

Romanticism and Landscape: an Eco-critical approach to the Natural Image.

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ABSTRACT: *The article traces the genealogy of the concept of Nature and landscape from the romanticism to the second industrial revolution. This archeology of ideas aims to dissect Nature as a subject of discourse in order to propose it as an “empty container” filled with fantasy and which has been instrumentalized by (sometimes) conservative power axes. The ongoing ecological crisis demands a set of new theoretical approaches towards what is that thing “out there” that we call Nature since the romantic paradigm only gives away a passive and contemplative image that serves to economic exploitation and aesthetic consumerism. Through the lens of eco-criticism, the aim is to dismantle and deconstruct the fantasy of Nature by proposing different entry points from interdisciplinarity and critical studies.*

KEYWORDS: *Nature; Romanticism; Consumerism; Aesthetics*

I. NATURAL IMAGE AND ROMANTICISM.

“Ecological writing keeps insisting that we are “embedded” in nature. Nature is a surrounding medium that sustains our being. Due to the properties of the rhetoric that evokes the idea of a surrounding medium, ecological writing can never properly establish that this is nature and thus provide a compelling and consistent aesthetic basis for the new worldview that is meant to change society. It is a small operation, like tipping over a domino...Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration.” (Morton 2007: 5)

Romanticism was an artistic and intellectual movement which appears in Europe by the late XVIII century, especially in Germany and England. The movement was a strong reaction to the Neoclassicist movement that evoked the classical figures of the ancient Roman and Greek civilizations as the absolute beauty canons in art. The romantic revolution takes place in an industrialized, urban and profoundly nostalgic Europe. About its name, etymologically the root *-romant* comes from the French *roman* (novel) but these relationships are not fully clear. It was James Boswell who by the mid XVIII century mentions for the first time the term “romantic” describing certain landscapes surrounding an exile experience. Romanticism being an intellectual and artistic response to the rationalism present in the Enlightenment and the neoclassicism put the creative weight on emotions. These feelings being experienced by the artist were the engine of their creative activity and, being the artist the catalyst of said feelings, this person became a creator/genius, an enlightened one.

The tormented poet was the only way to be a real artist and said artist needed a unique and particular voice. “We found ourselves in Germany at the end of the XVIII century where, as in many other places, there was a huge rebellion against the classical ideal of beauty which was confronted with much more poetic alternatives as the picturesque and the sublime. This being followed by the displacement of the reason by the emotions. Some wise men were expecting that a divine enlightenment would reveal to them a series of inaccessible truths. This would lead to understand romanticism as a soul attitude, one that designs in every human individual the creative

activity itself. It was in Nature where melancholy and restlessness found their place” (Fernandez: 2017, 8). As Fernandez puts it, it was this individualism coming from the creator/genius that could translate itself easily into nationalist discourses along the countries where the romanticism was stronger (France, Germany and England). Something very important about the creator/genius is that the artist and their vision was the subject that held the undisputed vision towards the world and national landscape; they thought about themselves as receptors of higher emotions. This makes place for binary: a subject-human being and an object-world thing. By facing such idealization towards the creative forces it is interesting how the movement was also very nostalgic. There was a huge longing for past days, especially medieval ones, a longing for a non-industrialized world took by surprise the artistic and intellectual imaginary. The denial of the present days, those of the bourgeois, the mechanic and rigid life, transformed itself into an adoration of Nature and rural life. This paradigmatic shift on how beauty was understood holds a rich period of artistic and literary creation in the most industrialized countries in Europe. This cultural production found its ways to leak into philosophical axioms and mainstream thinking which would lead later to maintain certain scientific visions about the natural world.

“Romanticism is considered as a period in which profound cultural changes in literature, philosophy and arts flourished but in which few scientific innovations took place. Science and romanticism have been interpreted as irreconcilable universes since this movement may have cultivated values completely opposed to scientific objectivity, characterized by a strong irrationalism and by the exaltation of the subjective components of knowledge. In fact, there are several opinions judging this possible cultural impact in the scientific praxis as a disastrous event, which produced no effective progress in the experiment sciences of said period.” (Martin and Menéndez: 2007, 296)

Natural ideals of freedom as high grass fields where the wind blows are the perfect picture for Rousseau’s approximations of men going back to Mother Nature. These same thoughts which captivated the Versailles court are still relevant since they detonate with the same concern. The romantic point of view could affect directly on how we are able to think, approach and react to the ongoing ecological crisis. Even the legacy of the poetic style developed in the XVIII century can be tracked on how today we speak and write about the subject. For John Mayer, the contemporary ecological writing seems to be only focused to find a new vision on nature independently if this vision can be useful to transform human politics and societies. The forgotten paradises were those containing a simple life and nation/state ideal, the *volkgeist*. The exaltation of a beauty only found in emotions and this being translated into the motherly nation landscape generated a series of aesthetical experiences present in several paintings by Delacroix (1863), Turner (1799), Constable (1837) and Spitzweg (1808). Sublime landscapes in the kantian sense, filling the spectator’s vision who feels reduced but still overwhelmed by emotions. Nature is an exotic and savage beauty, it is a fetishized paradise where to escape from urban life, and it is, overall, a desirable past. The aesthetic of these pictorial pieces reinforced a series of opposed binaries (as said before) such as city/nature, human/nature and technology/nature to mention a few. For what started as a revolutionary movement it is interesting to see how nostalgia and denial of the present days can be easily transformed into reactionary thinking.

“Nature is no longer a resource to extract benefits and productivity but it is also looked at as an aesthetic, in other words, nature or landscape can also be used for enjoyment and for aesthetical pleasure. More the human disassociates from needs better they can contemplate the value of things: nature is no longer just ground, it is already something more than the food supplier. What is being produced with this aesthetical vision is the conception of a world that possesses beauty in function of itself and not by its utility, a new comprehension of beauty on Earth.” (Martinez: 2007, 14)

Later on, romanticism fragmented itself into several other post-romantic movements that eventually would dispute their place to dictate the European artistic dynamics. Remains of the creator/genius, for example, can be found in surrealism but many other of its proposals have been able to linger and even to shape certain visions that we have nowadays about the natural world. In the present days, even if romanticism was not a revolutionary political carrier *per se*, its nationalist content inspired the independence movements in the American continent. The new national landscapes were human property and the administration of the world was developed under the vision of the romantic poet in which the world is an object to be seen and possessed.

“In this sense, romanticism carried a fundamental epistemological transformation or a change of episteme facing the tradition of the XVIII century, one that produced the alteration of cognitive models. This change illustrated itself by the comprehension of the individual’s mind as a mirror, a fateful reflection of reality to be understood by the metaphor of the lamp, able to recreate Nature form subjectivity. Both poles of knowledge were necessary to acquire an objective thinking without denying the important role that played the imagination and the interpretation of the experience proposed by our senses.”

(Martín and Menéndez: 2007, 298)

The previous quotation from Dolores Martín and Roberta Menéndez build up a conceptual bridge towards a construction of the natural imaginary. Romanticism has a profound impact even in the contemporary days by shaping a diversity of normalized concepts that are used in aesthetics and critique. One of these is landscape. This recurrent figure appears in the reactionary spirit of romanticism and they can be analyzed by genealogy and art.

II. INFLUENCE IN CULTURE.

Romantic thought gets to expand quite fast over the European continent and other latitudes thanks to the mechanization and mass production of printing. Meanwhile, in its cultural axes the movement starts to divide, but it travels to new actions spheres like the American continent where it translates into independence rebellions and a new way of mapping territory. The political comprehension of territory starts to be understood through visual tools and poetry. Contemplation as a colonial exercise gives its first steps through fantasy and fetish. Javier Arnaldo approaches to this issue, “the term “romantic” had already made an appearance by the late XVIII century in English literature and its use as a poetic charge can be tracked throughout the Enlightenment period, it could be used to point out a “roman” style by its extravagant signature or, in a more positive way, as a synonym of what in nature and artistic creation would be understood as attractive and as an emotional object by its surreal, fantastic or surprising appearance. What is romantic acquires its significance as an aesthetical concept by the end of the century.” (2004, 207). Romantic posture has a quick acceptance in mainstream culture. Science is no distant from this *allure*, certain concepts that found their fundamentals in poetics were taken as a base where to build up a sense of the natural world a century later.

“This “scientific” notion of nature exploded quickly from the XIX century. The conceptual tissue made up by Nature/Science/Rationality consolidated itself quite firmly, mainly by the increasingly successful development of natural sciences and their hypnotic applications in all domains of life. Nevertheless, at the same time, other significant chains started to wrap the sense of Nature.” (Swyngedouw: 2011, 48)

This new vision coming from the idea of a science of contemplation, of individualization and nationalism synchronizes with the European colonial expansion. By using these relatively new disciplines such as zoology, botany and anthropology, western science starts creating an inventory of raw matter from the global periphery in order to take agency and administration on them to the detriment of the first nations which inhabited those territories. “During the romanticism, two axes predominated: nationalism and liberalism. This translated into arts as an introspection of the self and its link with Nature. By doing so, changing the genre of landscape painting, mainly in the northern countries thanks to their pantheist attitude.” (Fernandez: 2007, 9). This quotation allows to keep on the discussion about a Nature that permits to understand the world as a landscape image and therefore, as an aesthetical pleasure to be consumed easily transformed into material consumerism – pushing towards an aesthetical depredation that maintains the early capitalism which romanticism, in the first place, wanted to get rid of. The colonial European enterprise in the XIX century alongside with the romantic vision of territory nests a cultural and landscape fetish of the invaded latitudes and a facility for aesthetical and material consumerism. “By the other hand, landscape reflected tragedy because of the separation of men and nature. The romantic landscape is not being taken by Nature but seduced and overwhelmed by it. Far away from the pastoral conceptions, romantic landscapes are essentially tragic. It is the scenery where nature and men confront, and in which men acknowledge the dramatic nostalgia that invades them by affirming their own ostracism on behalf of Nature.” (Fernandez: 2007, 9). The confrontation of Nature and men on consumerism,

contemplative or economical, allows to reinforce the human/nature dichotomy which for romanticism obeys an ancient philosophical duo: subject/object.

One reason to argument in favor of the fusion of both dichotomies through the romantic period is that both duos present vision and agency: man is the subject and Nature is the object. Men's agency lies on their capacity to passively contemplate by then possessing and administrating actively and then exercising their own gaze and epistemological construction onto the object. For this dichotomic vision, nature is a beautiful landscape that lies passively and it is infinite.

“In the landscape genre, the contemplation of Nature is just an external one: the fundamental gaze, which puts in the confidence of imagination, it exist towards the exterior, the unconscious. Inside the romantic painter's canvas reality is shaped and dominated by the forces that come from this gaze. A ruin, a mountain, a sunset, or a hurricane must recall and, therefore, visually reflect, not orographic or climatological phenomena, but states of subjectivity. The acceptance of this premise separates radically the romantic aesthetic from a realist preach and an impressionist one too.” (Argullol: 2000, 68)

In the romantic pictorial production and those that followed, landscape has an especial protagonism. There are infinite meadows, indomitable mountains, and urban scenery (as Argullol proposes by mentioning impressionist preaches). These three characteristics can respond to 1. The domesticated landscape, this means the already worked territory ready to be consumed and useful, 2. The sublime frontiers and the phallic elevation of contemplative geographies by their masculine power, and 3. The human natural space: the Enlightenment urban castle with a romantic interior design. Nature seems to be always divided by its practical quality or its contemplation quality present in western art and literature. Cultural productions reinforce more and more the passive visions of Nature but also the dichotomy that something beautiful and wild lies outside the barriers of civilization. Maybe a lens that Paul Gauguin could expand in a transparent way by translating the indomitable and savage Nature into the women he found in the south pacific ruled by the French empire at that time. “This barriers situate themselves in order to see Nature beyond a knowledge resource, but maybe as the face of an incontrollable force, of sickness and death, catastrophe and the expression of what makes men conscientious of their finitude.” (Fernandez: 2017, 15). Once planted, the natural fantasy is diversified into a series of human shaped desires, almost flirting with the *eros* of power and domination. At the end, Nature seems to be an empty container.

III. DICHOTOMY.

Coming back to romanticism, Francisco CalvoSerraller offers an interesting recompilation of some of the previously discussed concepts. About the sublime, it can be taken by different perspectives, the most well-known one is the kantian definition where the sublime is thought as a counterpart of beauty where understanding and imagination are engaged in a free game. For Kant, the sublime is a blocked game of these two faculties. Aesthetically this brings a problematic contemplation, a sort of emotional and intellectual wallow where outside mellowness exist dynamics and lack of control.

“In the XVIII century, and significantly associated with the industrial revolution, political changes are coming to the urban expansion and overall to the idea that Nature is already well dominated. A reaction towards the domesticated, rationalized and ordered Nature is being born, at the same time an attraction for its vast scope takes place. The sublime is a term which etymologically means what is outside every limit, the unlimited. As an aesthetical feeling, it identifies with the sense of overflow by the natural phenomena and disasters. (...) In order to identify this feeling we have to look at Turner's landscapes, we have to think about the excursions, to think about that restlessness that moves alpinists to do things as surprising as climbing up the Himalaya without knowing if there is going to be a comeback. Suddenly, men longs for the lack of control and risk. All the contemporary landscape is marked by tragedy due, precisely, by this wish to find in Nature what is not familiar, but everything that is completely external to men and exceeds its possibilities of control.” (Serraller: 2005, 262)

With the sublime, the natural vision of traditional romanticism crystallizes the dichotomy outside/inside which obeys a savage Nature being somewhere “outside” and a domesticated and controlled “inside”. The sciences and arts of the outside have to deal with the problematic contemplation of the sublime while the arts and sciences of the inside can deal with the traditional concept of beauty according to the kantian genealogy. Once designated in another conceptual space, natural sciences stop creating just archive in order to build up a comparative analysis of what they have discovered. The figure of the western adventurer in foreign lands starts to be very attractive and feeds the popular imagination of Nature (territorial and cultural) as a counterpart of the city. A highly aestheticized literature with romantic hints appears exploding this vision. “Much of the romantic literature emerges from the desperate feeling of alienation from the natural world and it expresses an anxious attempt to reestablish a vital and sustainable relationship between humanity and the fragile planet in which we live.” (McKusick: 1997, 123 – 124). Being outside Nature, the human being does not belong to this order. Mountains, animals, plants, insects, viruses, mushrooms, rocks and water are not indexed in the same category as ourselves, so-called civilized human beings. By having a foot (and not a paw) outside this category that builds up “the rest of the world” the alienation is fully done in a conceptual and material level.

“Romantic mind is so voraciously longing to achieve the totality and unicity that erects the natural spirit as the genuine aesthetical representative of its angst: this is the reason why landscape, even from the renaissance crisis, constitutes itself as the main romantic genre.” (Argullol: 2000, 46)

These landscapes are different and distant, nostalgic but nonetheless they are desirable in a pragmatic way. Its contemplation is beautiful through the romantic representation, facing such landscapes would be cathartic through the sublime presentation and its relationship is dichotomic by becoming the opposite of human civilization. The “Discourse on Inequality” by Rosseau¹, for example, projects certain fantasies of simplicity over his idea of men in the state of Nature and he observes the increasing alienation of the subject individual while human beings form communities, develop governance and interchange systems, invent languages and gradually subordinate their autonomy and self-sustain capacity to the traps of civilization (Harrison: 2006). Romanticism aimed to be an artistic and intellectual movement that could rise a strong critique of industrialization and the neoclassical and rationalist visions of the European Enlightenment. This enterprise is well achieved by proposing a new *status quo* of conceptual axioms about the natural world plagued with dichotomies: nature/human, landscape/city, natural/artificial, etc. By the end of the second industrial revolution² the horizon is different, and the colonial and capitalist conquer is already done.

How to think about Nature once it is no longer there? How to understand a new ecological horizon in which the dichotomy is still operating? How to face the natural crisis of the XXI century from a critical approach?

IV. ECOCRITICISM.

Ecocritical thinking is a fairly new field with an ongoing development, especially in the North American and European academy from the 1990s. The main idea is to discuss about concepts of Nature found in the literary and artistic production from the present and the past in order to relativize human visions about the world. For the ecocritical gaze, the natural world is highly idealized thanks to artistic movements, especially romanticism. “These debates (Ecocriticism) investigate on how these texts (romantic ones) got to participate in the proto-ecological discourse about work and the function of humans in this world. (The debates) not only focus on testing if one author is green or not, but also they try to distinguish through research the ideological use for which Nature has been used” (Salt: 2001). A proposal which goes against the natural idealism can be found in “The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology” by CherrylGlotfelty published in 1996 in the United States. The text aims for a critical lecture of literature and the means of academic comprehension about the subject of Nature looking for alternative entry points based not only in science but also in philosophy and artistic proposals.

¹ « Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes », Jean Jaques Rousseau, 1754.
² 1850-1970.

“It is not easy to define in a satisfactory way what is Ecocriticism, but we can affirm that we are talking about a concept that started to mint inside the Anglo-Saxon academy, especially the American one from the second half of the 90s decade. One of the first times the term was used can be found in 1995, year in which an American Literature professor in the Harvard University, Lawrence Buell, published “The Environmental Imagination” in which the note number 20 mentions vaguely the word Ecocriticism to define it as “study of the relationship between literature and environmental conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalism praxis.” (Buell: 1995, 430). Echoing this need to hunt the literature theory with the ecologist commitment shortly after in 1996, an anthology of critical texts configured by this criteria’s is published. “The Ecocritical Reader” is a book still considered a mayor hit mark of the discipline. In this way, it is rare to find nowadays a book that ignores what Glotfelty proposed as Ecocriticism in the general introduction of the piece: “Simply put Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” (Garcia: 2017, 80)

In the text “Ecocriticism” published by Greg Garrad in the year 2004 in the UK, a deeper gaze on the environmental cataclysm is introduced. Pollution is also taken into account as one of the many “natures” to acknowledge and study. Finally Timothy Morton, in his 2007 text “Ecology without Nature”, approaches the subject of Nature with a multidisciplinary problematization from arts and philosophy. All the authors previously mentioned have an interest to diversify even more their critical capacities through this new discipline by being flexible to become a coherent theoretical set for other latitudes. What romanticism achieved Ecocriticism can dismantle and it can allow those who were understood as savage and un-civilized to have agency and a voice.

“Ecocritical theories aim for some consciousness about the environment inside the literary debates which would bring, according to the experts, a new ecological ethic. This field presents a level of diversity that goes in parallel with cultural studies since the biotechnological changes facilitated the study of cultural comprehension about Nature (Heise: 2006, 506). In the same way, in its third stage it has promoted an intense dialogue with ecocritical perspectives articulated in other countries: England, Japan, Australia, Latin-American and Africa.” (Rosa-Bustos: 2004, 64-65)

The discursive permeability in Ecocriticism exist to understand the vast diversity of natures that are present in the “outside” of the popular imagination. To understand the cultural construction that is that empty container that we call Nature is a first step to analyze the world, not as a study object (thing that would reinforce even more the dichotomy), but as a subject with agency who is looking back at us. This is how the ecocritical thought needs interdisciplinary entries in order to better comprehend the ways in which the world can look back at us and even objurgate us. Fiction, art and cinematography are big allies of Ecocriticism and permit a dynamic sway in the core of its debates.

“From all these definitions we can extract two characteristics that keep themselves invariable beyond the nuance differences: on one side, Ecocriticism occupies about the relationship about literature and the environment, on the other one, it does it from the openly militant consciousness on the ecologist movement. This explains that, in recent work, Ecocriticism does not appear as an analysis method, but as concern to translate the cultural study fields into the ecological issues (Clark: 2001, 303). Besides, an insistent appellation to transgress the academic limits into the sciences, to forge a transformative and sustainable discourse and, by the immersion in cultural history, to understand the complex relationship between the human and not human are some of its most important goals.” (Garcia: 2017, 81)

As Garcia mentions in the previous quotation, Nature is an existent entity outside any postmodernist interest that would put it as only a social construction. The “outside” exists, Ecocriticism does not want to deny the material presence of what we call Nature but it does search for an ecological thinking that can be critical, diverse and creative far away from passive and contemplative concepts of the romantic tradition. Precisely this is the part that Timothy Morton finds tricky and difficult. To understand the material dimension of Nature still knowing that it has real effects on life and existence qualities but at the same time recognizing the fantastic and romantic narrative that has shaped it.

V. NATURAL PROBLEMATIC.

If Ecocriticism pushes us to deconstruct certain axiomatic concepts inside the fantasy of Nature, which are the steps to follow? A first one would be to start questioning nature for real outside the shadows of romanticism and aestheticized idealisms. If we do some surveys, Nature will probably be described as animals, oceans, mountains and valleys... this is a first approximation and it is quite romantic. At first glance, we consider and appreciate Nature as everything that is useful and disposable to be consumed (aesthetically or economically). Geography and edible animals and plants are quite regular figures appearing once we call out Nature in our heads, but, what about all the other entities, existences and lives that are not "useful" to the human being?

"Nature is, indeed, very difficult to understand. Is it about the physical world around and inside us, as trees, rivers, mountain chains, HIV, microbial life, elephants, petrol, cacao, diamonds, neutrons, our hearts, trash, etc.? Does it includes things as the roses in the botanical garden, fresh orange juice, adventure island in Disneyland (one of the most diverse ecotopes in the world), an eco-building by Richard Rogers, served water fluids, genetically modified tomatoes or a hamburger? Should we expand it to include greed, avarice, love, compassion, hunger and death? Or should we think about it in terms of dynamics, relationships, and relational processes as climate change, hurricane movements, proliferation and extinction of species, erosion, droughts, food chains, tectonic plates, nuclear energy production, black holes, supernovas and things like that? (Swyngedouw: 2011, 42)

This is a first step towards deconstructing notions of nature. The anthropocentrism that holds the romantic vision is not unjustified, it comes from the European renaissance where the gaze and epistemological center was the human being. Such highly anthropocentric vision of Nature shape the ideas around the natural world as passive. Those entities or lives that, peripherally, do not contribute to the human cultural (western) expansion or the capitalist model are undesirables. Keeping the line drawn by Swyngedouw, HIV, fungus, pollution, hot lava, excrement, cancer cells, amongst other things are thought as not necessarily natural elements, they are thought more as the rage of Nature, the demons inside it. On the other hand, diseases or industrial waste are conceived as elements existing outside Nature, they are the human industrialization's bastard children or at its best, parasite life forms. One gaze that compels to problematize in a schematic way three discourses about Nature is Timothy Morton's one in his 2007 work.

"In a fairly recent book, titled *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton makes reference to Nature as "a transcendental term with a material mask that lies at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that merge into it" (Morton: 2007, 14). Morton places at least three senses or spaces in our symbolic universe about Nature. First, it comes as a floating significant, the content of Nature expresses itself through a variety of diverse terms that all together cast into the name of Nature: olives, fish, parrot, SRAS virus, love, reproduction, the alps, mineral water, markets, desires, profit, CO₂, money, competence... said metonymical lists offer some – but still unstable, significance, but they are intrinsically slippery and they refuse to show a more consistent sense. Nature, as a metaphor, stays empty, its meaning can only be extracted as metonymical references or other significant." (Swyngedouw: 2011, 42)

Coming from Swyngedouw led by Morton, the concept of the empty container comes back to the article as the point 0 in the metonymical series. In other words, Nature's definition depends on the enunciation of figures that do not answer to the question "what is nature?" rather they are a list of elements that got to be classified as such. It seems that Nature requires the existence of such series in order to justify itself, its real definition is indeed slippery because it aims to give away "entry passes" by cataloguing what is Nature and what is not.

"Second, Nature has a "law force, which is a norm to measure deviation" (Morton: 2007, 14). This the kind of invocation of Nature that is used, for example, to normalize heterosexuality and to think queerness as some sort of deviation and against nature identity and to put competition against human beings as something natural and altruism as a merely cultural product" (Swyngedouw: 2011, 43)

A second discourse is the one about the natural and the unnatural. As the previous author mentions, Nature has been used as a measurement unit to validate and condemn human actions. Taking Nature as a scatological issue transforms its norms as supposedly inviolable laws which have to stay and long in order to continue balanced life on Earth. These visions come more from fantasies about harmony and stability that are not the result of analysis or observation of the natural world. In the validation of human activities and identities, Nature acts as a foucaultian exercise of power. The ruler of the regime is in the tacit aspect of Nature, that empty container without definition that fills itself with any reactionary ideology that can fit in and, most of all, needs an undisputable dogma. For Ecocriticism, all Nature is strange and dynamic, there is no norms, just the becoming.

“Nature embraces a plurality of fantasies and desires, for example the dream of a sustainable Nature, the desire to make love in a warm beach under the sunset, the fear of Nature’s revenge if we keep producing CO2... Nature is always summoned as the substitute of other passions and desires, often repressed and invisible. The lacanian *objet petit a* around which we conform our motivations and that hides the lack of a firm ground on which we can support our subjectivity (Žižek, 1999b). It is a procedure in which we project on Nature – displaced on otherness – our desires and fears, it is falling down the abyss that separates the difficult ontic core of what is real repressed from the symbolic world where we live in. It is that kind of fantasy that unfolds in discourses that aim for taking back the true human harmony – original, presumably, but lost nowadays – through the restoration of the lost balance of the world. Here Nature is put as the external terrain that offers the promise, if we know how to understand it, of finding or producing a really happy and harmonious life (Stavrakakis, 1997a)” (Swynedouw: 2011, 43)

A third and last point from Morton is that Nature is an empty container that seems to have some sort of desire gadget. In a more aestheticized sense we can talk about an Eros fantasy of Nature. This quality is directly taken from Romanticism and the campaign to flee the big cities, industrialization and the routine. Ideas such as skipping one day of work to go to the beach to see the sunset are discursive figures highly charged with romantic aspirations and therefore highly desirables. Nature is some “other reality” where to scape. This last point is maybe the main reason why tearing apart the notion of traditional Nature is so difficult. Without the fantasy, the vision of a savage yet desirable outside dies. Nature suddenly is no longer an exotic foreign country and maybe we will have to understand that we are that exotic place and we inhabit it. The duality of desire falls down and there is nowhere to scape but the gaze of the subject and the object combined in one. This dissolution deconstructs contemplation as it was put together on previous pages but for Ecocriticism it may be the only way to face the conditions of ecological devastation in which we live in.

Finally, the existence of a romantic Nature, passive, ready to be consumed and beautiful exists for the benefice of its own depredation, of its own idyllic eroticism and of its own fetishization ready to be tamed. It is not gratuitous the quote with which I decided to start the article. Nature seems to be the victim of a sadistic gaze longing for control and desire, a double dynamic that does not allow to act but it begs for dominance. Untouched lands in the world can only exist as a reservoir of unexploited capital, as some worldwide conflicts have shown already. Nature is an abstraction... what is savage embodies the freedom of determination, the bedrock of capitalist ideology. It is always “somewhere”, behind the showcase at the distance as an aesthetic experience, even when you are in it, as much of writing about nature shows (Morton: 2007). In order to think and re-think what Nature is without falling into its slippery abysses, it is important to keep in mind a critical approach, having into account the tradition of its poetic construction but moving forward an action sphere were sacristy only exists for the good of a bigger panorama.

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