

Walk, watch, register: landscape as experience

“‘Wherever you go, there you are’, he said whenever someone asked him if we were lost yet.” Rebecca Solnit

Any path is made up of encounters and inattentions.

We pounce to the roads we take the traces of all the roads we have taken before, knowing we will never ever repeat previous experiences and that, even if we return, we will never ever find the same road on the same places. We start each journey seeing and not seeing, watchful and blind, attached and detached.

In spite of being a vaguely vain gesture, to register the forms of experience (any given experience) fosters, perhaps, the illusion of contradicting its impossible fixidity, its condition of evanescence that so perennially pervades and displaces us. Therefore, such movements become the expression of a given poetics. But we will get there!

Rebecca Solnit, in her *Wanderlust, a History of Walking*, says that “to walk is, ideally, the state in which mind, body and the world align” (2014: 5). From mystical pilgrimages to forced migrations, not forgetting nineteenth-century *flânerie* and the situationist *dérive*, walking is probably one of the most significant acts in the history of humankind. The history of walking conglomerates, thus, religion and politics, pleasure and aesthetics; but in all its different guises, walking, by giving shape to ontological and cultural perspectives, to social constructs or personal discovery, always determines a deep and triptych-like relationship between the individual, the territory and time.

But beyond the implications concerning the capitalist construct of territories – globalizing, as one says – exerting endless pressure upon each individual in its interaction with the world... with the mountain, the frontier, the desert (and even the sea, over which one always walks but figuratively); beyond that construct, I was saying, there lies the possibility that a minute action may create an immense field in which to project multiple experiences on the landscapes that relate to us. That minuteness is *poiesis*, that is, the gesture that all reveals.

Corporeal mobility, especially if it does without a device (motorised or not) that amplifies or alters it, has a deep, direct impact on the way the individual experiences one’s surroundings and oneself. Steps need time, they sense the ground, sound in conformity, and bear the body.

Walk descriptions are more often than not tinged with fiction or with an inevitable subjective approach, and it is subjective because it concerns the subject and its positioning in a given moment and in a given space. It is subjective because there is no other word to express the fact that such an approach cannot be subjective, that is: to be without error. How could a description of a place be without error, if error is precisely what emanates from it at each moment? The error of the record of time, of the maladjustment of the image, of the omission of presence. By error one means forms of *pentimento* in various shapes: photographed or drawn, cut-out, retro-lit, mimetic or via obliteration.

And at last we arrive at the benefit of looking. To the eyes and through the eyes a sort of landscape has been given form, one that did not exist before, in spite of being there. To the eyesight an idea of field has been framed, one in which the sky was not. And since then we ceased being to the landscape mere inhabitants, we also become spectators. It was both a terrible and wonderful contradiction that settled in and which, by separating the eye from the body, left the former suspended and held the breath to the latter! The rule was created, foreground brown, the second plane green, blue in the background. And later, with the wanderings (*dérives*), the landscape no longer needed be just landscape, it could be palimpsest, it could be a thousand things simultaneously, it could be a place in which to get lost.

As in all places there is a never seen layer: an ensemble of sensations, a draught of air that brings a scent, the duration of a hiss, a bump that shakes the limbs, a trembling of recollections... a place is never like any other except through evocation, and any given image of a place is always, but always, a form of filter.

I still have to mention repetition... like a step following another, a river faithful to itself, a repeated sound in different tones, and because there are in every place other places, only by repetition can a place be separated from us so that it can belong to someone else.

And so, now, finally, in these sets of works, eye and experience are connected. In them we find, unbound, the experience of the place that kept the artists captive, free themselves from the tyranny of a medium, free the observer to wander by proxy.