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Walking Art / Walking Aesthetics

**From walking artist... to walking
visitor... to walking researcher |
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Andy Goldsworthy – *Untitled*, 1992. Centre International de l'Art et du Paysage de l'Île de Vassivière, France.

In this paper, we put forward a reading of the models of institutional relationship between art and the landscape, which has developed since the 1970s, along three lines: its creation, its reception, and its study, with the binding premise between the three being the act of walking, and those who walk.

The reception of art and the place of the *walking visitor* is the theme, which has been most thoroughly developed, through an analysis of contemporary cases of exhibitions set in the landscape. The *walking researcher* arises inherently in any search for art situated in the landscape. The examination of the *walking artist*, understood in a free context here, stems from the institutionalisation of centres of art and landscape.

Before looking into contemporary cases, it is worth taking a moment to consider the different types of relationship between the land and artistic practice, which define landscapes as either *with*, *of* or *for* art.

Patrick Dougherty – *Ruaille Buaille*, 2008. Sculpture in the Parklands, Ireland.

The placing of art in open air spaces, particularly in gardens[1], was a determining factor, until the end of the 19th century and even into the early 20th century, of models of articulation in which sculpture contributed to the formal and symbolic organisation of the space, and to the orientation of the user. Sculpture underlined the divisions in the landscape, reinforced its geometric organisation and its hierarchy. It was an instrument through which the countryside could be measured, it accentuated a spatial composition, it polished off the grand exit of an arbour, established symmetries and rhythmic units. It worked symbolically, as a sign of social ostentation. It invoked mythology, history, and allegory to manifest wealth, power, erudition and morality, wonderment and civic education. Finally, sculpture in the open air oriented the user, pointing her along her path, defining the rhythm of the route travelled, attracting one to certain focal points and even manifesting as a humanising element in gardens and urban parks. The situations referred to, as exemplified in historical European gardens, form landscapes *with* sculptures and artistic elements: the landscape has precedence with regard to the art which has to adapt to the place, in such *site dominant* projects. However, in the 20th century, the reverse situation arose with designated landscapes *of* sculpture, as seen in the sculpture gardens of museums: there, art had precedence with regard to the landscape and the space was prepared to receive projects in a manner that is *site adjusted*.

George Trakas – *Self passage*, 1986-88. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark.

Finally, in the contemporary period, the articulation has shifted with the rise of landscapes *for* sculpture and *site-specific* sculptures and projects, in which artwork and landscape are both imagined simultaneously.

If, in the first two cases, art occupies a place, in the third case, the one we are going to discuss, art creates place. In the first situation, the spatial dimension of the landscape is dominant, and in the second, the plasticity of art is to the fore, while in the third case the dominant aspect is an entirely new anthropological dimension formed by the junction of artistic project, visitor and place. This evolution can be seen, emblematically, in the stages of development of the Kröller-Müller Museum,

defined as “sculpture garden, sculpture park, sculpture forest”[2], or in the successive phases of the Middelheim Museum[3].

In the creation of contemporary centres of art and landscape three factors converge: the field of museum studies, ecological thought, and the artistic and visual reality from the 1970s onwards, which we will attempt to summarise here.

In the area of New Museum studies[4], from the 1970s and 1980s, great value was set in the properties of the place and in those museums that rejected the territorial decontextualisation of exhibited materials. Concepts such as eco-museums, territory museum, community museum and “active museology” had an impact on the renewal of cultural mediation. In official documents and in the good practices of ICOMOS[5], a semantic and operational field that interests itself in the investigation of exhibiting phenomena in the landscape is recognised. There exists a relationship between these museum practices and the reformulation of modes of exhibition of art in the landscape. The 1970s was also an important decade for landscape thought and culture. In Europe, 1970 was declared European Conservation Year, while in the United States of America people celebrated the Year of the Earth. Alarms were sounded about the need to conserve the planet’s resources and to prevent natural disasters, and there was a new focus on the biosphere and on ecology. Landscape architect Geoffrey Jellicoe was one of several to propose the creation of collective landscapes as a response to social needs, which formed the backdrop to the *green revolution*[6]. In 1971, the movement *Greenpeace* was founded, and the name was registered the following year. Declarations and conventions forged an irreversible path towards respect for the environment, with a consequential impact on architecture, urbanism, restoration, the management of land and natural heritage, and the repercussions of different uses of the landscape, including its artistic use and its use as an exhibition space.



Alfio Bonano – *Bridge of Humlebaekken*, 1994. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.

Finally, the artistic field underwent similar transformations: enormous *land art* events, landscapes invaded by *earthworks*, artistic episodes of *land reclamation*, *environmental art*, and the documentation and recording of *walking art* in peripheral areas. The concepts of site and place have led to the use of terminology similar to that used in museum studies: *site-specific*, *arte ambientale* and *art in situ*[7]. The last phrase was appropriated from archaeology and museum studies for use in the artistic field by Daniel Buren, in 1974[8].

It is in this context of renewal that landscapes for *walking visitors* emerged. An analysis of Europe's centres of art and landscape leads us to define three distinct types – the park, the itinerary and art as environmental conversion[9]. In all types, the desire to foment new conditions for the visibility and accessibility of artistic events is present – in other words, there exists a willingness to create a new way to discover art. Nearly all of the centres are marginal in nature, as in they are located outside the territories of consolidated exhibition spaces[10], and are involved in the exploration of the mutating or transitory identity of place, via artistic practice. We will explore some examples.

The *Yorkshire Sculpture Park* (England, 1977), the *Parc de Sculptures du Domaine de Kerguéhennec* (France, 1986) and the *Tranekær International Centre for Art and Nature* (Denmark, 1993), are sculpture parks in a coherent landscape, delimited by borders that coincide, generally, with historically constituted properties. They all possess well identified entrances and a certain degree of formalism in the placing and integration of the artistic elements. The treatment of the land is through a series of smooth modulations, easily overcome by the visitor via connecting elements such as stairs or ramps, steps, small bridges and walkways that support the itinerary of the visitor. These architectonic devices, promenades and swooping lines punctuate the parks with elements that stand out and that provoke interest, directly influencing the progression of the walker. The landscape is manipulated in order to increase the comfort and intensify the experience of the visitor. The different textures of contrasting surfaces are explored, from beaten earth trails to pastures to wooded zones, muddy winter paths beside agricultural areas to damp tracks alongside lakes and streams. The variety of spaces and atmospheres works as a call to independent decision-making: continue or stay, inspect minutely an artistic element, an abandoned tree trunk, a rocky outcropping.



Carl Andre – *74 Weathering way*, 2001. Middelheim Museum, Belgium.

Grizedale Forest (England, 1977), *Sculpture in Woodland* (Ireland, 1994), *Centro de Arte y Naturaleza* (Spain, 1995), are *itineraries of art in the landscape* that are not delimited by artificial

borders but rather contained by elements such as streams or other natural divisions in the landscape. They present a more fluid and flexible disposition than those of the sculpture parks and a greater degree of informalism in the integration of artistic elements. It is these which organise the itinerary. There are fewer wide-ranging vistas and more appeals to a detailed viewing. Usually in forested paths, they involve obstacles and difficulties, with an atmosphere supposedly closer to wild nature or the rural environment than that of a garden. While the parks promote a rambling circulation that allows diversions at any time, short cuts, and less formally directed movements between spaces, in the itineraries linearity is highly relevant and circulation must be done in one direction, with few options to change track or even, sometimes, to return. The texture of the paths is an expressive element, with the way dotted with fallen tree trunks, wooden walkways, and crossings of waterways that support the steady movement of the visitor in difficult moments, especially at certain times of the year. The artistic elements explore its ephemerality and its dilution in nature.

The ***Centre International d'Art et du Paysage de l'île de Vassivière*** (France, 1983), *Montenmedio. Arte Contemporáneo* (Spain, 2001) and *Sculpture in the Parklands* (Ireland, 2002), are centres of art as environmental conversion, located respectively in an artificial landscape associated with the construction of a dam, a demilitarized zone and an area that was formerly mined for peat. These projects do not allow a uniform analysis of their spatialities and atmospheres, although they do have in common the artificiality of irreversible marks on the landscape.



Shen Yuan – *Bridge*, 2004. Montenmedio Arte Contemporáneo, Spain.

There are common patterns discernible in the placement of artistic elements in the three different types of centres: in the centre and around the edges of open spaces; on elevated ground; along paths

and waterways. Interventions are frequently of natural elements but may also be functional in character, such as benches, pavements, cabins and pavilions, fountains, amphitheatres and walls. The types of art and landscape mentioned here – *park, itinerary* and *art as environmental conversion* – appoint the *walking visitor* as the subject and the protagonist of the phenomenon of artistic mediation. As expressed by Colette Garraud, we are witnessing a “return to the real”[11]. Art in the landscape recuperates the horizon that extends before us, in contrast to the horizon on the screen that is mediated, televised, audio-visualised, tele-monitored and tele-objectified. The real, material and substantial presence of the work reclaims the oneness of the place, the time, and the subject.

On the other hand, Anne Cauquelin, in her reflection, underlines the similarities between journeys through landscapes and virtual journeys[12]: both deny stability and imply movement; both process a “non-hierarchical, non-pyramidal, non-linear circulation”; both construct the path along which one travels.

Brian Fell – *Ha-Ha Bridge*, 2006. Yorkshire Sculpture Park, England.

These cultural projects necessarily demand the participation of active subjects with a disposition towards walking. It is in the experience of the subject, in their act of perception and in their journey of artistic discovery that the landscape is generated[13]. The reception of art involves the act of seeing and the body, a dynamic apprehension, an experience created through movement and orientation. It is the involvement of the observer that activates the artistic object. The journeys through parks and forests substantiate Jean-Louis Déotte's idea of exhibition as an encounter “in which work and public are reciprocally established”[14].

These experiences evoke the theory of Nicolas Bourriaud, for whom place is already superseded in a world and a time without anchors, marked by the journey and by movement[15]. To wander and float without time, without plan or pretext to remain are, for the author, fundamental features of contemporary culture.

But, once again, the institutionalisation of the visitor who walks may contradict these characteristics, as can be seen in the behaviour of the visitor to contemporary centres of art and landscape. The visitor is able to exercise a free observation in an itinerary of discovery which they traverse alone. There are no signs, explanatory labels or complementary info-packs. Perhaps some few indications may be found in a welcome centre, if it exists. This autonomy is not without risks - it forces diversions, hesitations, it requires persistence, time and a certain mental strength of will, a preparedness for failure and frustration. A guided visit is, perhaps, the most desired. A network of points in the landscape is thus systematically disseminated, visited, explained, interpreted, via multiple devices: guides, all-terrain vehicles, organised walks, and night tours. The most demanding journeys require a *tourist kit* of hat, water bottle, sun screen, light clothing and rugged footwear.

The territory becomes transformed into regulated, moulded and interpreted landscape. Landscape becomes transformed into exhibition, via the usual museum devices. Parks, itineraries and art as environmental conversion[16], openly promote a green ideology and a new moral regime of an environmentalist nature, civic behaviour and rituals of a touristic nature.



Michelangelo Pistoletto – *Segno Arte*, 1976-93 – Centre International de l'Art et du Paysage de l'Île de Vassivière, France.

According to Joy Sleeman, the discovery of parks and sculpture trails in the 1970s proved to be “theoretically justifiable, economically viable, politically correct and, perhaps most importantly, popular”[17]. Questions such as the sustainable exploitation of natural spaces, regional development, the qualification and valorisation of marginal areas are all relevant factors in the process. Art thus takes on a role as a resource in the service of policies of economic and tourism growth, among others[18].

In these contexts, what role does the *walking artist* have? Taking into consideration the characteristics of contemporary artistic interventions, and the strategies to enshrine in museums and institutionalise art in the landscape, several paradoxes appear. The very idea of sites for *walking artists* is contradictory.

In these contexts, the model of artistic residence is preferable to other models of artistic curation. Artists respond to invitations, and work according to the specific indications, proposed themes and characteristics of the site. The necessity of a result, compliance with a deadline and congruence with the objectives of the site are all important requirements. The act of recognition and exploration of the landscape is based in the act of walking and coming across observatories, refuges, shelters, bridges, passages, paths, tunnels, functional objects, signposting. In this way, the mechanisms of institutional artistic mediation end up betraying the particular essence of the *walking artist*, making of him a creator of devices through which others walk.

One of these users is, undoubtedly, the *walking researcher*. The investigation of art and landscape is a multidisciplinary affair, calling on history of art, museum studies, visual culture[19], and landscape studies. Hans Belting refers to the dialogue between the various humanitarian disciplines, which, instead of eyeing each other suspiciously, seek out the inherent uniqueness in each other[20]. Keith Moxey believes that the validity of history of art stems from the inquiry into its place in the

epistemological framework, and states that the subject must reflect “historical interpretation and theoretical argument”. The same author maintains that history of art should not avoid the feeling of an “illegal border crossing” between fields of distinct disciplines[21]. In the same way, Donald Preziosi believes that history of art incorporates methods, perspectives and discussions of various periods and origins[22] , among which he highlights museum studies[23].

However, perhaps the most relevant aspect of the study of centres of art and landscape does not result from the application of the methodologies of the disciplines mentioned here, but from the visit, from the confrontation, from the *being in place* which is more typical of ethnography and anthropology. The practice of use, direct experience, seeing and walking constitute irreplaceable instruments of study.

This article is the result of experiences ranging from study to active journey, from bibliographical research to field trips, from gathering information to direct confrontation. The phenomenological dimension and lived experience were important principles that guided the direction of the work[24].

If Hamish Fulton asserted the proposition *no walk no work*, this researcher asserts the expression *no walk no talk*.



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