Chapter 3
Nature and Culture in Digital Media Landscapes

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ABSTRACT

The landscape genre in art is something that has not been explored until today, despite being a dominant genre until the 20th century. During the industrial revolution, in the context of cinema, photography, and other media, this genre continues its strong presence. However, it is not so clear what happens with the advent of digital media. In this context, the authors contextualize landscape, having visual culture and social semiotics as their point of view, and present a set of digital media-art artefacts that are taken as references to the way the topic has been approached and explored and where digital media assume themselves as tools and products in the construction and presentation of the artistic work. The objective will be to expose how the concept of landscape evolves, and it is presented in the scope of digital media-art.

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of verisimilitude in art is something extremely important before the industrial revolution, being one of the main factors that contributes to the intensification of the value of truth in images. Landscape painting is related to this interest and, at the same time, to the presentation of a subjective point of view of its author. Representing what our senses apprehend is, in the end, an impossible task due to a whole interpretive process related to perception and, in this sense, landscape painting reflects a whole set of values, rules and cultural codes. There are even several cases of artists who deliberately add elements to their paintings - like trees and mountains - that do not exist in the physical space contemplated in order to produce a certain aesthetic and / or conceptual effect.

The way we relate to nature is a determining factor in the way we represent it and, in the West, it is at the time of the Renaissance that an important change takes place. Until now, nature was something unknown, producing fear in the individual who perceived the natural environment full of connotations such as mystery, danger, mysticism, among others. With the advent of the Renaissance, the individual ventures into the natural world and begins to perceive aesthetic values in it. It is at this point that the landscape emerges in paintings as a background element, contextualising and complementing another more dominant topic. Nature thus appears in visual culture, as a semiotic resource in the construction of a visual message. Its connotations are now used to reinforce, complement, a main theme. According to Malcolm Andrews, when he tells us about the role of landscape in the paintings that represent Jerome, "Most fifteenth -and sixteenth- century paintings of Jerome in a landscape follow this basic compositional idea and thus charge the natural setting with dramatic significance, but the human subject needs the landscape to complete his meaning. Landscape becomes a dramatic agent rather than simply a decorative setting." (1999)

Plato and Aristotle debated the nature of images and, while Plato assumes the images are bad because they trick our senses making us believe that we are in the presence of the thing, Aristotle defended the didactic value of images, recognising its power to convey concepts, feelings, ways of seeing. In a more Aristotelian perspective, the presence of nature in painting, presenting this new look at the natural world, will cause profound changes in the way in which Western visual culture develops in relation to the landscape.

It is in the 16th century that the European concept of landscape emerges related with a painting in which the main theme was centered in the natural scenery. (Olwig, 1996) The artistic genre appears later, in the 17th century, particularly in Holland and, in the 19th century, in full romanticism, the topic gets universal as a dominant artistic genre.

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