

Nature's Externality: Hegel's Non-Naturalistic Naturalism

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In my contribution, I dwell on Hegel's conception of nature as the idea in the form of its externality. What I outline in addressing his position is what I call a non-naturalistic naturalism. To account for the peculiarity of the Hegelian concept of nature, I first propose a sort of prologue on the modern concept of nature and the criticism it is subjected to today.

To introduce a theme as complex and multifaceted as "the modern concept of nature," let me start with some considerations about the notion of landscape.

Alexanderschlacht, or *The Battle of Alexander at Issus*, is the title of a famous painting by Albrecht von Altdorfer from 1529. The wealth of detail in the painting is so massive that it almost leaves one breathless. Altdorfer portrays a battle of crucial importance in world history: the Battle of Issus, fought in 333 BC, when Alexander the Great's troops defeated the Persians, led by Darius III, in southern Anatolia. Commentary on this painting occupies the first pages of the essay *Vergangene Zukunft der frühen Zeitlichkeit: Ein Beitrag zur historiographischen Neuzeit*, which opens the famous collection by Reinhardt Koselleck entitled *Vergangene Zukunft – Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*.

What interests Koselleck about this extraordinary painting is an anachronism:

Viewing the painting in the Pinakothek, we think we see before us the last knights of Maximilian or the serf army at the Battle of

Pavia. From their feet to their turbans, most of the Persians resemble the Turks who, in the same year the picture was painted (1529), unsuccessfully laid siege to Vienna. In other words, the event that Aldorfer captured was for him at once historical and contemporary. (Koselleck 2004, pp. 9–10)



What is impressive about Altdorfer's painting, according to Koselleck, is that in it, "the present and the past were enclosed within a common historical plane" (ibid., p. 10). Koselleck further elaborates that Altdorfer deliberately does not erase the temporal difference. For Altdorfer, that battle is contemporary, out of time, as it were. In so doing, Altdorfer is said to operate outside the temporalization of history, which characterizes the following centuries and marks the birth of the historical consciousness typical of the modern age. In this sense, Altdorfer belongs to a dimension that we can call pre-modern—a dimension that still lives in the eschatological expectation of the end of time. In fact, as Koselleck states, what marks the passage from the pre-modern vision of time to the modern one is precisely a different account of the future.

This being said, the reference to Altdorfer is also relevant because, in addition, he is considered the initiator of a painting tradition that is all modern, namely, landscape painting. His 1518 painting *Landscape with a Bridge* is deemed to be the first painting on canvas where a landscape assumes the centrality of an independent subject.

It is no coincidence that Friedrich Schlegel, admiring *The Battle of Alexander at Issus* in 1803 in Paris, where it had been brought by Napoleon, asked himself, "Should I call it a landscape, or a historical painting, or a battle piece?"

It is clear that Schlegel's conundrum makes sense only to the extent that landscape painting finds its initiator in Altdorfer. Of course, as the American art historian Christopher S. Wood rightly points out in *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape*, Altdorfer's landscapes are, in a certain sense, also premodern. Unlike Dürer's or Leonardo's naturalistic paintings, they do not seem so much supported by a cognitive instance in which nature is also thought of as Master. Leonardo's landscape backgrounds are, as is well known, illustrations resulting from his research in geology, hydrology, and meteorology. Similarly, for Dürer, as



Wood maintains, “The study of nature was a discipline, and nature itself the foundation of an aesthetic of mimesis” (Wood 2014, p. 14). Altdorfer’s landscapes, by contrast, are neither studies on nature nor the results of scientific investigation: “He was largely indifferent to the measurable or nameable attributes of the natural object” (ibid., p. 18).

Be that as it may, it is in these years that the all-modern genre of landscape painting was born. Symptomatic of this genesis are the words themselves. The terms derived from *land* (landscape, *Landschaft*) are terms that existed before, but simply meant “a part of a territory.” They began to mean something more specific only at the beginning of the sixteenth century, in relation to the progressive emergence of landscape painting. The result is prominent to the point that the very terms that denote “landscape” in Neo-Latin languages (*paesaggio* in Italian, *paysage* in French), which became common words during the eighteenth century, are neologisms that were born between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to indicate not the real landscape, but its pictorial representation.¹

I.

As a typically modern subject, landscape is the invention of a society for which the city, and therefore business, industry and money, progressively became the center of life.

In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel himself associates landscape paintings with modernity, specifically the modern bourgeoisie, and in particular with what he identifies as a typically German mindset embodying the values of the Protestant bourgeoisie: “It is this loyal, comfortable, homely bourgeois type: this remains in house and surroundings simple, attractive, and neat, in a self-respect without pride, in a piety without the mere enthusiasm of a devotee, but in stead concretely pious in mundane affairs and unassuming and content in its wealth” (Hegel 1975, p. 886).

The fact that the city became predominant had a disruptive effect on the rise of a new perspective on nature, which relied on a no less crucial factor that took hold in the same period: the Scientific Revolution. As Heidegger points out in *The Age of the*

¹ See D’Angelo 2010.

World Picture, the tendency towards nature's objectification was rooted in the idea that the human subject's representation could express and deplete the totality of the world's entities in its own reference. In modernity, according to Heidegger, the being as a whole is a being only to the extent to which it is posited by the human who wants to have it before him- or herself (*vor-stellt*). The rise of the very idea of the "picture of the world" is connected, as Heidegger says, to the fact that the being of the end is reduced to its being represented. The age of the world picture, or modernity, is, for Heidegger, the age in which the world becomes a picture for a subject who re-presents it to itself.²

It is above all Georg Simmel who explicitly connects the notion of landscape to a typically modern experience of the outside world:

Landscape painting, which as an art depends upon distance from the object and upon a break in our natural unity with it, has only developed in modern times as has the romantic sense of nature. They are the result of that increasing distancing from nature and that particularly abstract existence that urban life, based on the money economy, has forced upon us. (Simmel 2005, p. 484)

The experience of landscape presupposes, in this sense, a laceration of the harmonious relationship between the human being and nature. Put differently, it presupposes an experience of the extraneousness of nature, its externality with respect to the subject, who stands in front of it as the pivotal point of its objectification. Landscape can therefore be seen as an attempt to shape this rupture, as well as to reconcile a subject that has placed itself outside of nature and a nature that is represented as subjectivity's other.

The point to which I would like to draw attention has to do precisely with the idea of nature as externality, which underlies

² See Heidegger 2002, pp. 66–69.

the representation of the fracture between subject and world, the latter being a fundamental form of otherness.

II.

Much contemporary literature that focuses on the need for a conceptual transformation in relation to ecological issues and climate change tends towards a radical criticism of the conception of nature as externality, that is, as an object that stands before a subject, a form of beyond. Indeed, it is not uncommon that in the attempt to free oneself from this peculiar conception of nature—one that has its genesis in the Judeo-Christian tradition and would gain its full configuration only in the secularization of Christian theology accomplished by modern science—the need to get rid of the notion of nature, reduced to its modern configuration, comes to the fore.

This is, as is well known, the thesis of Carolyn Merchant, who in 1980 published a book that decisively influenced the debate on the concept of nature. In her work, significantly titled *The Death of Nature*, the ecofeminist scholar presents a view of the Scientific Revolution that challenges the hegemony of mechanistic science as a marker of unquestioned progress. Merchant argues that modernity, and in particular Enlightenment culture, is at the origin of the atomization and objectification of nature, which progressively transform it into an inert world governed by pure mechanical relationships, at the total disposal of the human being. Seventeenth-century science can then be implicated as one of the reasons for the ecological crisis, the domination of nature, and the devaluation of women in the production of scientific knowledge.

The need to leave nature behind, understood as an external and inert entity, and to think in its place something different from it is also at the center of Bruno Latour's latest works. In *Facing Gaia*, Latour argues that ecology "clearly is not the irruption of

nature into the public space but the *end of 'nature'* as a concept that would allow us to sum up our relations to the world" (Latour 2017, p. 36). According to Latour, it is necessary to move from nature (a space colonized by the natural sciences and a naturalism that claims to reduce everything to this "nature") to the world, which is something more encompassing than nature, that is, a space open to various discursive orders that evade the uniformity of a dominant order.³

This is why the former, ancient role of nature must be radically redefined, says Latour. In his reading, nature is one cosmological figure among many. Moreover, it is only one half of the symmetrical definition of culture, subjectivity, and humanity, which has somehow assumed religious connotations, becoming the god of the secularized religion of the modern:

When we claim that there is, on one side, a natural world and, on the other, a human world, we are simply proposing to say, after the fact, that an arbitrary portion of the actors will be *stripped of all action* and that another portion, equally arbitrary, will be *endowed with souls* (or consciousness). But these two secondary operations leave perfectly intact the only interesting phenomenon: the exchange of forms of action through the transactions between agencies of

³ On the same line of argumentation, arguing for a shift from nature to the world, stands Donna J. Haraway. From the death of nature should arise what Haraway calls *Terrapolis* in her *Staying With the Troubles*: "Terrapolis is for companion species, cum panis, with bread, at table together—not 'posthuman' but com-post. [...] Finished once and for all with Kantian globalizing cosmopolitics and grumpy human-exceptionalist Heideggerian worlding, Terrapolis is a mongrel word composted with a mycorrhiza of Greek and Latin rootlets and their symbionts. Terrapolis is rich in world inoculated against posthumanism but rich in compost, inoculated against human exceptionalism but rich in humus, ripe for multispecies storytelling. This Terrapolis is not the home world for the human as Homo, that ever parabolic, re- and de-tumescing, phallic self-image of the same" (Haraway 2016, p. 11). By saying that Terrapolis is rich in world, Haraway is evidently critically addressing Heidegger, who argues that the environment of animals is poor in world (see Heidegger 1995, pp. 192–195).

multiple origins and forms at the core of the metamorphic zones. This may appear paradoxical, but, to gain in realism, we have to leave aside the pseudo-realism that purports to be drawing the portrait of humans parading against a background of things. (Ibid., p. 58)

Latour characterizes the customary concept of nature as a series of properties: “it is *external*, *unified*, and *inanimate*; its decrees are *indisputable*, its people is *universal*, and the epoch in which it is situated is *of all time*” (ibid., p. 160). It is exactly these properties that Latour claims must be questioned in the era of climate change. In particular, it is the idea of an external nature that Latour wants to question, that is, a nature that is *out there*, that is indifferent and that in its indifference is opposed to everything that is historical, social, cultural, human. Gaia, a term that Latour obviously takes from Lovelock⁴ as an alternative to the notion of nature, is not external, since it is not indifferent:

Contrary to the old nature, Gaia does not play either the role of inert object that could be appropriated or the role of higher arbiter on which, in the end, one could rely. It was the old Nature that could serve as a general framework for our actions even as She remained *indifferent* to our fate. It was Mother Nature who served as nurse-maid to humans capable of neglecting her as a mere inert and mute object even as they celebrated in her the *ultima ratio*. [...] Gaia is no longer *indifferent* to our actions. Unlike the Humans in Nature, the Earthbound know that they are contending with Gaia. They can neither treat it as an inert and mute object nor as supreme judge and final arbiter. (Ibid., pp. 280–281)

Lastly, even an author who places himself within the horizon of so-called *object-oriented ontology*, Timothy Morton, has advocated in his texts on ecological thinking the need to dispose of the concept of nature that so pervasively marks modernity.

⁴ See Lovelock 1979.

This modern conception of nature, which Morton believes we should free ourselves from—and it is here that the importance of the reference to Altdorfer, from which this contribution initially draws, becomes clear—has to do with the “picturesque”: “In the picturesque, the world is designed to look like a picture – like it’s already been interpreted and packaged by a human. [...] The picturesque is keyed to a fundamental human-centered way of looking at things: it is *anthropocentric*” (Morton 2018, pp. XXXII–XXXIII). For Morton, thinking ecologically means emancipating oneself from an idea of nature that is necessarily flattened and reified. Morton’s proposal, which he calls dark ecology, is precisely that of an ecology without nature, an ecology that has left behind the exteriority of a nature that would find its conditions of possibility in the representational framework of a subject positing “nature” as its other.

Now, if the fundamental character of the traditional notion of nature that we must abandon relies on its externality, Hegel’s account of nature seems well suited as an ideal critical target for the objections so far reconstructed. According to Hegel, in fact, nature is essentially and most fundamentally an externality:

Nature has yielded itself as the Idea in the form of *otherness*. Since the *Idea* is therefore the negative of itself, or *external to itself*, nature is not merely external relative to this Idea (and to the subjective existence of the same, spirit), but is embodied as nature in the determination of *externality*. (Hegel 1970, p. 205.; GW 20, § 247)

Äusserlichkeit is the word that expresses and defines, in Hegel’s conceptual vocabulary, nature’s own way of being. In the following section, I intend to show what is meant when Hegel says that nature is fundamentally external. Starting from this, I suggest that the externality to which Hegel refers is not at all reducible to the one that ecological thinking claims to overcome. More precisely, I show how Hegel’s conception of nature’s exter-

nality can function as a remedy against the risk of contemporary attempts at relinquishing nature's exteriority: that is, the inability to account for the differences that cross reality.

III.

Externality is what distinguishes nature. In Hegelian conceptual-ity, to say that nature's essence is (properly understood) external-ity requires, first of all, recognizing that nature is the dimension in which entities are one outside the other, each external to the other, and in many ways independent. In this respect, nature is the realm of dispersion. In nature, things are always irreducible singularities. There is no natural object that is universal: the stone, the flower, the river we encounter in nature is always a certain stone, a flower in its singularity, that particular river. It is thus clear that to say that nature is external means to say that the natural entity, of whatever type it is, in its real and concrete being, never immediately coincides with the conceptual structure that makes it intelligible.

To understand how externality implies the separation between one's own being and concept and leads to the division between "thing" and "concept," it is worthwhile to analyze the meaning of *idea*. For Hegel, the idea is neither a model that stands outside the world and with which the world should somehow conform, nor something purely subjective, which simply arises from the minds of thinkers: rather, for Hegel, the idea is "*the absolute unity of the concept and objectivity*" (Hegel 2010, p. 282; GW 20, § 213), or the subject-object, the unity of the ideal and the real, of the finite and the infinite, of the soul and the body.⁵ Therefore,

⁵ See GW 13, § 162. For Hegel's refusal to understand philosophy as an activity that gives "instruction as to what the world ought to be," see Hegel 2008, p. 16, and GW 14,1, p. 16.

to claim that nature is the externalized idea does not mean that nature is external to the unity which characterizes the idea. Rather, it means that nature's being is the proper breaking of this unity, the tearing apart of such a bond. This is why Hegel views nature as that which is most difficult to understand, an *enigma*, to say it with Hegel's *Lectures*.⁶ Nature is something that is open as well as closed with respect to its intelligibility, since its essence is both logical and non-logical, rational and non-rational. The externality of the idea marks the specific logical structure of nature. If this is so—and this is the crucial point—nature according to Hegel is external not just with respect to a mind that considers and analyses it; nature is external with respect to its own logical structure.⁷

On this delicate balance rely the originality and difficulties put in place by the Hegelian conception of nature. For Hegel, thinking nature means, first, tracing the idea within a reality that is the shattering of the unity, of the idea. Second, considering nature per its proper essence means recognizing that such a “shattering” represents, in turn, a proper way of being of the idea itself, a specific shape of it. This is what makes Hegel's externality a very special one, such that cannot be assimilated to its different forms that have characterized modernity and that should be overcome according to contemporary ecological literature. Defining nature as an idea in the form of externality demands coming to grips with its duality. On the one hand, nature is not at all extraneous to the idea, to logos, to the subject-object. On the other, nature is never completely reducible to a purely logical discourse, since it is the idea in the form of laceration and singularization, which cannot be purged of its peculiar opacity, contingency, and non-transparency. In other words, nature takes the shape of its own negation, namely, of the negation of what makes the idea what it is.

⁶ See GW 24,2, p. 770. See also the Addition to the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Nature* in the 1830 *Encyclopedia* (Hegel 1970, p. 194).

⁷ On the essential character of exteriority that characterizes nature, see Furlotte 2018.

The extraordinary ambiguity of Hegel's concept of nature finds, in this way, its ground in the fact that nature is simultaneously a manifestation of the idea and a destruction and a fragmentation of it. This ambiguity makes nature—in Hegel's words—"the unresolved contradiction" (Hegel 1970, p. 209; GW 20, § 248 An.); in fact, on the one hand, it is a world of externality and singularized fragmentation—with all the consequences that this implies—but on the other hand, even if only in its interiority and in a form that follows from its specific externality, it is also idea. The contingency, irregularity, and conceptual indeterminacy of the formations of nature are therefore not simply an apparent fact or a veil of Maya that the sciences are called upon to penetrate and that philosophy, with its conceptual power, can tear apart to bring out the hidden essence of nature.

In the sphere of nature, contingency and determinability from without come into their own. (Hegel 1970, p. 215; GW 20, § 250)

This "*impotence* of nature" (ibid.), resulting from the fact that its figures do not correspond to the conceptual structure, is an absolutely decisive element, to the point that it "sets limits to philosophy" (ibid.). Philosophy, in fact, is tasked with finding traces of conceptual determination within nature; meanwhile, in the knowledge that in nature contingency has its proper right, philosophy must understand and respect this contingency so as not to succumb to the error of transmuting these traces into something unnatural, ending with an idealization. By recognizing nature as a way of being characterized primarily as externality, Hegel aims at a rational understanding of nature without assuming that nature is itself the transparent expression of this rationality, while at the same time refusing to think that rationality is simply a subjective network superimposed on nature to make it *rational*—as if nature in its legality were nothing more than a construct of this subjective rationality.

The rationality of nature is thus retrievable only through work that moves from the particular, that is, from the recognition of the fragmentation that constitutes the “*proprium*” of the natural. Thinking about the rationality of nature means being aware that rationality can be grasped only by exploring the detail, assuming it, and recognizing it for what it is. In a certain way, this is precisely what justifies the importance and the necessity of the philosophy of nature in discussions with the empirical sciences of nature. According to Hegel, the sciences of nature are fundamental to understanding the conceptual structure that runs through the natural world. Only from the results of the sciences, which investigate the particular, can philosophy articulate in purely conceptual terms the rational structure of that world. Such a need finds its justification precisely in the fragmentation and disintegration of the natural world. For Hegel, the natural sciences, far from passively recording nature’s ways of being, do the actual work of finding the universal in the singular, the law in the multiplicity. Philosophy of nature can operate only on this basis, since

[...] the empirical sciences do not stand still with the perception of the details of the appearances; instead, by thinking, they have readied this material for philosophy by discovering its universal determinations, genera, and laws. In this way, they prepare this particularized content so that it can be taken up into philosophy. (Hegel 2010, p. 41; GW 20, § 12 An.)

The externality of nature of which Hegel speaks is therefore not trivially the exteriority of an object that stands before a self-contained subject. The externality that indelibly characterizes nature involves, if anything, the subject itself. This is the case not just because the structure of subjectivity finds its first articulated expression in Hegel’s system in the realm of natural exteriority, namely, in the treatment of the animal organism,⁸ but because the

⁸ See Illetterati 1994, 2016, 2017.

externality that radically innervates nature runs through the whole of reality. Reality, in order to exist, always implies externality: to exist, the real cannot but be external, cannot but expose itself, can never remain closed inside a purely logical-noetic plan. Think, for example, at the level of the spirit, about the structure of action: action is really an action, says Hegel, if and only if it becomes other than the intention, than its noetic structure. Action, in order to be, must enter the world, that is, it must make itself other than the intention from which it arises. By entering the world, the action changes alongside it. It takes its peculiar configuration, never completely replicable, its unique profile, its specific consistency necessarily linked to the conditions, time and contingency of its performance. If it does not translate into the world, or if it does not accept the challenge of becoming the world itself, the action is nothing and becomes bogged down in nothing, assuming at most the density of a sleepy neuronal tremor. This is the tragic essence of action: to be, it must accept being something other than itself. And for Hegel, indeed the subject is nothing more than “*the series of his actions*” (Hegel 2008, p. 122; GW 14, § 124), or his exteriorization, the translation of himself in the objective, which in turn implies that without this translation, without this loss of self, the subject is not.

In this sense, if we consider the idea that the key aspect of nature is externality and that being reality is always necessarily external, we can, in a way, say that reality is always and necessarily also nature. It cannot be denied that the actuality of spirit's externality—and finitude, being its correlate—takes a different shape, since it is somehow sublimated through thinking's self-knowledge, which removes what at first seems external to it. But such work never ends with the eradication of externality. There is no actuality, and there is no spirit without externality. Even at the level of absolute spirit, that is, in the physicality of the work of art, in the cultic dimension of the religious symbol or the discursive articulation of philosophy, there is an ineliminable,

necessary remnant of externality and, thus, naturalness. Externality is a condition of possibility of the world. There would be no world if there were no externality. As we know, Hegel takes the prologue of the Gospel of John very seriously: in the beginning was the logos, and the logos was God. However, Hegel knows that logos and God are still nothing concrete until they accept the finiteness within themselves, that is, until they become external:

And so the Word [logos] became flesh
And took a place among us.

IV.

According to Hegel, nature is external not in the trivial sense of being what is in front of the human, beyond it or at its disposal, either as a pure objectivity that can be used and abused, or as a world dominated by laws that are completely autonomous and independent of subjectivity. These two attitudes, which Hegel calls the practical and the theoretical attitude, have dominated modernity and, as Hegel expands, although they appear opposed to each other, they mirror one another.⁹ Rather, nature is external because it is the flesh within which the logos takes shape, because it is the first condition of having something like the real, like the world. This is what makes it possible to speak of Hegel's philosophy as a form of naturalism. This should not be misunderstood as Hegel suggesting that all of reality is to be reduced to the nature investigated by the empirical sciences, implying that therefore the natural sciences are the only valid form of knowledge of reality. Hegelian naturalism instead implies a sort of decolonization

⁹ See GW 24,2, p. 769: "Wir haben ganz äußerlich angefangen, mit theoretischem und praktischem Verhalten. Sie sind abstrakt, einseitig. Beide zusammen machen die Totalität aus."

process in nature, or, in other words, a denaturalization of nature, a process of nature's liberation from its reduction to an ontological space that is regulated by the explanatory model of the natural sciences determined in the course of modernity, and that is thus opposed to the dimension of the human, of history, of freedom.

As a result, such decolonization does not leave the account of the human being itself unaffected, but rather implies a redetermination of it to discuss the human being's naturalness without flattening it based on what is other than it. Hegelian philosophy, then, is naturalism only to the extent to which it is a non-naturalistic naturalism. By non-naturalistic naturalism, I refer to an attitude that, on the one hand, avoids considering reality as divisible into the natural and the cultural world, into one sphere dominated by necessity and the other accounting for freedom; on the other hand, this interpretative position refuses to absolutize any of these sides, whose abstractness it intends to criticize. In this sense, non-naturalistic naturalism is an attempt to break away from the alternative between naturalist monism, which claims to reduce the whole of reality to the way natural science thinks about it, and cultural relativism, for which the natural does not actually exist, being always and only a reflection of symbolic operations and, therefore, cultural constructs. This opposition refers, in its background, to the idea that the world is separated into two realities, each of which is placed by the naturalist and the culturalist at the foundation of the other: in naturalism, the nature of natural science grounds culture, and in culturalism, nature is instead a product of culture, a result of the symbolic stratifications that constitute it. Naturalist monism and cultural relativism are in fact, as Philippe Descola discusses, two positions that, when they clash, ultimately legitimize each other: "They form the two poles of an epistemological continuum along which those trying to make sense of the relations between societies and their environments must position themselves" (Descola 2013, p. 49).

Hegelian non-naturalistic naturalism is a form of monism (i.e., there is only one world) that aims at neither an ontological nor an epistemological *reductio ad unum*, which would imply that the different entities originate from some unitary law able to give a linear and continuous structure to reality (be it a teleology of freedom or evolution by natural selection). This kind of monism would not dismember reality into radically heterogeneous spheres, yet it would be able to account for the infinity of orders and differences that are produced within reality—differences that do not imply any duplication or even multiplication of reality. Consequently, the recognition of difference does not necessarily lead to dualism, just as the idea that reality is one does not imply the denial of differences

In this sense, non-naturalistic naturalism wants to be a more radical naturalism than that of the naturalists; the latter naturalism—belonging to the naturalists—takes as its reference an abstract and limited conception of nature, based precisely on its opposition to another with respect to nature, and, by expelling from nature everything that it cannot account for, nourishes the articulated forms of anti-naturalism and supernaturalism with which it struggles. By contrast, Hegelian non-naturalistic naturalism can be read as an attempt to overcome the conception of nature that Terrence Deacon calls *Incomplete Nature*, or the idea of nature that must exclude a series of phenomena, which are themselves evidently natural, to remain consistent with the conceptualization received within a certain model of natural science.

V.

In 2014, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rovereto organized a remarkable exhibition titled *Lost in Landscape*. The aim of the exhibition, which was curated by the Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera, was to investigate how a typically modern topic

such as landscape is interpreted in the contemporary world. The interesting elements of the exhibition were many: the idea that the landscape of the Anthropocene is one radically marked by a violent and destructive subjectivity; the idea that the contemporary landscape is mostly that of the metropolis; the idea that it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between what Hegel called *physische Natur* and *sittliche Natur*. Among the various exhibited works, the one by Cuban artist Carlos Garoicoa, entitled *Quando el deseo se parece a nada* (*When Desire Seems Like Nothing*), attracted the most attention.

Looking at this picture, the words of Andrea Zanzotto, one of the greatest Italian poets of the second half of the twentieth century, who never stopped reflecting in prose and poetry on the notion of landscape, come to mind: "The landscape is inhabited not only by one, but by countless walking brains, by a thousand different but contiguous mirrors that create it and that, in turn, are created by it all the time" (Zanzotto 2013, p. 33, my translation).

In Garoicoa's picture, the urban landscape that stands in the background is reproduced with and in a tattoo on the arm of the subject in the foreground. Under the tattooed landscape are the words "in my soul," almost as if to say that this man belongs to that world, just as that world belongs to him. The subject is immersed in the landscape, and at the same time, the landscape is internalized in the subject. The subject is itself the landscape and the landscape is itself the subject. An unthinkable perspective for Albrecht Altdorfer. A perspective from which to rethink the concept of nature today.



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