transmission of Landscapes*, eds Rita Hermans, Jan Kolen, and Johannes Renes (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 38–41.

5 Gudrun Danzer and Gunther Holler-Schuster, "Landscape: Transformation of an Idea. Art from 1800 to the Present Day from the Col-

Fig.1:
Italian Landscape with Umbrella Pines by Hendrik Voogd, 1807, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, public domain image

acknowledging the various external forces that shape and reshape our contemporary landscapes. In the context of the proliferating use of landscape in recent art — mainly by deviating from genre expectations — contemporary artistic landscape representations have the potential to emphasize the multi-layered temporalities that encompass them. These practices mark a departure from the idealized imagination of landscapes, a shift this article explores through a suggestive example of this current within contemporary art practices, the video artwork *The Wave* (2012). *The Wave* returns to the dominant tradition of Western landscape art to eventually withdraw from it, and subsequently triggers reflection on the intricate temporality and the complicated task of depicting violence within — and through — the landscape. Analysis is achieved by means of a dialogue between the historian Fernand Braudel's theorization of the '*longue durée*', and the post-colonial scholar Rob Nixon's notion of 'slow violence'. These two concepts, although they come from different intellectual

lection of the Neue Galerie Graw," in *Landscape: Construction of a Reality*, eds Peter Pakesch, Katrin Bucher Trantow, and Katia Huemer (Graz: Kunsthaus Graz, 2015), 8–13.

traditions, are relevant to the endeavour of re-thinking landscape as a temporal entity, since they deal, respectively, with the inscription of historical time on the land (or the sea), and with how this process of inscription is made tangible in the present.

In 2011, Belgian filmmakers Sarah Vanagt and Katrien Vermeire spent twenty-one days accompanying a team of archaeologists in the remote region of Castilla–La Mancha in the Spanish countryside. Vanagt and Vermeire deliberately placed themselves in the midst of an operation of political remediation: the chosen location is the site of past violence, for this was the exact spot where in 1939, towards the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), nine people were executed and buried by Franco's followers. The artists went to this area to document the exhumation, and the result is a 20-minute video piece entitled *The Wave.*

Over the past two decades, contemporary art experimentations with landscape have gained considerable traction within the field of cultural geography.[6] In line with these disciplinary developments, the approach to landscape in *The Wave* underscores the passage of historical time, a fact that makes it pertinent to a reflection on the crucial relationship between landscape and time. More precisely, the particularity of *The Wave* lies in the distinct point of view the artists chose to document the exhumation process: they placed the film camera above the dig, thus confronting the viewer with the material residues of the past violence that had laid intact for almost a century in the secluded grave. Although the landscape is at first devoid of any hint of human presence and stands as the perfect image of rurality, this initial depiction is subverted in the course of the video, for the camera slowly reveals traces of Franco's insidious legacy.

It is important to situate *The Wave* within this wider perspective in recent artistic practice, to shift away from the aestheticization, inherited from traditional

6 Harriet Hawkins, "Geography and Art. An Expanding Field. Site, the Body and Practice," *Progress in Human Geography* 37.1 (2012), 52–71.

landscape aesthetics, of aspects of land. This shift in focus, which can be traced after the middle of the twentieth century, marked a departure from traditional depictions of landscape and transformed the critical components of the landscape's social texture. A pivotal moment of this change was reached with the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (1975),

Fig.2:
A Mass Grave Near Snagovo, Bosnia
by Luc Delahaye, 2006,
© Luc Delahaye & Nathalie Obadia Gallery, Paris/Brussels

Digital C-print Photograph of 16 November 2006. Archaeologists and forensic experts from ICMP (International Commission on Missing Persons) working on the mass grave #SNA04ZVO, near the village of Snagovo in the Zvornik district, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

which contributed to the demythologization of the genre.[7] Differently put, this shift recognized and subsequently placed greater emphasis on the historical, ecological, and political reality of a landscape. Several contemporary artistic practices are shaped by a desire not just to depict, but also to have an impact on reality, bringing into focus the material rather than the primarily visual aspects of landscape, and incorporating the temporal dimension. Conceived within similar circumstances as *The Wave*, visual creations in which landscapes may appear as a medium to represent aggression can be seen in the work of Luc Delahaye (Fig. 2), Nguyen Trinh Thi, Enrique Ramírez, and Sophie Ristelhueber (Fig. 3), among numerous others. Produced in different contexts of conflict and trauma, these practices express the urge of their creators to grapple with places

7 The show took place at the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York. For an introduction, see: Grec Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach, eds, *Reframing the New Topographics* (Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2013).

that have served in the past as sites for violence, whether against the land itself, or its people, or, indeed, both.

Frequently, the impetus for these artists lies in the ghostly character of landscape, which, even if it gives spatial form to various social, political, economic, geological, and climatic operations, also erodes the evidence of its own production. This observation, which lies at the core of *The Wave*, brings into play questions of visibility and invisibility, which are further complicated by a second representational obstacle. On this front, art historian Brianne Cohen notes that much of the recent crossbreeding between documentary and artistic work experiments with photographic and filmic vocabularies in order to delve into conjoined questions about human aggression and the ecological sustainability of the planet.[8] The use of this crossbred artistic form discloses the generational longevity of human involvement in the landscape, stretching into lengthy

8 Brianne Cohen, "Eco-aesthetics, Massacres and the Photofilmic," in *The Photofilmic: Entangled Images in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture*, eds Brianne Cohen and Alexander Streitberger (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016), 64. Cohen discusses *The Wave*, but although her analysis of that work and of two other recent audiovisual pieces refers to forensics aesthetics, 'slow violence', and globalized environmental degradation, it does not address the relationship between landscape and temporality. Her main concern is instead with "a historical field causality of violence", an expression that she borrows from the research group Forensic Architecture.

Fig.3.
WB, #22 by Sophie Ristelhueber, 2005, colour photograph, silver print mounted on aluminium, 120 x 150 cm, © Sophie Ristelhueber & Jerôme Poggi Gallery, Paris

This photograph shows the different forms and materials used to cut and block the roads and paths of the West Bank, to which the initials of the title refer.

timescales, thus posing an additional problem of representing the intricate temporal nature of violent operations.

In light of these two representational obstacles — erasure and lengthy timescales — this paper analyses how the hidden (or invisible) and durational forms of violence inscribed on the landscape can be apprehended and critically assessed in *The Wave*. Negotiating in the present an execution that took place nearly a century ago and left an invisible trace on this landscape is an intricate endeavour. This article asks: How does *The Wave* present a filmic figuration of a form of violence that stretches across time and is not necessarily sensational?[9] This question is examined through a close reading of the work, investigated through the temporalities denoted by the categories of '*longue durée*', which refers explicitly to all-but-permanent historical structures, and 'slow violence', which Nixon defines as a violence that "occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction, that is dispersed across time and space".[10] Typically not perceived as violence at all, 'slow violence' surfaces via the gap in the way spectacular and unspectacular time are perceived and experienced. Exploring questions of invisibility related to unresolved episodes of social violence bound to the remote landscape of Castilla–La Mancha, and scrutinizing the intricate temporal layers present in forms of 'slow violence' bound to the land, my analysis revolves around an articulation of the element of time and its complicated relationship to landscape.

THE PAST RESURFACING THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE: *THE WAVE*

In collaboration with the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (ARMH),[11] a Spanish political group working to expose and denounce the cruelties of the Civil War by retracing undocumented burial sites, Vanagt and Vermeire emphasize processes that, although invisible in the landscape, nevertheless continue to define it. For twenty-one days, archaeologists and volunteers from the ARMH worked in Castilla–La Mancha to unearth the bones

9 The terms 'sensational' and 'spectacular' stem from Nixon's invitation to engage a different kind of violence that is neither spectacular nor erupts into instant sensational visibility, playing out across a range of temporal scales. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

10 Ibid., 2.

11 Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory.

of these victims. On the first day of the excavation, a digging crane gently loosened the top layer of soil, until the archaeologists present for the dig encountered a skull with a bullet hole.[12] Thenceforward, they continued their work by hand, and gradually the skeletons began to appear, only to disappear again into the earth from which they had been exhumed. The families of the nine victims were present at the scene and, after a belated funeral, the remains of the nine victims were put back into the earth, to disappear into the realm of invisibility once more. The artists remained on site and documented the excavation for the duration of the operation.

The act of filming this specific landscape derives from an impetus to explore and experience places that were once sites of violence. However, Vanagt and Vermeire approached the land as something that they cannot have unmediated access to, because the type of violence that is specifically at work in Castilla–La Mancha stretches across time. The video offers several perspectives of this landscape, although at regular intervals the camera is placed directly into the earth, inside the pit where the archaeologists are digging, as a result of which the filmic surface is entirely covered with soil. Every day, the artists chose a more or less fixed viewpoint (the general view of the grave).

The film opens on a black screen, accompanied by crunching noises, the source of which becomes clear some seconds later when a digging machine rhythmically penetrating the unearthed soil appears on the screen. This opening shot in media res, portraying a pile of loose earth, produces an uncanny impression that induces some hesitation in the viewer: is something being buried or excavated? The voice-over that follows, accompanied by a panoramic, almost pastoral view of the landscape of Castilla–La Mancha, explains the particularity of the location, which today serves as a repository of the atrocities inflicted during the Civil War. A male narrator explains in Spanish that some family members are not sure if they want the excavation to begin; later we understand that he is a member of the ARMH giving a presentation on the exhumation project. After

12 As described on the artists' websites: Sarah Vanagt, "Balthasar," accessed 27 July 2018, http://balthasar.be/work/item/the-wave; and Katrien Vermeire, "The Wave, a Film (20') and a Photo Series, 2012," accessed 27 July 2018, http://www.katrienvermeire.com/the-wave/.

revealing her identity as a granddaughter, a voice from the audience states that this is a harrowing decision for people like her (01:51 min.). "And what if the bodies are not there," she pursues. "You know what happened in the case of Garcia Lorca, I mean, what if the bodies are not there?" (02:10 min.).[13] Younger relatives, who are further removed from the victims in time, harbour some moral reservations, but the viewer does not get to see this hesitation as the speakers never appear on screen. Moreover, the full details of the execution

Fig.4.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 01:22 © Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

(when, who, where) are not given to the spectators. The only thing they are aware of up to this moment is that there has been an execution on this spot and that somebody is giving a talk to an audience.

The absence of human figures is countered by the backdrop against which this powerful narration unfolds: a mountain view (Fig. 4), initially misty and blurry, eventually unveils the rural, hilly surroundings. The setting appears isolated, making it an ideal execution site. French historian Fernand Braudel, a pioneer of geo-history, analysed the societal landscape of the Mediterranean, with its specific geological features, as the ultimate setting where the slow fluctua-

13 After he had been executed at the start of the Civil War, Federico Garcia Lorca's remains were thought to be have been found thanks to research conducted by an international team of experts. However, it was later revealed that they would probably be unable to locate his remains as Lorca's body was thrown into a water well after he was summarily executed on the night of 18 August 1936. James Badcock, "Remains of Federico García Lorca 'hidden at the bottom of a well'," accessed 9 March 2018, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/13/remains-of-federico-garca-lorca-hidden-at-the-bottom-of-a-well/.

tions of history take place. In his first major work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1995),[14] Braudel elaborated on the theory of timescales as well as the interaction between them (*longue durée, conjonctures,* and *événements*),[15] suggesting that the history of societies and landscapes resides in the '*longue durée*', the long term, emphasizing, however, that the play between these various strata of time produces historical meaning. As his work on the Mediterranean Sea gave rise to a series of relevant publications on the long-term development of landscapes,[16] a closer look at his arguments about landscape and time provides some insight into the notion of temporality and its connection to the environment.[17]

Braudel conceives the landscape as a witness, a merger of the past and the present. His approach must be seen in light of the new historiographical method he was working to establish, which consists of delving into the course of history through changes — slow, at plate-tectonic pace, and invisible to the human eye — in the natural environment.[18] Braudel investigates long-term, definitive forces in history, which he famously called the '*longue durée*'; this temporal movement is produced through slow, almost geological, societal interaction with the geography and environment over a very long term. Ultimately, Braudel's introduction of this longer-scale temporality broke with the vacuous idea of geography as a mere unchanging backdrop, as the scenery for human activity. Close attention to geographical structures in historical analysis allowed Braudel to weave cultural and natural time into one narrative.[19] To quote Braudel himself: "Lucien Febvre used to say 'history is man'. I on the other hand say: 'history is man and everything else.' Everything is history: soil, climate, geological movements."[20] As a consequence, Braudelian historiography paved the way for the integration of geography and environment into the study of history, which had until then remained unexplored by historians through the ages (his method, incidentally, was formulated against nineteenth-century historiography). Braudel argued that history writing, with its focus on the high frequency and rapid shifts in politics, had overlooked other time frames. By

14 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vols 1–3 1949, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995). The first edition of the study dates to 1949 but the doctoral thesis from which it originates was written in the 1930s.

15 The long-term, towards which Braudel showed a clear inclination (and which constitutes his most considerable contribution to historiography), the conjunctural, and the 'event', as the nexus of a linear conception of history.

16 Kolen and Renes, "Landscape Biographies: Key Issues," 39.

17 It is appropriate to note that the legacy of the Annales School has been gaining renewed attention from scholars, in particular thanks to what is perhaps its cornerstone, the insistence on the '*longue durée*', which is especially important to the development of the category of 'deep time', and to considering the temporal imperatives required for narrating the Anthropocene.

18 Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée: L'espace et l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985), 31.

19 Stephen W. Sawyer, "Time after Time: Narratives of the *Longue Durée* in the *Anthropocene*," *Transatlantica* 1 (2015), 6.

disposing of the micro-temporality of a single event (like an execution), he shifted the tools of historical analysis towards a construction of time that embraces large temporal periods and geographical amplitudes. Accordingly, Braudelian history also led historians to shift their gaze away from what he called '*histoire événementielle*', with its focus on the trajectories of individual agents, subjects, and actors, and to attend instead to the geographical environment as a possible entry to the study of the past. In his view, "events are dust" because events are finite.[21] While there is no doubt that these events occurred, some events were recorded at the time of occurrence, whereas others were not, and never are, recognized as events in the first place, meaning that they are ultimately left undocumented.[22]

In the case of the execution in Castilla–La Mancha in June 1939, the sole preoccupation with the short temporality of the event, or the focus on the individual identities of the victims, might have been insufficient to capture either the durational violence at work, or, more importantly, the aftermaths of that violence, which stretch all the way into the present. The legacy of Franco's regime still looms over Spanish politics, and even though the regime is long gone, its repercussions in the present are active and several of its aspects remain unresolved.[23] As a result, a cinematic depiction of this cross-temporal violence, such as the one *The Wave* explores, must account for forms of engagement that reach beyond immediate spectacles of suffering.

A closer look at the opening scene, the panoramic view of the Spanish countryside, offers a relevant entry to examine the potential of the Braudelian articulation of space and time for the study of the past in *The Wave* (Fig. 5). It may be thought that this initial mountain scene betrays a perspectivist's view of this same landscape, that is to say, it implies a subject gazing at it. However, film scholar Martin Lefebvre wonders in his reading of cultural geographer John Wylie if "a landscape is the world we are living in or a scene we are looking at from afar", in his attempt to leave aside perspectival constructions of

20 "Lucien Febvre disait: 'L'histoire c'est l'homme'. Je dis quant à moi : 'L'histoire c'est l'homme et le reste'. Tout est histoire: le sol, le climat, les mouvements géologiques […]" Fernand Braudel, "Une vie pour l'histoire (Interview with F. Ewald and J. J. Brochier)", *Magazine Littéraire* 212, (1984), 18–24.

21 "Les événements sont poussière". Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II*, vol. 2 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), 223.

22 Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 188.

23 A relevant recent example is the decision to exhume Franco's body from its resting place in the Valle de los Caídos. See Raphael Minder, "Plan to Exhume Franco Renews Spain's Wrestle with History," accessed 30 August 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/07/world/europe/spain-franco.html. For an account on the literal and symbolical 'exhuming' of the Francoist legacy in contemporary Spanish culture, see Eloy E. Merino and Hari Rossi, eds, *Traces of Contamination: Unearthing the Francoist Legacy in Contemporary Spanish Discourse* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005).

Fig.5.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 02:45
© Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

landscape.[24] In his theorization of a spectator's landscape, or an intentional cinematic landscape — meaning a landscape that arises as an object of contemplation — he urges the viewer to never attribute independence to the setting of a film. One must allow for a larger picture of human–land interaction, one that takes into account the fact that a landscape is pregnant with the past, that it carries historical time, and is defined by multiple forces. Vanagt and Vermeire address landscape as a living actor, an active participant not only in the community's quest to make amends for a violent past, but also in the larger search to remediate the injustices of Spain's recent history. The artists give voice to the landscape; through the vertical movement of the camera inside the unearthed land of Castilla–La Mancha, they attempt to reveal its hidden nature.

INSIDE THE LAND

24 Martin Lefebvre, "On Landscape in Narrative Cinema," *Revue canadienne d'études cinématographiques* 20.1 (2011), 62.

After the opening scene, the camera suddenly abandons the horizontal approach to the landscape and shifts its gaze inwards: it literally goes inside the

earth. The screen surface is immersed in the striated soil, almost making the soil come alive in a direct encounter with the earth and the historical layers that encompass it. Technically speaking, what passes before our eyes is the stitching together of about 9,000 high-resolution photographs (not film stills). The viewer may get the feeling that there are absent frames, but that is only the time passing in the series of photographs, in between every single shot.[25] The important element here is the filmic technique that Vanagt and Vermeire use to depict the vibrant materiality of the soil. Through the use of stop-motion, the

25 The artists, email message to author, 12 March 2017.

Fig.6.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 03:26 © Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

Fig.7.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 03:35 © Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

viewer sees different shades of light crossing the scene and revealing a moving image that has the capacity to reorganize time. One series of photographs in a single scene, which in filmic time corresponds to something ranging from one to three minutes, could represent up to eight hours of work by the archaeologists.[26] In film theory, stop-motion is defined as the photographing of a scene or a situation for trick effect through a stop-and-start procedure rather than through a continuous run of the camera.[27] Stopping the camera for a period of time gives an elliptical quality to the image of the depicted scene or situation, and the objects in the frame seem to appear and disappear in flashes.

In the case of *The Wave*, the stopping of the camera is replaced by the instantaneous capacity of a single photographic shot, since the artists use a photo camera, blurring the photographic and the filmic medium. Crucial here is the way through which the immobilized camera and the subtleness of movement in each scene allow the photographic dimension of the filmic image to emerge. In the first shots of the soil, the viewer sees no clues of the presence of human remains (Figs 6, 7). Instead, the moving image, through the depiction of the digging of the earth, translates the passage of time into an act that reveals its materiality. Intriguingly, even though the earth is dug, no equipment for this purpose appears over the course of the film: no trowel, no mattock, not even a human hand.[28] The level of the earth descends almost magically, as if a wind had triggered an invisible wave of exhumations to roll over the country,[29] and as if the excavation of one grave would somehow trigger the excavation of another, and so on — all thanks to the activities of the ARMH.

This wind blowing over the surface of the landscape is insistent and enduring enough to delve deeper into the earth, where it eventually starts revealing signs of human presence. After some minutes, *The Wave* brings into view, piece by piece, the first signs of the archaeological expedition (a red flag used to indicate a specific body part, or a small plastic bag), until gradually human remains become visible (Figs 8, 9). One of the first body parts is a foot, easily

26 The artists, email message to author, 12 March 2017.

27 Franck Eugene Beaver, “stop-action cinematography, stop motion,” *Dictionary of Film Terms: The Aesthetic Companion to Film Art* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 224–25.

28 The only exception is the use of a small mattock in one of the brief depictions of the archaeological operation from a horizontal perspective.

29 This link to the title of the work is explicitly claimed by the artists. Sarah Vanagt, email to author, 14 March 2017.

Fig.8.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 04:22
© Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

identifiable due to the old, decaying shoe, its form is still discernible, clinging to it. Suddenly, though, this deathly depiction, shown from a vertical camera standpoint, is replaced by a horizontal view of the landscape, only this time the horizontal shot takes in a broader view of the rural surroundings and of the archaeological site itself. This particular scene lasts less than a minute, at which point the image returns to verticality; as the video progresses, more and more details of the skeletons appear through vertical camera views. Throughout the

Fig.9.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 05:05
© Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

film, a back-and-forth movement between brief landscape views and longer inside-the-land scenes is rhythmically performed.

The brevity of the horizontal views of the landscape compared to the lengthiness of the vertical views of the 'pregnant' landscape (the grave) suggests that the traditional — horizontal — landscape view is insufficient for the task of rendering an episode of violence that still haunts the present. Indeed, the geographer Jessica Dubow notes: "Landscape outlives history; it surpasses it. Over time — and almost as a function of its earth, its soil — landscape absorbs the events played out on its surface; it inters the marks of past practices as much as it bears its traces".[30] Following Dubow, history may 'decompose' in the landscape — this is illustrated on a material level through the decaying process of the human bodies — but, significantly, the violence that is connected to the landscape still has an impact on the present moment. As a result, what the vertical views succeed in doing is to invest the land with a temporal dimension, so often lacking from traditional understandings of landscape. Tim Ingold, already aware of this fallacy, explains that landscape, when set against the duration of human memory and experience, may be easily taken to establish a baseline of permanence.[31]

However, as Robert Pogue Harrison has shown, the earth has an erosive capacity: when it receives the dead, it becomes the site of their disappearance, and at first sight, erases every sign of them and therefore of their history. And the surest way to take possession of a place and secure it as one's own is to bury one's dead in it. Burying then is an act of power. Landscape, through the erasure of its own readability, as Pogue Harrison suggests, is an agent of power, perhaps even independent of human actions.[32] Moreover, the entire world of the living, according to Pogue Harrison, is permeated by the dead, from whom the living inherit their obsessions, their burdens, their causes. In connection with this point, Julia Kristeva has noted that what is particular about the violence of men is that if silenced — especially if silenced — the violence spreads

30 Jessica Dubow, "The Art Seminar," *in Landscape Theory,* eds Rachel Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (London: Routledge, 2008), 100.

31 Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," 166. At this point, it is important to stress that the interaction between the different timescales Braudel argued for remained largely untouched by scholarship on landscape and time, which insist exclusively on the '*longue durée*'. More anthropological approaches to time, such as the ones suggested by Ingold and Bender, eventually put forth issues of human memory as well in their elaboration of landscape. Hence, *The Wave*, with its overlapping of human and earthly durations, demands a theoretical framework that accounts for both timespans.

32 Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 15.

to the next generations.[33] In the case of *The Wave*, this violence was fiercely silenced through the secrecy of the operation, which, moreover, remained masked until the burial site was revealed by the ARMH. Vanagt and Vermeire chose to mediate this silenced violence through the landscape that carries it. What happens when the dead resurface from the earth? Indeed, one could argue that the power relation denoted by the archetypal marking of place, for example with a grave, is reversed[34] and radically so when the unearthing discloses a hidden aspect of the landscape. As a result, a combination of the erosive capacity of the earth and the erasure of the readability of a landscape is precisely what can make the latter appear as a topography that changes only marginally. *The Wave* puts in question this faith in the landscape's permanence by highlighting the historical layers of the land and by gathering the invisible forces created by the very people who inhabit this same land. In other words, *The Wave* emphasizes the dispersed temporal layers that intersect in this particular landscape: past and present.

SLOW VIOLENCE: A PAST THAT IS EVER PRESENT

In fact, what these historical events bring about is a durational violence, a form of brutality that occurred in the brief moment of a gunshot (past), but involves larger periods of time (present: despite the fact that the execution happened almost a century ago, its impact continues to haunt Spanish society, at a macro-level, and family members, at a micro-level). Having addressed the form of the work and the way it revisits traditional landscape aesthetics, it is important to analyse how *The Wave* activates the violent historical residue dormant in a landscape. Nixon introduces the notion of 'slow violence' precisely to enable an account for a type of violence that operates across long periods, but one that erases the possibility of drawing a straightforward line between cause and effect. The implications of that conflict, consequently, need to be traced beyond the causal nature of the event of the execution. A closer look at Nixon's formulation is worthwhile here, since the notion of the '*longue durée*' is

33 "La violence des hommes a ceci de particulier que même si on la tait, surtout si on la tait, elle se propage aux générations suivantes," Julia Kristeva, *Micropolitique* (Paris: Éditions de l'Aube, 2001), 51.

34 Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, 18.

essential to an understanding of 'slow violence'. Although Nixon never explicitly alludes to Braudel's conceptualization of '*longue durée*', the term is used in important sections of his book, notably when he asks:

> […] beyond the optical façade of immediate peril, what demons lurk in the penumbral realms of the *longue durée*? What forces distract or discourage us from maintaining the double gaze across time? And what forces — imaginative, scientific, and activist — can help extend the temporal horizons of our gaze not just retrospectively but prospectively as well? How, in other words, do we subject that shadow kingdom to a temporal optic that might allow us to see — and foresee — the lineaments of slow terror behind the façade of sudden spectacle?[35]

What Nixon is looking for are aesthetic strategies to arch over "slow terror" and the "façade of sudden spectacle". In his view, the semiotic conventions for representing violence in media contribute to a lack of attention to attritional, open-ended forms of violence. If the reception of the direct violence of sudden spectacles takes as its focal point a particular individual or event, what about the "slow terror"? Besides the element of temporality in itself, the productivity of Nixon's discussion also lies in the tension he identifies between space and time, and in the subsequent bridging he eventually conducts when recognizing the necessity to account for the two in their deep entanglement. Drawing from the work of John Berger, who argues that "it is space and not time that hides consequences from us,"[36] Nixon strives to prevent this spatial eminence from failing to expose the temporal dissociations that permeate violent events.[37] Thus, through his reading of the *'longue durée',* he searches for ways to grasp long-term, intergenerational forms of violence that persevere in the present.
Although Nixon eventually identifies the space of literature as the realm where this '*longue durée*' can be grasped, recent scholarship has also suggested the moving image as a potential realm for the representation of 'slow violence'.[38] An example can be seen in the work of film scholar Juan Llamas-Rodriguez,

35 Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 62.

36 Ibid., 45.

37 Ibid., 45. In this passage, Nixon quotes Edwar Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*, who in turn discusses John Berger and his valuable contribution in the field art history on the intersection of time and space. The aforesaid initial quote comes from John Berger, *The Look of Things*, (New York: Viking, 1974), 40.

38 See, for instance, Ewa Hanna Mazierska, "Representation of Slow Violence in the Films about Collapsed East European State Farms," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 22.2 (2016), 327–50. See also the chapter "Slow Violence in Film," in Christine L. Marran, *Ecology without Nature: Aesthetics for a Toxic World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 55–89.

who reads 'slow violence' as an attempt to 'environmentalize' violence; that is, to find ways to attend to dispersed temporalities and spatialities, to account for reverberations and forms of feedback, and to trace implications that exceed the straightforwardness of cause and effect.[39] Any attempt to 'environmentalize' violence, he suggests, requires an 'ecologic' approach, that is, a set of interconnected systems of human and non-human relations.[40] In the context of a film scene, an analytical move to 'environmentalize' violence consists of tracing macro-level configurations within a sequence that still retains a micro-level specificity. Seen from that perspective, the landscape depicted in *The Wave* is merely a single instance in a wider system of entangled relations that have produced a much larger number of still undiscovered collective burial sites in Spain. Along that same line, in their choice to show the remains of the executed, Vanagt and Vermeire make no attempt to personalize them, that is, to sharpen the micro-level; rather, they attempt to articulate the micro-level within the macro-level, and vice-versa, so that the juxtaposition of the materiality of the earth with an apparently generic landscape becomes the space where such an articulation becomes possible, because it conveys the continuity of the 'slow violence' in the present.

39 Juan Llamas-Rodriguez, "Towards a Cinema of Slow Violence," *Film Quarterly* 71.3 (2018), 32. This article examines depictions of narco-trafficking violence in contemporary Mexican cinema.

40 Ibid., 31.

Fig.10.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 13:05
© Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

Fig.11.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 13:34 © Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

Concretely, how is this performed in the video? *The Wave* retains the aforementioned micro-level specificity, but achieves it without falling into the trap of individualization, whether of the victims or of the family members present for the funeral. The artists craft an image of the past that is inhabited both by human and non-human relationships: for example, the invisible presence of the archaeologists doing the dig is contrasted with the decaying power of the earth and, in this way, the work succeeds in making the land of Castilla–La Mancha the Braudelian subject of its story. The scenic transition, for instance, makes images fade into one another at varying speeds, perhaps as a way of hinting at the variety of temporalities that are present in the landscape. Occasionally, in slow, more contemplative movements, the images fade into one another. At one point, the static photographic images dissolve into one another in such a subtle and precise overlapping that small yellow flags pop up mysteriously in the frame, one after the other, in sequential order (Figs 10, 11).[41] The number on each flag stands for one executed individual, a reduction of subjectivities to mere figures of scientific classification. Moreover, the gradual and steady appearance of numbers on the screen that reveal the way the bodies in the

41 Cohen also references this scene, though she connects it to Eyal Weizman's work on forensic aesthetics. See Cohen, "Eco-aesthetics, Massacres and the Photofilmic," 77.

grave were stacked, like a joint entity, conveys an image of totality. Indeed, if the bodies can be distinguished from one another it is due to archaeology and forensic science. Be that as it may, the fact that they appear as a collective mass of soil and bones creates a larger, more widespread picture of violence. In its anonymity, this image could outline a broader frame of violence, one perhaps active across different landscapes in the Spanish countryside: a 'slow violence' that can be uncovered thanks to the supposed wave of exhumations rolling across Spain, to return to the image that Vanagt suggested earlier.[42]

Fig.12.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 11:12
© Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

This particular scene appears towards the end of the video and, in its alluring slowness, it stands in sharp contrast to the rhythmic pace that characterizes the stop-motion used elsewhere in the film. It is important to note that the scene that precedes the identification of the bodies with the yellow flags is that of the families gathering for the funeral, a scene defined by its rhythmic pace. Viewers can barely distinguish the family members as they dissolve in the dark light of the afternoon, and the only element that gives the scene any visibility

42 See footnote 29.

is the frantic on-and-off of photo cameras flashing as they try to grasp the last image of the victims in the waning light (Figs 12, 13). Besides drawing attention away from the human presence, this scene, which uses a horizontal camera view, has a much quicker pace; by alternating swiftly between dark and light, it simultaneously erases and reveals the landscape (Fig. 14). The gradual juxtaposition of different rhythms transforms the '*longue durée*' of 'slow violence' into an instance that becomes ever more elusive to attempts to frame or contain it.

Fig.13.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 11:49 © Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

Art historian Christine Ross, in her comprehensive study of aesthetic experimentations with time in contemporary art, discusses Braudel's relevance to artists dealing with the past. More specifically, she argues that these artists try to remove this semi-stillness of the '*longue durée*' in order to 'presentify' the historical narrative, productively opening the past to the present by disclosing its irresolution.[43] That is what *The Wave* does when it exposes an aspect of the past that still lacks resolution and extends it — and with it the past — into the

43 See the chapter "The Historical Sublime, or *Longue Durée* Revisited," in Christine Ross, *The Past Is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 279–305, which examines the work of Stan Douglas and his filmic exploration of an episode of injustice dating back to Canada's colonial past.

present in intricate ways. By bringing the material remains of the past into a temporally limited visibility, the work fuses past and present and provides an articulation of time and landscape that lays bare the historical continuity of 'slow violence', perhaps even disrupting that violence momentarily.

The final sequences play an important part in this possible disruption. It is only at the end of the film that the names of the victims, their dates of birth, and some brief information about the execution itself appear against a black background. In other words, it is only after twenty minutes of landscape views that alternate between vertical and horizontal, fast- and slow-paced scenes, that viewers are given basic information about the event; they must watch the full video before gaining any specific knowledge about the event. The delay is intentional: its aim is not to uncover the specificity of this particular moment in history or a single historical event, but to generate multiple forms of tem-

Fig.14.
Still from *The Wave* by Sarah Vanagt & Katrien Vermeire, 2012, 11:51
© Katrien Vermeire & Sarah Vanagt/ Balthasar

porality and impel the viewer to become attentive to this temporal diversity. Perhaps this decision to provide basic information (names, dates, location) only at the end of the viewing experience serves to displace our attention, to focus it, not so much on a factual, but on a macro-level configuration of violence. The filmic images of the landscape, in their variety of viewpoints and temporalities, enact this displacement. To put it another way, the use of the Braudelian '*longue durée*', which is materially contained in the landscape and infused with violence, succeeds in overcoming the specificity of these events and, in so doing, accounts for larger forms of violence and makes the past matter in the present.

CONCLUSION

This essay examines the notion of '*longue durée*' in connection with the concept of 'slow violence' as it is embedded in less visible landscapes, such as isolated Franco-era execution sites in the Spanish countryside. After a close examination of Fernand Braudel's and Rob Nixon's positions on time, a detailed analysis of sequences of *The Wave* shows the efficiency of Vanagt and Vermeire's artistic, spatio-temporal investigation. Their work renders an articulation of both time (the slow time of history) and landscape as a means to underline the interdependency of the two. *The Wave*'s exploration of a past that lacks resolution performs, even if unwittingly, Braudel's '*longue durée*', and that performance accounts for the binding relationships between landscape, the time of history, and 'slow violence'.

By examining the varying-speed techniques used in *The Wave*, this article shows that Vanagt and Vermeire attend to the dispersed temporalities of 'slow violence', and that they afford the filmic medium new ways to reveal the imperceptible passage of time that hides violence. Through the exploration of a past that lacks resolution, *The Wave* succeeds in extending this irresolution into the present: Vanagt and Vermeire are interested in rendering the past present. The

decisions to leave aside normative depictions of violence, to avoid individualization, and to make the surface of the earth the subject of their story are all governed by the attempt to grasp the ungraspable.

The work succeeds in allowing us to see space as a multiplicity of durations, and the binding spatio-temporal relationship, in its turn, enables a reflection on the invisibility of some forms of violence that extend into the present. In doing so, Vanagt and Vermeire suggest a concept of landscape, not as backdrop or scenery, but as a constitutive and active part of human life and society at large, as a temporal entity that shapes our present and future. In short, *The Wave* treats landscape as an ongoing process shaping the present, in its exposure and subsequent recognition of the traumatic past of the war and of Franco's long dictatorship, that still lays intact in mass graves. This gesture echoes Spain's current political climate, amidst attempts to confront the ghosts of the past, through the design of the first legal document explicitly dealing with them: the Historical Memory Law enacted in 2007, and the more recent decision to establish a truth commission to investigate crimes against humanity committed by the former dictatorial regime.[44]

In light of the above, *The Wave* invites a radical rereading of traditional landscape aesthetics, as suggested at the start of this article. Referencing a landscape afflicted by a not-so-distant past, it comes as a valuable addition to a growing body of scholarship exploring the many ways through which landscapes undergo human intervention, about how they intertwine with politics and become depositories of history. Drawing further into the present the unresolved challenges and pending issues related to the lasting legacy of political violence, contemporary artistic landscape representations are a critical tool in a culture that is all-too-often amnesic. Such a gesture could be seen as a trenchant reflection on the invisible mechanisms that cause a violent past to silently seep into the present moment and, hence, as a move towards a deeper reflection on this same past. Notably, what Vanagt and Vermeire attempt to demon-

44 A law that has, nevertheless, been called into question by different political parties for its inefficiency in retroactively bringing justice. For a critical approach, see: Mónica López Lerma, "The Ghosts of Justice and the Law of Historical Memory," *Conserveries mémorielles* 9 (2011). For an analysis of the more up-to-date truth commission, see Natalia Junquera, "Spanish government to spearhead efforts to find Civil War victims," accessed 10 October 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/07/12/inenglish/1531388057_522551.html.

strate is that the ways landscapes are looked at, dealt with, and moulded today have a crucial role to play in the process of renegotiating the past.[45]

45 I wish to thank the artists for their willingness to answer my ceaseless questions during the production of this article, Dr. Emiliano Battista for his sharp insights on Fernand Braudel and the editors of this journal for their keen editorial input.

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FRAMING THE VIEWER:
EDVARD MUNCH'S HYBRID GENRES

Timea Andrea Lelik
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From the beginning of his career, landscape was an integral part of Edvard Munch's compositions depicting figures. Munch's paintings show a complex entanglement between the subjects painted and their surrounding environment, which is a characteristic perceivable in his most iconic composition The Scream. Evading the conventional aesthetics of classical painting categories, these compositions undermine formal structures of conventional portraiture or landscape painting as they juxtapose elements of both types, thus creating a hybrid genre of the two. Taking as case studies paintings from the turn of the twentieth century, this paper will analyse the manner in which these canvases depart from conventional art historical genres to create new formulas for understanding human subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION

Edvard Munch's works resist clear categorization in terms of traditional genres of art. His canvases are idiosyncratic interpretations of existing categories that demonstrate Munch's ingenious ability to manipulate pictorial traditions and the perception of onlookers alike. In this article I analyse compositions that have not previously been categorized as portraits, but because of the attention given to a central subject in the composition, could be read as such. These paintings undermine formal structures of conventional portraiture, as they juxtapose elements of portraiture and other genres, thus creating what I refer to as a 'hybrid genre'. I therefore argue that these paintings depart from conventional art historical genres by introducing compositional and executional devices such as the mixture of landscape and portraiture in order to create

unexpected and direct connections between painting and onlooker.

I further argue that Munch's fascination with transient subjects such as emotions (melancholy, anxiety, jealousy, etc.) transform the works into present experiences, as they do not ponder past or future stories of certain subjects, but rather focus on the depiction and experience of an ongoing moment. Their dedication to the rendering of current emotions is what anchors the works in the present. The devices employed in inducing this ongoing feeling — such as the introduction of landscape in the genre of portraiture — are part of the mechanism that I call the 'framing of the viewer', which transforms these canvases into lived experiences for the onlookers.

Since the portrait is an essential tool in creating this lived experience, I structure my analysis around works that can largely be referred to as portraits, even though Munch's portraits cannot be categorized as one homogeneous group of works. I categorize the chosen canvases as portraits based on commonly accepted assertions about the genre in Western art history. Jean M. Borgatti explains that traditionally the genre of portraiture emphasizes individuality, with face and body dominating the picture plane:

> Western art features representation, and the portrait canon stresses physiognomic likeness — incorporating the idea that personality may be communicated through idiosyncratic facial features and expression. Thus we accept nameless but representational images as portraits, whether or not we have the documentation to provide us with a specific identity.[1]

The conventional canon of portraiture stresses that as long as the primary depicted character shows traits that could be related to his or her 'personality' or inner self, the representation becomes a portrait. It therefore becomes of secondary importance whether the existence of this subject is factual. As long as the composition shows a character with recognizable physiognomic traits,

1 Jean M. Borgatti, "Constructed Identities: Portraiture in World Art," in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 306.

we are looking at a portrait. Shearer West explains in the introduction to his elaborate study on portraiture that:

> Portraiture can be distinguished from other art categories such as history, landscape, and still life by its relationship with likeness. All portraits show a distorted, ideal, or partial view of the sitter, but portraiture as a genre is historically tied to the idea of mimesis, or likeness.[2]

Therefore, even if the main subject of the composition is depicted in an unconventional manner — compositionally or in terms of depiction — as long as this subject bears likeness to an individual, the representation becomes a portrait.

Since Munch made portraits for several purposes, at times it becomes problematic to distinguish these from other genres. For that reason, essays discussing portraits in Munch's oeuvre largely revolve around the large standing portraits that more or less comply with conventional requirements of the genre. One of the most elaborate (and recent) articles discussing portraiture in Munch's oeuvre is Øystein Ustvedt's essay "Edvard Munch's Portraits: Artistic Platform and Source of Renewal" (2013), which focuses on Munch's full-length portraits. In this article, Ustvedt explains that Munch's portraits have been excluded from thorough studies since many of these were made as commissions, which implies compromise in their execution. Nevertheless, Arne Eggum argues that Munch in fact created many such works on his own initiative and ended up keeping them in his own collection.[3] These portraits usually depict a single character on a neutral background, typically without any pictorial distractions. Ustvedt explains that conventional portraits, which were mostly commissioned or made out of friendship, can be seen throughout the artist's oeuvre.[4] Commissioned works were part of the artist's main source of income, while portrait-making validated friendships and consolidated relationships of many kinds. Even though his article focuses on the conventional aspects of these portraits, Ustvedt does comment on the unconventional manner in

2 Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12.

3 Arne Eggum, *Edvard Munch: Portretter* (Oslo: Munch-museet/Labyrinth Press, 1994), 10–11.

4 Øystein Ustvedt, "Edvard Munch's Portraits: Artistic Platform and Source of Renewal," in *Edvard Munch*, eds Mai Britt Guleng and Jon-Ove Steihaug (Milan: Skira, 2013), 232–33.

which these characters are depicted. Unusual standing poses combined with hastily executed parts of the canvas, pasted on a nearly undifferentiated background, have led to Munch's much debated success.[5] Ustvedt clarifies that soon after Munch's breakthrough as an artist in Germany, many more commissioned portraits followed, especially from the newly formed social class of art patrons, collectors, prominent social figures, writers, philosophers, and businessmen. While even his commissioned works were created in a rather unconventional manner, his originality in portraiture is most apparent in his juxtaposition of different compositional devices which lead to their evasion of strict genre categorization.

In this article, however, I do not focus on these full-length portraits but rather analyse compositions that revolve around a central subject bearing a physiognomic likeness to an individual, yet without representing his or her inner self. The subjects I discuss are not conventional sitters, that is, clearly identifiable people who modelled for the artist. I argue that in Munch's oeuvre the genre of portraiture gains a new dimension that transgresses the notion of the subject as being dependent on mimetic likeness. In the canvases that I identify as hybrid portraits, Munch takes as a starting point compositions with unknown subjects. Nevertheless, their individuality is not contingent on identity recognition, but is being constructed anew every time viewers engage with the compositions. For this reason, I refer to the depicted characters as *subjects* rather than *sitters*.

THE JUXTAPOSITION OF LANDSCAPE AND PORTRAITURE

One of the devices used by Munch to reinterpret the traditional genre of portraiture is the conversion of landscape from an auxiliary element to a vital part of the composition. As remarked by Poul Erik Tojner, the surrounding environment plays a crucial role in understanding the function of the subjects of his early canvases:

5 Ibid., 234.

> Irrespective of the distance there seems to be between the melancholic introspection of the earlier pictures and the seemingly transfigured and more action oriented life of the later ones, the basic thread that runs through Munch's work is the inscrutable relationship that exists between man and the world that surrounds him. In this chemical blend the particles can no longer be separated.[6]

Fig. 1
Edvard Munch
Inger on the Beach, 1889
126 x 121cm, Oil on canvas
Kunstmuseum, Bergen

In the late 1880s Munch began experimenting with the place of the subject in its surrounding background. *While Summer Night: Inger on the Beach* (1889) (Fig. 1) follows conventional rules of portraiture with a centrally depicted subject recognizable as the artist's sister Inger, it is a work that anticipates the importance that landscape will attain in Munch's oeuvre. In *Summer Night* one can already note a subtle absorption of the subject into her surrounding

6 Poul Erik Tojner, *Munch: In His Own Words* (Munich: Prestel, 2003), 19.

landscape. At first glance, the subject of the painting is a solitary character on a shore looking at a distant point outside the picture plane. Nevertheless, maintaining a soft colour palette of grey and blue hues, neither subject nor landscape make a particularly strong visual impact on the viewer. Subject and background form a homogeneous unveiling of anthropomorphic forms. Not only does Inger's hat replicate the colour of the rocky landscape, but her dress also emulates the shape and texture of the stones on which she rests. Her pensive facial expression is complemented by the gloomy mood invoked by the landscape, transforming the subject and the surrounding landscape into one entity.

Melancholy (1892) (Fig. 2) is a similar work that prefigures a type of hybridization of genres that begins in the mid to late 1890s in Munch's oeuvre. While the head of the main character seems to take the shape of the stones next to him, transforming this subject into a harmonious continuation of the pebbly landscape, this work could also be read as a portrait. Although highly stylized, the facial features are recognizable as an individual character. Furthermore, his melancholic state could offer indications about his personality and general

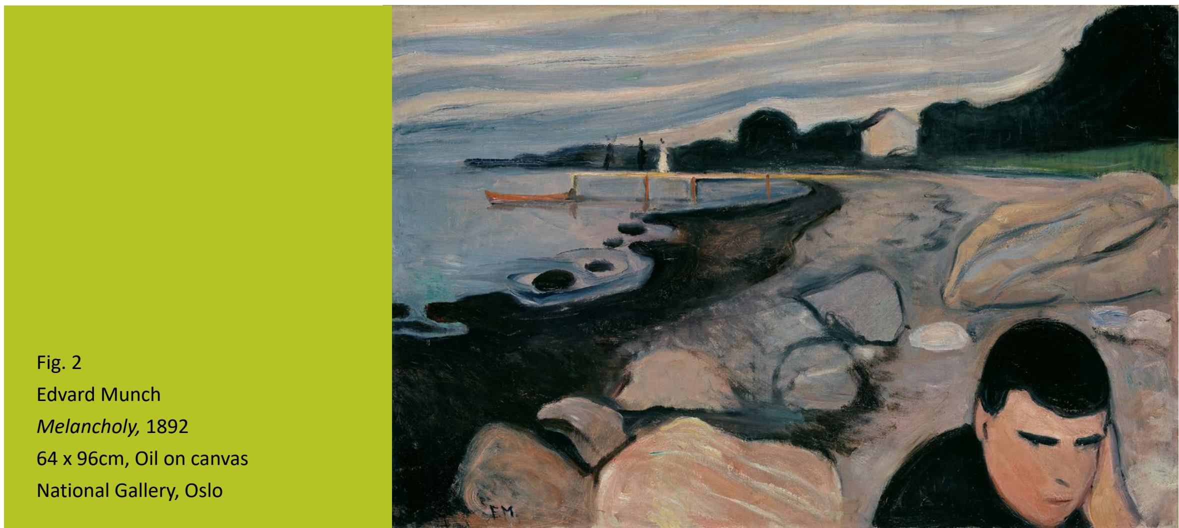

Fig. 2
Edvard Munch
Melancholy, 1892
64 x 96cm, Oil on canvas
National Gallery, Oslo

mood. Upon a closer inspection of this painting (and of the several variations of this particular image) one can see in the distance on a bridge the vague silhouettes of two figures, one dressed in white and one in black, vaguely resembling a man and a woman. The deep melancholy expressed by the central subject seems to be caused by the encounter of the figures in the far distance, which potentially transforms *Melancholy* into a sentimental genre painting. However, the predominance of the landscape in the pictorial surface, combined with the focal point that emphasizes the face of the main character, make compositions such as *Melancholy* evade strict genre categorization.

While the blurring and melting together of the subject and landscape in these compositions is achieved through subtle transformations, in works such as the iconic *The Scream* (1893) (Fig. 3) these elements become one entity in a confrontational manner. Formally, the lines underlining the entire composition continue and complement each other; in this sense, there is no distinction in terms of how the subject or the landscape are executed. Thematically, the work depicts a scream and a state of anxiety invoked and complemented by the use of blood-red and orange hues in the background. This fusion of subject and background could be read as an attempt to create a unified landscape of interior and exterior, meaning that the landscape is not so much about depicting an existing scene as about an 'interiority' where all compositional elements, including the surrounding landscape, metamorphose into the physical appearance of a present moment or state of mind. Rather than an external depiction of a character, the composition is a glimpse into the character's psyche. As Christoph Asendorf explains:

> All the techniques Munch experimented with up until 1910 were employed in an effort to achieve direct representation of something that is almost impossible to represent — Munch's strips, halos, and lines of force all are means used to visualize, in particular, the dynamics of an intrapsychic pay of forces in a world drama charged with energy.[7]

7 Christoph Asendorf, "Power, Instinct, Will — Munch's Energetic World Theater in the Context of *Fin de Siecle*," in *Edvard Munch. Theme and Variation*, ed. Klaus Albrecht Schröder (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 89.

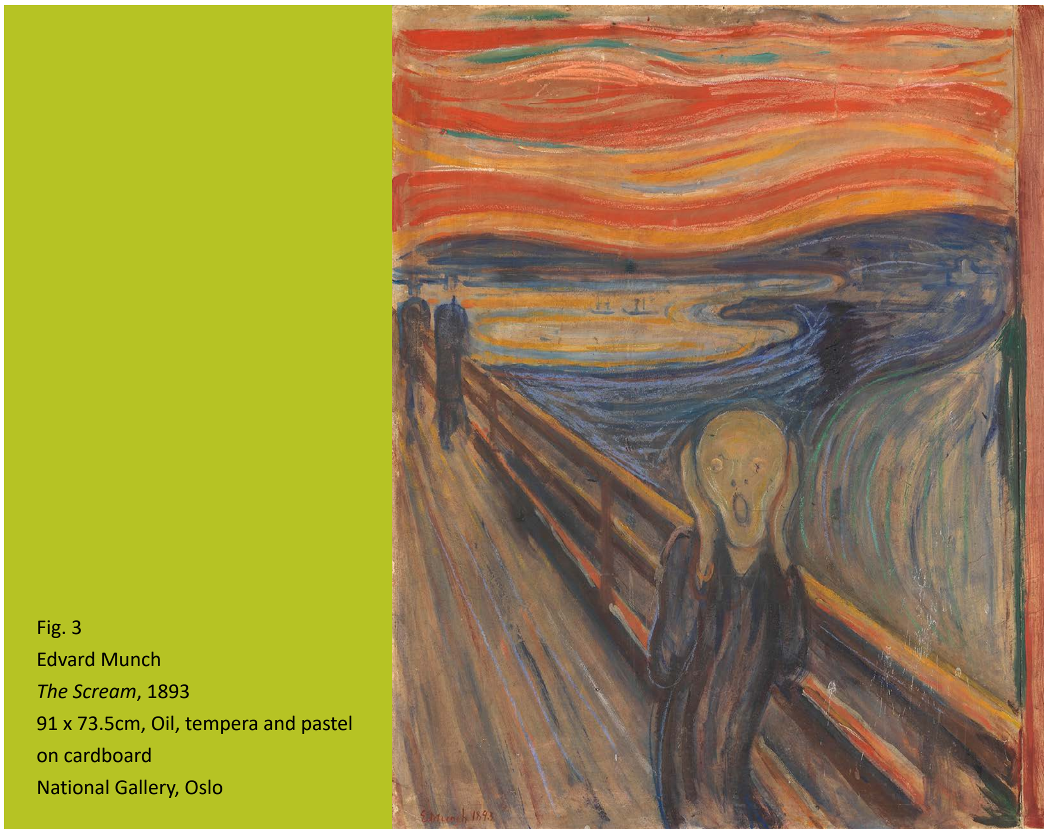

Fig. 3
Edvard Munch
The Scream, 1893
91 x 73.5cm, Oil, tempera and pastel on cardboard
National Gallery, Oslo

Munch's subjects never seem to be clearly involved in any concrete action and do not speak of the events that have happened or are to follow; rather, they suggest an ongoing present moment. The subject in *The Scream* is engaged in an act of screaming, despite the fact that there is no clear reason to do so. Reconstructing the same Ekeberg hill setting as in *The Scream, Anxiety* (1894) (Fig. 4) shows several subjects confrontationally marching towards the viewer. The faces of these characters are simple outlines. Except for the three frontal characters, all other figures are lost in the background. The expressionless faces in the foreground appear to be staring hypnotically and directly at the viewer, while engaging in a continuous march towards an undetermined des-

tination. It is unknown where these figures come from or are going; the focus is on their current engagement with the ongoing activity. As Tojner explains:

> Munch has the skill of a poster painter without actually being one. [...] He stamps out his subjects, and even though they may be executed with the most slovenly of brushes, they are still astonishingly accurately balanced,

Fig. 4
Edvard Munch
Anxiety, 1894
94 x 74cm, Oil on canvas
Munch Museum, Oslo

> and seem almost able to talk. He seems to have captured his subjects at the decisive moment in a long conversation — they are painted at exactly the right moment, capturing a kind of taciturn eloquence.[8]

This ongoing present moment that characterizes many of his compositions since the early 1890s is therefore central to the understanding of these hybrid portraits: in order to represent the un-representable, Munch must subvert the conventional roles of different genres. By unifying portrait and landscape, and at times also adding elements of other narrative genres, he propels the viewer to engage in a different, more direct reading of the canvas.

8 Tojner, *Munch: In His Own Words*, 22.

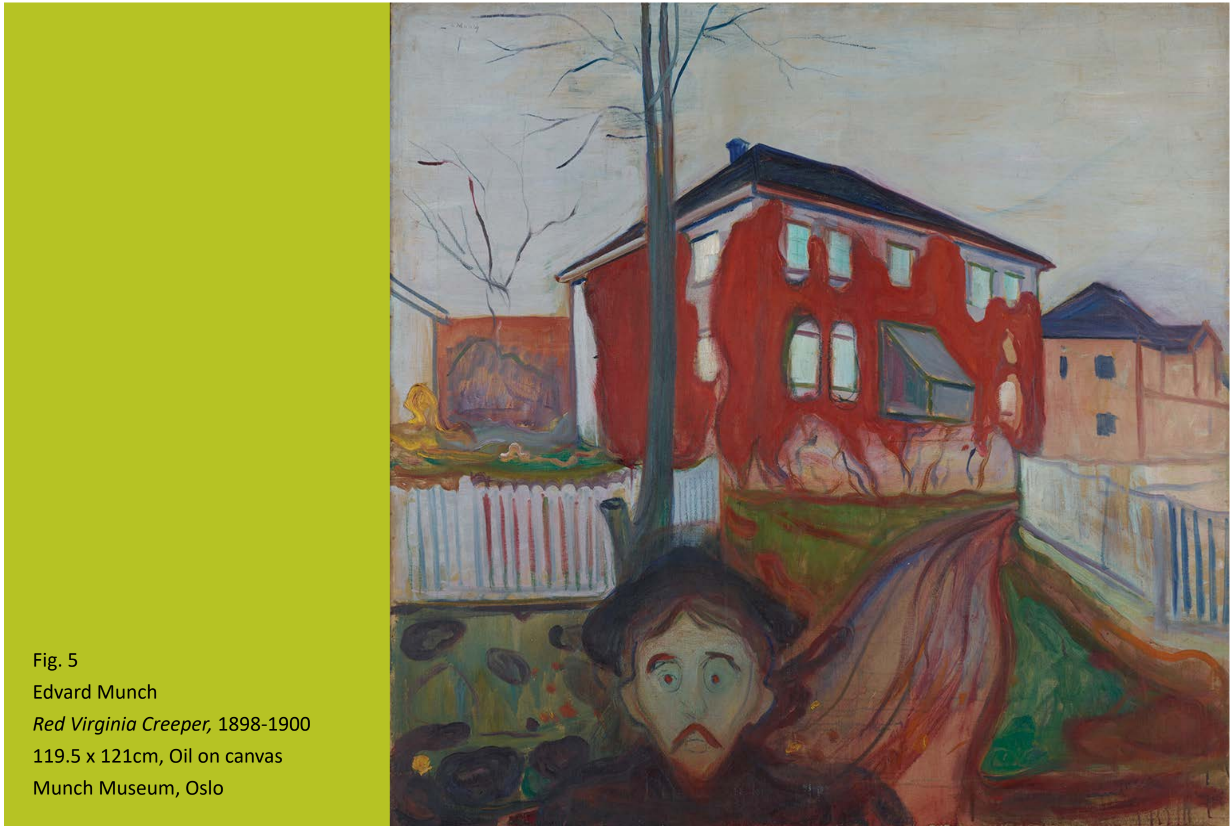

Fig. 5
Edvard Munch
Red Virginia Creeper, 1898-1900
119.5 x 121cm, Oil on canvas
Munch Museum, Oslo

Fig. 6
Edvard Munch
Street in Åsgårdstrand, 1901
88.5 x 114cm, Oil on canvas
Kunstmuseum, Basel

THE HYBRID GENRE

While *The Scream* and other compositions which rework the same theme achieve a hybrid effect in a rather visceral manner, *Red Virginia Creeper* (1898–1900) (Fig. 5) and *Street in Åsgårdstrand* (1901) (Fig. 6) make use of these devices in a more discrete way. Although these works have not been previously categorized as portraits, I refer to them as such for the attention they bestow on the preeminent character of the painting. Both compositions depict a 'main' character showing individual facial traits that allude to an inner self. Most importantly, both subjects are the trigger points of the compositions. I read these works as portraits also because of the 'curated' and attentive manner in which the central characters are portrayed. While the subjects are depicted

Fig. 7
Edvard Munch
Self-Portrait on a Trunk in the Studio, 82 Lutzowstrasse, Berlin, 1902
7.9 x 8cm
Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper
Munch Museum, Oslo

in every day circumstances, the focus is not to document everyday activities.

As these works employ similar compositional elements to Munch's photographic and painted self-portraits from around the same period, it is necessary to first discuss the role of self-portraits in Munch's oeuvre. In 1902 Munch purchased his first small No. 2 Bulls-Eye Kodak camera. Clement Cheroux explains that it was from the 1880s onward that cameras became easier to use due to the development of gelatin silver bromide, and consequently many artists of this generation took up photography.[9] Bonnard, Vuillard, Vallotton, and Khnopff were among the painters who also became amateur photographers. However, what differentiated Munch noticeably from them was the number of images

9 Clement Cheroux, "Write your Life! Photography and Autobiography," in *Edvard Munch, The Modern Eye*, eds Angela Lampe and Clement Cheroux (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 57.

he took: Munch had taken in total only 226 shots of 183 different subjects, out of which almost two thirds were self-portraits.[10]

In a recent study discussing Munch's painted self-portraits, Jon-Ove Steihaug explains that the artist's self-portraits are principally made in a self-performative manner; Munch used these portraits to stage a specific representation of himself, and consequently contributed to the general image the public would have of him.[11] Focusing mostly on his painted self-portraits, Steihaug explains that the artist intentionally depicted himself in situations and contexts with innate psychological drama. Actively staging the contexts in which he wished

10 Ibid., 58.

11 Steihaug, "Edvard Munch's Performative Self-Portraits," 13.

Fig. 8
Edvard Munch
Self-Portrait in the Garden at Åsgårdstrand, 1903
8.7 x 8.4cm
Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper
Munch Museum, Oslo

to be seen, he painted himself in Dr Jacobson's rehabilitation clinic, sick in bed in his private quarters, and naked in what seem to be the flames of hell.

Steihaug's theory is also applicable to many of the artist's camera shots. In one of the first images he took with his analogue camera, Munch presented himself in a theatrical manner. *Self-Portrait on a Trunk in the Studio, 82 Lutzow-strasse, Berlin* (1902) (Fig. 7) shows the artist in his Berlin studio surrounded by elements of his occupation (i.e. his palette, his well-known work *Evening on Karl Johan Street*). He is caught in a contemplative moment, which seems to be staged considering the fact that he orchestrated the picture himself. More interesting from a compositional perspective (since the image in the studio might still pass for a documentary shot) is his *Self-Portrait in the Garden at Åsgårdstrand* (1903) (Fig. 8), in which the artist is portrayed walking in the garden among randomly positioned artworks. Behind Munch we can see *Girls on a Bridge*, and on the right edge of the photo the outlines of another work. Even though the artist is positioned at the centre of the composition, this image is not a conventional photographic portrait, nor a documentary shot of the surrounding elements. Choosing to be depicted while walking through the garden indicates that his compositions are directed in such a way so as to reflect his role and ambition as an artist.

Tojner explains that the key to understanding the aesthetics of Munch's paintings is analysing the enclosure found in all his works and the outgoing movement that flows from this aspect: "In all his pictures, there is movement outwards, a movement which inevitably involves the viewers".[12] He goes on to explain that:

> It is not difficult to recognize this aspect of confrontation in Munch's pictures, because as you look at the picture, it catches sight of you. You are hit by it, you become the object of its approach — you are the one to release the picture from its internal tension. In a way, the viewer takes

12 Tojner, *Munch: In His Own Words,* 22.

> over the position which has previously been held by the painter. The viewer completes the relay.[13]

To elaborate further, Tojner draws a parallel between Munch and Monet, contrasting the contemplative aesthetics of Impressionism with the confrontational aspects of Post-Impressionism and Expressionism:

> Impressionism draws the sensitive person into the endless depth of the picture, as a sponge absorbs water. [...] However, this is not particularly relevant to Munch's work. Looking at his work, one does not travel anymore; one is immediately fixated in front of the painting. There is nothing before and nothing after that has any real significance when you look at Munch's work. That sudden moment of discovery, and the extreme confidence with which the painting is executed, are hallmarks of his work.[14]

The immediacy created by the continuous moment captured in Munch's works fully engages the viewer, leading to a similar type of staging as that created in his self-portraits. In this case, however, the action is better described as 'framing the viewer' than 'staging for the viewer', as Munch does not create a dramatic image of an existing subject, but rather orchestrates a dramatic set-up through which the viewer interacts with the main character. That is, instead of creating a dramatic understanding of the subject, he sets up a dramatic encounter with the subject of the painting. Attracting the viewer by using traditional genres, he subtly subverts these with interchangeable props which eventually confront the viewer and leave him with no escape from confrontation with the artwork.

The characteristics of confrontational aesthetics are made visible by depicting both the subject and the landscape. Munch, according to Tojner, "plans the space with a characteristic sloping forward. The pictures dip, they are like a chute sending the depicted subject straight into the arms of the viewer".[15] The

13 Ibid., 22.

14 Ibid., 22.

15 Ibid., 24.

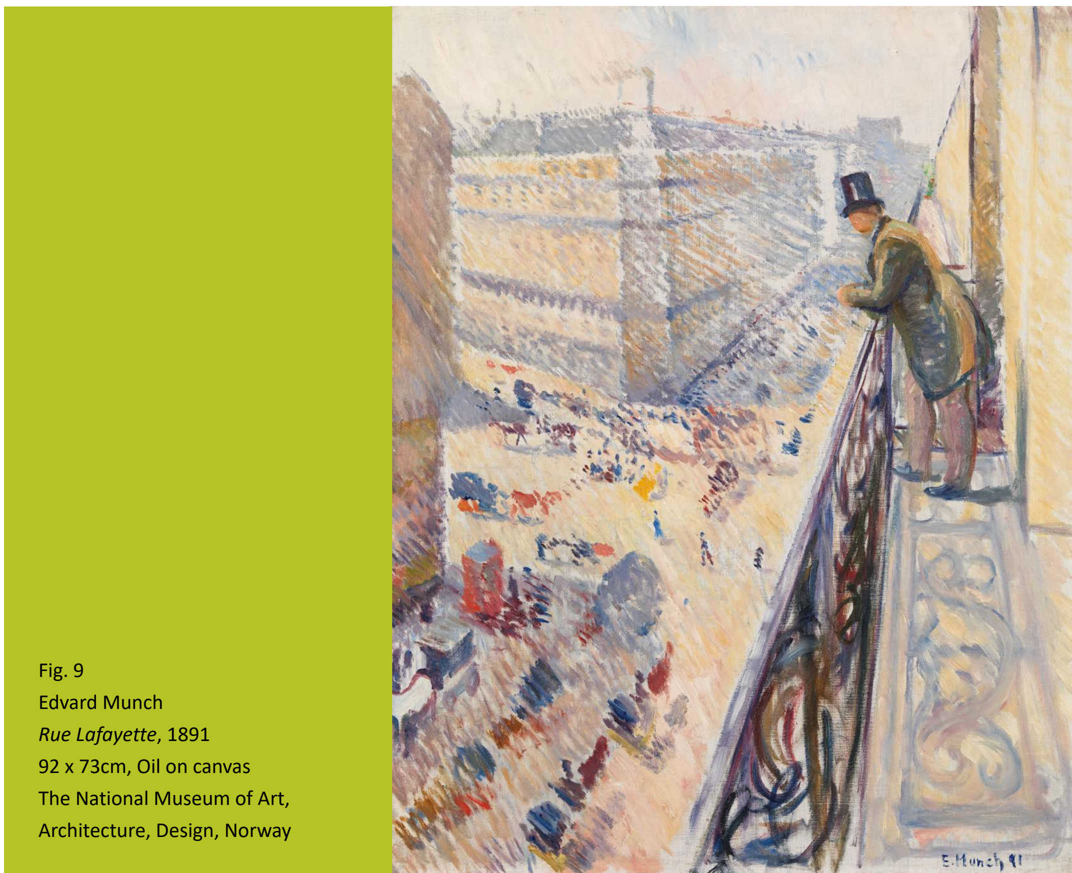

Fig. 9
Edvard Munch
Rue Lafayette, 1891
92 x 73cm, Oil on canvas
The National Museum of Art, Architecture, Design, Norway

subject is not painted in a landscape; rather the landscape is constructed in such a way that enhances the position of the subject that Munch saw fit for trapping the viewer's attention.

Munch had been developing this compositional strategy for several years before reaching the subtlety of construction present in works like *Red Virginia Creeper* and *Street in Åsgårdstrand*. His first experiments with diagonals are seen in *Rue Lafayette* (1891) (Fig. 9), which is inspired by the work of the impressionists. Here, the solitary character leaning over the balcony to gaze at the busy city life is pushed to the back of the composition. In later years,

Munch made several sketches showing a lonely man leaning over a fence. Even though this subject does not face the viewer directly, he is pushed forward to a point where he dominates the composition. The strong diagonal representation of the rail which crosses the composition from background to foreground gives the sensation that the viewer would immediately bash into this figure, creating a moment of interaction between the two.

THE GAZE

Red Virginia Creeper and *Street in Åsgårdstrand* further manipulate the viewer into engaging with the paintings' subjects. While *The Scream* brings on a direct point of interaction, the aforementioned compositions 'frame' (set-up) the viewer to become part of this interaction. In *Red Virginia Creeper* the plant covering the house in the background seems to be in a slow and continuous moment of melting down from the house to the curved road before it. The road, rather than a straightforward diagonal, takes the shape of an undulating and curling flow of lines that organically lead to the subject at the bottom of the composition. In traditional portraiture, the sitter conventionally occupies a central role, making him or her easily graspable by the gaze of the onlooker. In this painting the subject is intentionally positioned at the bottom of the composition, safe from the first glimpse of the viewer, in the point of the canvas closest to the onlooker. Munch stages a natural flow for the viewer's gaze; the house covered in the red Virginia creeper first grabs his attention. The viewer can only see the head of the character with his frenetic stare, who has made his way from the red house to the end of the road. As there are no clues in the image about what might have caused the character to leave or where he might be going, the encounter freezes the viewer and makes him or her part of the scene, even if only for a moment. Trying to read the work, the gaze organically wanders from the top to the bottom of the canvas, before the onlooker realizes that he or she has been framed to take part in this eerie moment of direct confrontation.

In this composition, another crucial element that fully engages the viewer is the subject's staring gaze. It is a common trait of Munch's works that main subjects stare directly at the viewer, with their gaze becoming a completely inextinguishable point of contact between the picture and the viewer.[16] Munch needs a focal point to release the painting, and he does so through the gaze, making this another direct bridge that reaches out to the viewer.[17] It is, therefore, crucially important for Munch to rely on the genre of portraiture to create direct interaction between canvas and onlooker, as the gaze of the main character is what locks the viewers' immediate attention.

Similar compositional elements are also at play in *Street in Åsgårdstrand* (1901). The background represents a dense, almost abstract landscape, with a descending undulating road that broadens in an almost exaggerated manner right in front of the onlooker. The viewer's gaze meets the direct stare of a female subject who is cropped at the lower part of the canvas. Her blue hat marks the centre of the composition as well as the focal point of the painting, making the transition from background to foreground. This prop has taken the shape of the rocky formations behind the subject, creating again a unity between figure and landscape. The reading direction of the composition is again organically conducted from the background to the main character, yet the landscape setting is tamer, and fully focused on guiding the gaze of the onlooker. What is different from *Red Virginia Creeper* is the introduction of another group of subjects along the curling road that leads to the main character, and eventually to the viewer. On his way to meet the figure's obtrusive gaze, the onlooker acknowledges the undetermined and ongoing activity taking place amidst the group of women in the background. It is a rather unusual scene, as there is again no indication to the reason of this seemingly spontaneous gathering. Neither is there any hint that suggests whether this lonely female subject had been an active participant in this group and had left, or if she had been sent away. The fact that she is now placed between the group and the viewer directly engages the onlooker in what becomes a relationship

16 Tojner, *Munch: In His Own Words*, 24.

17 Ibid., 26.

triangle. In this way, the viewer is framed to take part in this ongoing exchange, including him or her in the composition.

Street in Åsgårdstrand (1902) (Fig. 10) has a very similar background as *Street in Åsgårdstrand* (1901) (Fig. 6), yet the fence curving along the road indicates that this canvas might be depicting a different road from the one in the previous work. Similar compositional devices are employed in both works to frame the viewer into direct interaction with the young girl placed in the right front of the painting. A road that broadens and completely takes over the lower left part of the canvas foregrounds the resting bodies of three boys observing the girl cropped in the right side of painting. She is depicted in such a way that the viewer can only see her upper body, her dress, and lower arms being washed into the surrounding landscape. In a similar manner of execution, the little boys' bodies, clothes, and the road are almost indistinguishable from one

another; figures and landscape almost become one. As the reading direction of the composition is organically constructed from background to the central character, the composition propels the girl right into the arms of the onlooker. Before meeting the confronting gaze of the girl, the viewer has already been framed to directly interact with this subject.

CONCLUSION

As the viewer's interaction happens through an encounter with the main subject in several of Munch's compositions, the genre of portraiture is a necessary device in creating these works. Portraiture, besides being a mode of representation, entails a specific subject. Portraits therefore have the capacity to become functional subjects; in Munch's case, they become subjects that are functioning in the present moment. Through the portrayed characters, Munch's compositions engage with viewers. Nevertheless, traditional assertions of the genre are undermined by the introduction of other compositional devices, such as landscape, that prove to be an integral part of the work. The portrait is not used to represent the inner reality of the main character. Instead, the representation of the human subject in the surrounding landscape is a necessary tool in creating the desired interaction between canvas and onlooker.

While making use of traditional genres, Munch continuously searched for new painterly solutions to transgress conventional understandings of the pictorial genres he employed. Already in the late 1880s Munch experimented with the place of the figure in its surrounding landscape, resulting in compositions that created a hybrid genre between portraiture and landscape. These compositions succeeded in eliminating a clear linear and narrative story, which led to the representation of an ongoing moment. Just as in his famous *The Scream*, it is unimportant what happened before or will happen after the moment of the depicted scene; all the attention is focused on the present instant, where all compositional elements are subordinated to the current moment. Con-

frontational aesthetics combined with self-staging techniques are key devices used in Munch's hybrid genre. Through these compositional devices, Munch orchestrated the way in which the viewer comes into contact with the subject of his works to create an inescapable confrontation. The landscape in Munch's portraits thus becomes an attentively constructed device meant to frame the viewer for direct engagement with the compositions. As argued by Nils Ohlsen:

> Munch is a diligent director, who in a masterly way utilizes his fine-tuned repertoire on all levels to achieve an equally precisely calculated effect on the viewer. The picture solutions vary greatly in their details, but they have the viewer's meticulously defined role in common. The viewer is inevitably drawn into the picture's force field.[18]

By directly engaging the viewer in his paintings, Munch evades pre-conceived readings of his works. He successfully subverts conventional understandings of traditional art historical genres, creating hybrid compositions which surpass passive contemplations and favour a direct engagement with the viewer.

18 Nils Ohlsen, "Edvard Munch's Visual Rhetoric — Seen Through Selected Interiors," in *Edvard Munch*, eds Mai Britt Guleng and Jon-Ove Steihaug (Milan: Skira, 2013), 26.

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Kristof Vrancken,
Colour Differences in Red Cabbage Liquids due to Different pH Values of the Soil (2016)

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