

THE WILLOW SEES THE HERON'S IMAGE... UPSIDE DOWN

I

A landscape is always a construction, a way of seeing or a representation, or all these things at once. It is a framing of the gaze, which is trained to see in a certain way. The landscape is an exercise in appropriation, in moulding what we have learned to call nature in order to separate ourselves from it as humans¹. When we try to depict it, and not communicate with it, through art, we create technologies of separation and distancing. We are constantly caught in the contradictions of this back-and-forth process.

Landscape is, in consequence, a political tool for the construction of subjectivities and of military and economic targets. At the same time, it affords a setting for contemplation in which we can project our own ghosts and those of others. There is no such thing as an unbiased observer.

II

The Latin word *Ruina* means, predictably enough, fall, collapse, catastrophe. Architectural ruins are sometimes romantically integrated into the landscape to demonstrate the different historical layers that are superimposed in our projections. They are also signs, messages, enclosures of a territory. But modernism has produced other kinds of ruins that demand other archaeologies which, in turn, call for another type of excavation: “we adamantly preserve archaeological ruins but struggle to manage political, economic and ecological ruins.”²

For instance, the unbridled extraction of so-called “natural resources” has turned many landscapes into continuous and multidimensional ruins that cannot be represented solely through images. Landscapes of extraction have nothing to do with those produced by early modernism; in them we no longer project the future. Rather they are the result of industrial and post-industrial processes. The flow of capital, which aspires never to be interrupted, nevertheless produces the interruption of many other flows: “a dam is like a knot in your anus.”³

III

Let us imagine the landscape through work and transhumance, through territorial and affective struggles with the land. Would they be the same images of the landscape produced

¹ The very notion of human as a biological unit, is a cultural construction.

² Gilda Mantilla and Raimond Chaves, in *The Misplaced Times*, a newspaper published for the exhibition *Misplaced Ruins*, in the Peru Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015.

³ Carolina Caycedo heard this sentence from Mamo Pedro Juan, the Kogui spiritual leader in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in northern Colombia.

by Machiavellian distance? No. Let us imagine the landscape after the age of discovery, but also after the age of the spectacle.⁴

Disappearances produce ghosts.⁵ Let us recognize a story told by ghosts. They force us to acknowledge their omnipresence however much we do not believe in them. They appear in museums, despite the narratives that these create, to tell us other stories; they appear on the flat surfaces of our technology; they appear literally and figuratively in thresholds. The crisis of capital and its ruins produces a back and forth between the visible and the invisible. This is perhaps what Chris Marker and Alain Resnais called “the botany of death”⁶, culture as a series of devices to detain it.

The term “naturalization” is used to describe processes by which cultural acts are normalized as natural. The natural is undeniable because it simply is. Under operations of naturalization we accept without question forms of organization that, in due course, ghosts come to disrupt: “utopias, which, incidentally, are a European invention, are almost invariably settler colonies.”⁷

IV

“A constant passage between one ruin and another. Only that the ruins are us who are made of nothing else but time.”⁸

*The title of the exhibition is borrowed from a haiku by Bashō which appeared in Chris Marker’s film *Sans Soleil* (1983).

⁴ See Marine Hugonnier, *The Last Tour*, 2004. 16mm film transferred to digital, 14 min 17s.

⁵ As Roberto Gil Hernández argues, there is a correlation between the physical “disappearance” of the Guanches and their spectralization. *Los fantasmas de los guanches: Fantología en las crónicas de la Conquista y Anticonquista de Canarias*, Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Editions Idea, 2019.

⁶ Chris Marker, Alain Resnais and Ghislain Cloquet, *Les statues meurent aussi*, 1953. Film, 30 min.

⁷ Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, *Promised Lands*, 2015. Video, 22 min.

⁸ Raimond Chaves, “Tourists, Ruins and Mountains”. In *The Misplaced Times*. Op. cit.