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WORKSHOP 2

Experiential cartographies: an educational approach to the landscape initiated by Homer-Ulysses

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Landscape, when approached through an experiential procedure, emerges as a subject that envelops the entangled observer. Attempting a contemporary approach of the Homeric Odyssey, we notice that an approach of landscape based on the *in situ* experience of the main character, namely Odysseus – alias Ulysses – is initiated.¹ His descriptions of a multiplicity of ‘new-found lands and islands’ that he saw in person and partially investigated, after reaching them from the seashore, form the narrative map of an unknown archipelago. Ulysses refers to the way his senses were stimulated by spatiotemporal qualities when he was in person enveloped by the archipelago’s landscapes. He furthermore correlated and assembled his sensorial and conceptual perception of the landscape entities he was enveloped by, thus developing a structured description of previously unknown landscapes. He thus offered, through his verbal descriptions to the Phaeacians who, according to the epic plot, hosted him, and to all audiences of the Homeric epics – before, during and after the archaic era –, a detailed experiential narrative map. The experiential approach of Ulysses involves his sensorial and sensorimotor experience of each site-landscape he encountered, stimulating the sensual perceptions of his audience.

In opposition to the experiential approach of landscape lies the feeling of detachment from the landscape when treated as an object of observation. During past centuries, numerous *distanced*

1. As stated by the European Landscape Convention, concerning the definition of Landscape: “Landscape” means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors;” [Council of Europe (2000): *European Landscape Convention*. Florence: European Treaty Series - No. 176, p2]. Regardless whether the landscapes described in the Homeric Odyssey may or may not have been based on real sites, what is significant for the proposed approach is the fact that landscapes were perceived during the composition of this epic poem, and thus described in the epos.

observers,² mostly offspring of the occident, have been defining themselves as representatives of the *civilisation*; by standing opposite from *nature* they felt enabled to contemplate it: thus fuelling the fabrication of the binary antithetic scheme [nature v culture]. Why should we quest for the traces of the ways landscape has been perceived before and during the archaic era? Perhaps surprisingly, we discover embedded in this archaic epic an avant-garde approach of landscape. Landscape perception in the Homeric *Odyssey* is structured without the mediation of the now-outdated, but until recently popular yet obsolete, bipolar scheme “nature v culture”. So landscape in the Homeric *Odyssey* appears as the distinct, characteristic context, where culturally and socially expressed dwellers interact with their environment. Each landscape is characterised by a synergy between cultural practices and natural processes. Thus the limits between *nature* and *culture* are interwoven, entangled. Furthermore nature is not presented as the substrata on which cultural structures are built: instead for each different culturally defined landscape, the relationship between dwellers and natural dynamics is mutually woven in time. Thus, the limits between *nature* and each culture are mutually defined, for each cultural expression, by a distinct and characteristic synergy. In addition, landscape is not depicted in the *Odyssey* as a still image: but as a result of the interaction between social and we may say cultural practices, and the constantly active environmental forces. It must be highlighted that, apart from Ulysses’ experiential mapping, maps by indigenous dwellers of the ‘unknown landscapes’ are also encompassed in the Homeric *Odyssey*.

Numerous readings of the Homeric *Odyssey* have, until very recently, often associated the bipolar antithetic scheme [nature v culture] with essential and crucial elements of the epic plot. Ulysses has many times been depicted stereotypically as the *civilised* observer that reports on the strange, *monstrous, barbarian*, beings he met, which were considered as being *out of the civilised world*; furthermore Ulysses’ travel has often been misinterpreted as a struggle *against* the forces of *nature*. Yet, not only the term *nature* is absent from the Homeric *Odyssey*, but furthermore social, cultural, and ontological expressions are inseparable from the Homeric landscapes. As the limits between social, cultural, and ontological expressions are non-obvious in the epic, we consider both social and ontological expressions as cultural expressions simultaneously: on one hand the traces of social structures and practices are indeed cultural traces; on the other, the perception of landscape through the prisms of different ontological and cosmological modes can be interpreted as cultural projections, immaterial or potentially materialised. The reading of the binary antithesis [nature v culture] as a constitutive aspect of the Homeric *Odyssey* has for centuries been an anachronism which dissimulated the presence of other, essentially useful, issues for discussion; as for instance the multiplicity of relationships that different cultures mutually weave with their enviroing landscape: each of the *Odyssey* cultures relates to landscape in a different way, delineating multiple, multifaceted possible understandings of *nature*, through the process of relating with the enviroing actors.

Ulysses’ cultural background certainly affects the prism through which he approaches the inhabited landscapes; yet his primal query emphasises his aim for survival: he tries to predict whether the dwellers of each landscape are hostile to strangers, or hospitable. Therefore, the binary scheme he uses for his ‘anthropological’ categorisation of the cultures he met, is not based on an antithesis which is analogous to the [nature v culture] bipolar scheme, but on the scheme [unjust and hostile v just and

2. According to theorist, Joachim Ritter, in his essay written in 1963, the distance between the observer and landscape was initiated by Petrarch. Ritter names this distance “*transcensus*” and considers it the foundation for the perception of landscape. According to his approach, the lack of *transcensus* between the dwellers of a landscape and the landscape they inhabit and work in, brings about, as a result, the non-perception of a landscape by its inhabitants. Ritter J. (1963): *Landschaft; zur Funktion des Ästhetischen in der modernen Gesellschaft*. Münster: Aschendorff

hospitable]. In Ulysses' approach, indeed, the flower-gathering Lotus Eaters are just, hospitable and friendly – although their culture is almost transparent in terms of materialised cultural constructions – ; by contrast, the Laestrygonians are unjust and hostile, although they have a lofty citadel with public services such as an assembly and a functional water source, and infrastructure such as a wagon road. Ulysses does not feel familiar with the Laestrygonians, whose 'civilisation' in some respects resembles the culture Ulysses stems from. So Ulysses tries to read cultural traces on the landscape surface, as signs of the hospitality or hostility of the dwellers. He thus observes the landscape as a mapping surface, where traces of the dwellers' practices are deposited. This is a way of understanding the relation of landscape and its dwellers as a map-creating process: landscape is the context of life, as it envelops and receives the practices of the societies that dwell within; simultaneously landscape is constantly modified by social, cultural practices, and is comprehended and therefore treated according to the way its inhabitants perceive it; moreover landscape is the cradle of the perceptive modes of its inhabitants. Thus landscape and its dwellers mutually form each other, on the one hand; and on the other, landscape bears cultural traces that map the cultures of its inhabitants.

The experiential maps of the Homeric *Odyssey* constitute an epistemological threshold between theological cosmologies and proto-scientific approaches of our earth. Focusing on the procedure of experiential mapping, we discover a solid structured epistemological paradigm, which exists embedded in the *Odyssey*. I have studied this paradigm precisely along my doctoral research;³ simultaneously I have taught students of architecture for several years, initiating them in the procedures of experiential mapping of landscape. As an alternative to the criticised 'top-down' planning strategies, which tend to impose abstract models to existing landscapes – cityscapes, peri-urban and rural landscapes – I juxtapose the approach 'from within'. The feeling of landscape from within, is not primarily meant to complement the abundant relevant information on given landscapes.

In our contemporary era, the notion of a map tends to be misinterpreted, as many graphic schemes, aerial views, diagrams already exist for too many earthly sites. By the *in situ* experiential mapping procedure, an encounter is established between the enveloping landscape and the entangled observer. This encounter bears the possibility of a potent relationship between the area of study and the future architects, landscape architects, urban planners, who decide to develop further their *in situ* experience; it is a mapping relationship which thrives from within the landscape. Through the experiential mapping procedure, the landscape by itself can educate the observer as it envelops him or her within its mass, its structures, its intangible qualities, and the multi-sensorial stimuli it emits, be it cityscape or rural landscape, peri-urban landscape or infrastructural landscape.

Experiential mapping emerges thus as an educative experience which can be expressed by the students through the composition of their own subjective maps of the study area. The aim is to get the students to the point where they may realise by themselves that landscape is a process that gets altered in time, modifying in accordance the ways it is experienced. Therefore landscape is not an object, but a subject, since it determines many factors of the life of its inhabitants, and also defines the ways it may be experienced by its visitors. This resolution is the basis for an augmented attentiveness and

3. I defended my PhD in 2017, at the Department of Architecture of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, entitled “ ‘Natural’ Landscapes of the Homeric *Odyssey*: Investigating the Structures and Limits of Cultural Sediments, along the ‘Nostos’ of *Odysseus*.”, supervised by Professor Emeritus Dr. Vana Tentokali, Department of Architecture, School of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and under the guidance of Dr. Constanze Magdalene Guthenke, Associate Professor of Greek Literature, E.P. Warren Praelector, Corpus Christi College, Faculty of Classics, University of Oxford, and Dr. Zisis Kotionis, Professor at the Department of Architecture, School of Engineering, University of Thessaly.

awareness of the responsibility that spatial planners have towards society. Moreover, through experiential mapping, the students of spatial planning can discover their design inspirations via the stimuli they have experienced *in situ*, and design for any specific landscape having lived an experience from within, rather than projecting and imposing pre-constructed concepts. Through the experiential process, the entangled observer feels enveloped by a vaster, collective subject.

Ulysses brings about changes in many of the previously unknown sites he visited, such as the blinding of the sheep-herder Cyclops, the building of an Mycenaean cult tomb on Circe's island, the wrath of Poseidon towards the godlike Phaeacians which made them resign from their nodal maritime role, etc. Ulysses, thus bringing about changes, incarnates an agent of the vector of time into the landscape. This is how the interference of the entangled observer with the system he observes is revealed in the Homeric epos. Any observer leaves traces on a landscape: even a distant observation can leave traces via the way the formed landscape perception is communicated to third parties. The planners and designers are meant to leave traces on a landscape, even if their aim is to protect it. That is why the experience of *in situ* experiential mapping is so important, as it can reveal some clues to the scale of intervention that a certain landscape can afford.

Planning and mapping landscape in time is also a process which can be aided by *in-situ* experiential mapping. The way landscape performs in time, and gets modified along time, is one of the key-factors for an in-depth understanding of its inherent processes, and tracking the changes imposed by external factors. Tracking the traces which have accumulated over time into a landscape facilitates the understanding of its history, as a perpetually changing system which is related to its vaster environment. The tracking of traces of change into a landscape reveals it as a perpetually changing palimpsest structure. The material accumulations on a landscape's surface comprise additive layers, modification of existing layers, and subtraction of material from pre-existing layers. The immaterial accumulations are also important as they include the ways a landscape has been perceived, the ways the perception of a landscape gets modified by planned factors [i.e. Landscape Branding], by unplanned factors [the spontaneous popularity of a landscape uncontrollably growing through the social network media], or by spontaneous agents such as the reading of a landscape through the arts.

The tracking of slight, significant, and irreversible changes a landscape has gone through is a mapping process which can be developed *in situ*, during the experiential approach. Time also pertains to time cycles, such as the seasonal cycle, the cycle of reproduction of flora and fauna species, various economic cycles (i.e. the tax-year), social cycles (school and academic year), but also traffic light cycles, train timetable cycles, etc. The detection on one hand of the active time-cycles which operate – or have operated – within a given landscape thus characterising it, and on the other hand the mapping of the complex ways these cycles are, or have been, interwoven among them, can be the result of a combined field study where *in situ* mapping plays a key-role. The ways complex parameters have left their traces into a landscape is revealed at its full potential when historical, sociological, anthropological, ecological, economical, factors are simultaneously investigated *in situ* and bibliographically. In the framework of demanding complex research of specific landscapes, the experiential *in situ* mapping procedure plays the role of the foundation, as it emphasises the human scale that the research ought to have, which is even more precious than the scale of planning, managing, and intervention becomes larger.

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