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Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology

ISSN: 0007-1773 (Print) 2332-0486 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rbsp20

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**To cite this article:** Vaiva Daraškevičiūtė (13 Oct 2026): Anthropocene Landscapes: Aesthetics Between Pollution and Inflammation, Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, DOI: 10.1080/00071773.2026.2745634

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2026.2745634

Published online: 13 Oct 2026.

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH SOCIETY FOR PHENOMENOLOGY
https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2026.2745634

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# Anthropocene Landscapes: Aesthetics Between Pollution and Inflammation

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**ABSTRACT**

The article discusses the issue of the Anthropocene and pollution from the perspective of aesthetics. The initial part analyses the tendency of the visual representations of the Anthropocene to aestheticise the crisis rather than serve as a mobilizing factor. It is argued that this tendency has its roots in modernity and has been influenced profoundly by the Western tradition of landscape painting. The second part focuses on the impact the perspective of landscape painting has on our perception of nature and the environment. The third part analyses the concept of landscape as a multidimensional process and reflects on the limitations of this approach, possibly based on a symbolic classification of a territory. The article concludes with a proposal to rethink the concept of a landscape in the context of the Anthropocene, thus moving beyond the inside/outside distinction and considering the coherence between the planet (pollution) and the singular body (inflammation) instead.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**
Received 26 May 2026
Accepted 1 October 2026

**KEYWORDS**
Anthropocene aesthetics; landscape perspective; dissociation; pollution; inflammation

## Introduction

In contemporary culture, the crisis of the Anthropocene is frequently associated with the development of technology and the economic exploitation of nature. However, the aesthetic dimension, albeit less immediately apparent, is also crucial in this context. Visual culture analysts Nicholas Mirzoeff and T. J. Demos introduce the concept of Anthropocene aesthetics, emphasizing a prevalent tendency to represent the Anthropocene mainly through panoramic images, where the destroyed landscapes, seen from above, acquire an abstract aestheticism and beauty.[1] This genre of visual representation works not by providing the necessary information but by aestheticising phenomena, such as pollution and environmental degradation. In this way, the aesthetics of the Anthropocene contributes to a diminished capacity to respond adequately to the current crisis by reducing the harmful factors to mere spectacle while at the same time allowing individuals to distance and abstract themselves as if these developments were happening somewhere outside, where their responsibility does not extend. According to Mirzoeff, the approach of Anthropocene aesthetics is a legacy of modernity that operates as a component of the "complex of visuality"; in other words, as a visual strategy that has historically

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[1] Mirzoeff, 'Visualizing the Anthropocene'; Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*.

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contributed to the empowerment of colonialism, imperialism, and industrial capitalism through practices of classification, separation, and aestheticisation.[2] From this perspective, Anthropocene aesthetics functions primarily as a visual mechanism linked to the dynamics of social and political facets of reality. However, this article will focus on the ontological assumptions underlying Anthropocene aesthetics. In this regard, the patterns of human interaction with the environment assume particular significance. The article will demonstrate how the Western tradition of landscape painting has significantly influenced our perception of the natural environment.[3] In paraphrasing Mirzoeff's concept of "complex of visuality," the notion of "complex of landscape" is proposed. This definition posits that perceiving the environment as a landscape is a mode of reducing reality to a visual perspective through aestheticisation and dissociation. In order to explore the possibility of transcending a totalizing gaze (the consequence of a landscape perspective), it could be hypothesized that an alternative approach lies in interpreting the environment beyond the visual perspective. Such an approach would involve considering it as a milieu rather than merely a landscape. Philippe Descola advocates for such an approach in his concept of landscape as transfiguration, referencing the relationship model characteristic of the autochthon cultures of the Amazon.[4] The latter model emphasizes processuality, regarding the environment as an active network of interconnections among various biotic communities. However, as demonstrated in the article, there remains the concern that the latter approach is grounded in the symbolic classification of territory.[5] The landscape-milieu model, therefore, poses the challenge of reconciling it with the realities of the Anthropocene, particularly concerning issues such as pollution and non-biodegradable waste. As an alternative proposition, the article concludes by analysing two metaphors from different theoretical foundations: the metaphor of the "skin of the world" proposed by Jean-Luc Nancy and the metaphor of pollution as inflammation, as reflected in the art project "Inflammation" by the Lithuanian artist duo Pakui Hardware (2024). Both examples offer opportunities to rethink Anthropocene landscapes beyond conventional distinctions of inside and outside and instead consider the coherence between the planet and the singular body.

## (An)Aesthetics of the Anthropocene

Claude Monet's famous work, "Impression, Sunrise," depicts the reddish-orange morning sun rising from the sea into the sky in the port of Le Havre. This painting, created in 1872, can be considered a modern landscape *par excellence*. As is well known, precisely that work gave its name to the newly-born Impressionist movement in art. However, Monet's choice of an idyllic image of the largest French port of the time provokes a double impression in the context of today's Anthropocene crisis. On the one hand, this painting can be seen as a statement of the era, testifying to society's optimism toward industrialization. On the other hand, one can ask whether this artwork was indeed radical or whether the reality it represented simply conveyed an

[2] Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*.
[3] Gombrich, *The Norm and Form*, 167–186; Mitchell, 'Holly Landscape'; Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*.
[4] Descola, 'Landscape as Transfiguration'.
[5] Melo, Alves de Lima, Ribeiro, 'Waste and Disposal'.

imperialist and rather conservative canon, thus contributing to a narrative that glorified the fossil fuel industry while ignoring the pollution factor.

The visual culture scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff identifies these exact problematic moments in his interpretation of this painting. In his article "Visualizing the Anthropocene", Mirzoeff argues that Monet's "Impression, Sunrise" is a perfect example representing the euphoria provoked by environmental ignorance that pervaded the entire era of industrial prosperity and is fading now. In explaining the grounds on which he draws direct links between Monet's work and the contemporary situation of the Anthropocene, Mirzoeff refers to the conclusion of art critics, according to whom the spectacularly coloured sky in the painting is not the ingenuity of the artist, but rather represents the actual colour of the sky, characteristic of Le Havre in the second half of the nineteenth century. More precisely, this colour resulted from the smoke from an industrial coal process merging with the sunlit horizon. To put it simply, Monet's painting exploited polluting smoke to create a particular effect of luminosity, and it is this latter aspect that Mirzoeff is concerned about the most. For him, the fact that Monet has chosen not to emphasize the damage caused by pollution but to give a charming appearance to the cranes and other installations in the distance suggests a desire to aestheticise the coal industry.

Thus, while the Anthropocene and the pollution crisis are usually associated with technological development and the exploitative economy, Mirzoeff is convinced that the factor of visuality and the specific aesthetic approach it entails also play a significant role in this process. Indeed, if we think, on the one hand, the changes occurring during the Anthropocene - such as ozone depletion, extinction of animal species, ocean acidification, climate change, and so on - are hardly detectable to the human senses because of their global scale. On the other hand, images of industrial landscapes, waste islands on the ocean shores, clear-cut forests, or animals trapped in plastic can be seen daily on the internet, on TV, and in magazines. In a sense, the Anthropocene generally becomes accessible to us precisely with the help of visual media. However, here, we must confront the problem of how the Anthropocene is represented. Images create an impression of immediacy, but they are neither things themselves nor mere appearances. Images belong to the domain of the culture industry - they are generated, and at the same time, they shape our perception of reality. For this reason, it is crucial to ask: how effective and mobilizing is information about the Anthropocene when it reaches us in visual form? At least, Mirzoeff suggests taking a highly reserved view of much of the Anthropocene iconography circulating in today's cultural field.[6]

Another visual culture theoretician, T. J. Demos, agrees with this cautious approach. T. J. Demos criticizes Canadian photographer Edward Burtynski's series of photos dedicated to the Anthropocene. These photos, made from a panoramic perspective, allow us to observe the footprint of human activity that has radically changed the planet's surface. It could seem that the purpose of these images is to inform the public and encourage radical action. However, T. J. Demos is convinced that a similar visual representation of the Anthropocene acts as a hypnotic, not a mobilising factor. In his opinion, Burtynski's photos aestheticise and naturalize the traces of polluting industries that are harmful to humans and the environment. This kind of Anthropocene

[6] Mirzoeff, 'Visualizing the Anthropocene'.

iconography, then, rather than informing about threats and promoting change, leads in the opposite direction. Because of the chosen perspective, it functions by creating an anaesthetic effect. The toxic atmosphere of industrial areas is transformed into an attractive view that, according to T. J. Demos, creates a feeling of supposed safety. Indeed, it is worth remembering that Kantian aesthetics already assigned beauty to realms of safety and controllability. Today, however, when the current situation requires fundamental structural changes, the passive attitude of an observer leads to political detachment and incapacity. Moreover, due to the all-encompassing nature of these phenomena, such inertia, according to T. J. Demos, becomes a kind of self-destruction.[7]

Thus, Mirzoeff and T. J. Demos introduce the term Anthropocene aesthetics, defining it as the widespread tendency to represent the Anthropocene mainly through panoramic images, where the destroyed landscapes seen from above acquire an abstract aestheticism and beauty. As these authors assert, the Anthropocene aesthetics operate in a dialectical manner: panoramic images offer us the possibility of grasping the global scale of the crisis, but on the other hand, the very choice of the perspective from above implies a message about the particular resources needed to manage the plight. In the end, such a strategy for communicating the Anthropocene creates contradictory rhetoric of the threat and powerlessness, suspending the ethical-political gesture of the observer and instead encouraging the transfer of responsibility to a supposed authority – governments, global business corporations, or the experts of a narrow scientific field.

According to the critique of these scholars, this kind of iconography is not oriented toward overcoming the crisis but toward maintaining the current status quo. That should be seen as a part of a broader systemic problem related to the approach of the representational strategies themselves, still guided by the principles established by the discourse of Enlightenment, where nature was understood in the sense of its governance and control. As Mirzoeff argues:

> As we learn how to look at the (Western, imperial) artwork via aesthetics a paradox results: the conquest of nature, having been aestheticized, leads to a loss of perception (*aesthesis*), which is to say, it becomes an anaesthetics (…) The aesthetics of the Anthropocene emerged as an unintended supplement to imperial aesthetics — it comes to seem natural, right, then beautiful — and thereby anaesthetized the perception of modern industrial pollution.[8]

It's easy to understand that Mirzoeff's and T. J. Demos's critiques of the Anthropocene aesthetics are oriented towards political mobilization and the questions of social politics. However, here I would like to focus on this issue from a slightly different angle by following the idea expressed by these authors that it is precisely the specific approach of aesthetics that allows us to visualize reality in such a way that it is as if the pollution and other consequences of the Anthropocene were non-existent in our environments.

## The Complex of Landscape: Between Nature and Art

The Anthropocene aesthetics contributes to our neglect of these phenomena. But how can that happen? How is it possible today to remain in a comfortable state of anaesthesia

[7] Demos, *Against the Anthropocene*.
[8] Mirzoeff, 'Visualizing the Anthropocene', 220.

and ignore the life-threatening situation? Of course, such negligence requires seeing the environment from a particular position and with a specific gaze. In search of an analogy, it's very appropriate to paraphrase Tommaso Marinetti, quoted by Walter Benjamin in his famous text "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". Marinetti defined war and injured bodies as beautiful and aesthetic. Sure, it's too difficult to understand this type of aesthetic pleasure unless it can be explained as a situation in which the observer remains extremely distant and dissociated from a similar experience. So, if we use this analogy for the context of Anthropocene – then, indeed, from a panoramic perspective – such as that offered by Monet's painting or Burtynsky's photos, the pollution is barely visible, and the garbage-loaded landfills can appear colourful and aesthetic.

At this point, one should raise the question, to what extent does the panoramic approach contribute to establishing aesthetic criteria for evaluating the environment? As far as we know, the very etymology of the word "panorama" implies a claim to a total view. However, even the view that opens up from the panoramic point, an extremely favorable position, cannot be considered as representing the whole because it is necessarily limited by subjective or technological restrictions of vision. And this limitation prevents the infinite extension of seeing. Thus, it is possible to say that a panoramic approach works as a kind of framing. Panorama functions not by creating the conditions to cover the whole picture but by offering the possibility to observe a particular, aesthetically framed fragment of reality from a certain distance. On the other hand, the distance required for the very panoramic perspective to work simultaneously establishes a separation that allows the individual to distance oneself from both one's situativity and from a particular place one is looking at.

It should be noted that these two aspects, the aestheticisation of reality and the dissociation from the environment, can be recognized in the artistic genre of landscape, which also has a lot to do with how we see the natural environment in general. In paraphrasing Mirzoeff's concept of "complex of visuality," the notion of "complex of landscape" could be proposed. This definition posits that perceiving the environment as a landscape is a mode of reducing reality to a visual perspective through aestheticisation and dissociation.

It has to be stressed straight away that the term "landscape" is used in everyday speech (in European languages such as English, but also in French or Italian) with at least two meanings – as an artistic representation of nature and as an aesthetically pleasing natural area, or - nature as landscape. As historians generally agree, the beginning of using the term "landscape," at least in Western culture, is primarily linked to the context of art. The neologism "landscape" can only be traced back to the Renaissance, when it was used to refer not to a "real" landscape but to a genre of art and its product - a fragment of nature aesthetically represented on canvas.

Thus, the question to begin with here is, how does one define the relationship between a landscape painting and nature as a landscape? It could seem that the answer is trivial: the landscape painting either conveys the beauty of nature or is inspired by that beauty. In either case, it appears that something that already exists in nature is transferred to the canvas or other medium. However, this process should be understood as corresponding to the opposite dynamic— not from nature to art, but from art to nature.

At this point, it is helpful to refer to the theoretical research of the art historian Ernst Gombrich. In his article "The Artistic Theory of the Renaissance and the Development of

Landscape Painting," published in the middle of the twentieth century, Gombrich explained in detail the hybrid identity of landscape. According to him, in both cases—not only in landscape painting but also in nature as landscape— the influence of the tradition of painting is fundamental. Moreover, as Gombrich points out, society learned to admire nature from landscape painting and not the other way around.[9] The influence of the paintings of landscape artists such as Claude Lorrain or Jan van Goyen was so significant for art lovers that they would search in nature for an equivalent to the images they had already seen in works of art. Thus, it results that the aesthetic criteria for evaluating nature were based from the very beginning on the emerging practice of representing nature in art, and only later was this matrix of a beautiful landscape applied to "real" nature.

Given the trajectory outlined here and the impact of the landscape tradition on our view of the natural environment in general, it is clear that it becomes very problematic to disentangle the registers of nature as image (landscape painting) and nature as view (nature as landscape). In my opinion, the overlapping of these two levels has been captured quite well by the rhetorical question posed by the visual culture analyst Thomas William Mitchell: "Doesn't the landscape perspective itself reduce a place to an image, a representation?"[10]

In order to reflect in further detail on the hybrid identity of the landscape, it can be seen that the dynamics of the application of aesthetic principles (from artistic representation to a specific area) do not take place only as a consequence of the instrumental transfer, when the optics of aesthetics is incorporated into the strategies of environmental formation. In this process, the modifications seem to be integrated at a much more fundamental level of the perception of reality when our relationship to a place is reformatted somehow into a purely visual regime of abstraction. As Mitchell argues:

> The concept of landscape that dominates the discourse of Western art history is one that is resolutely focused on visual and pictorial representation, the scenic, picturesque, and superficial face presented by natural terrain. Landscape is something to be seen, not touched. It is an abstraction from a place and a reification of space, a reduction of it to what can be seen from a distant point of view, a prospect that dominates, frames, and codifies the landscape in terms of a set of fairly predictable conventions – poetic, picturesque, sublime, pastoral, and so on.[11]

Looking at this quotation, we can see how imperceptibly, as if speaking of phenomena belonging to the same ontic category, Mitchell moves from landscape as a genre of art to landscape as a fragment of nature, showing that the boundary between these modes is not fixed and immovable; and at the same time keeping these two overlapping perspectives active. In addition, it should be noted that the critical approach expressed in Mitchell's definition of landscape correlates with the aforementioned criticism by T. J. Demos and Mirzoeff of the representation of the Anthropocene through panoramic images. In both cases, such an aesthetic approach is criticized as a definite mechanism of de-ontologisation and reduction of reality.

[9] Gombrich, *The Norm and Form*.
[10] Mitchell, 'Holly Landscape', 270.
[11] Ibid., 265.

## Landscape and the Perspective of the Totalizing Gaze

And then, the question is, how does this perspective of abstraction ultimately affect our understanding of the environment? The latter aspect is discussed from an interesting theoretical angle by the French anthropologist Philip Descola in his monograph *Beyond Nature and Culture*. In the chapter "The Autonomy of the Landscape," Descola examines how the linear perspective, established in the Renaissance pictorial tradition, has influenced the formation of modern epistemology in Western culture. To analyse this impact, he uses the example of the small-format drawing "Mountainous Landscape with an Artist," created in 1606 by the Flemish artist Roelandt Savery. According to Descola, this drawing serves as a good iconographic model to illustrate how the reception of reality works from the perspective of modern consciousness. As he points out, Savery's work was innovative for that time for at least two reasons: because Savery depicted a mountain valley in the Alps with a scrupulously realistic likeness, and because in his work, in the lower left corner, the artist depicted a tiny figure, barely visible in the overall landscape – himself, sketching the majestic panorama that opens up.

According to Descola, this example pushes the paradox of linear perspective to the extreme. This is because the artist has depicted himself lower than the mountains above him, but the viewer's gaze is presented with the central panorama of the ravine. And it is not the same view that Savery would see while working on his sketch. In Descola's opinion, the drawing presents the aspect of the projection of the view from the two perspectives at once. Descola interprets this artistic strategy as an attempt to establish the "realness" of the depicted reality while at the same time creating a third perspective of the total view, which should include both layers – the view seen by Savery and also the one from above, which also incorporates the figure of the artist. Next to this, in this example, the very movement of separation and reconnection of the two perspectives contains a reference to the process of self-reflection. In contemplating nature, Savery represents the image he sees in front of him, simultaneously abstracting from the situation in which he finds himself and depicting the process of representation as such. Here, we are faced with a double gesture of the objectification of reality – nature is reduced to a landscape, and at the same time, by distancing oneself from the site, the very process of objectification of nature is objectified. According to Descola,

> Such an "objectification of the subjective" produces a twofold effect: it creates a distance between man and the world by making the autonomy of things depend upon man; and it systematizes and stabilizes the external universe even as it confers upon the subject absolute mastery over the organization of this newly conquered exteriority. In this way, linear perspective established in the domain of representation the possibility of the kind of confrontation between the individual and nature that was to become characteristic of modern ideology and of which landscape painting would become the artistic expression.[12]

As Descola argues, precisely in this way – that is, by establishing a new dimension of exteriority (into which the subjective vision is projected), modern consciousness abstracts itself from the environment, in the second step accepting this projection as a modality of the general, supposedly "authentic" reality. Thus, on account of this

[12] Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, 57–58.

example, it can be said that the objectification of the subjective dimension, which Descola attributes here to the regime of modern consciousness, operates according to a kind of principle of anaesthesia of sensitivity, when the distance, the gap, between the individual and the environment in which the one finds herself, or himself, is established.

## Landscape as Transfiguration: An Alternative to the Totalising Perspective

It seems that while discussing the problem of landscape and our way of seeing nature in general, we should raise the question: is it even possible to go beyond the perspective of the apparently total gaze, and how? Descola analyses the former issue in his article "Landscape as Transfiguration." As the title suggests, the landscape problem remains central to this text, although Descola draws attention to the aspect of aesthetisation implicit in the phenomena covered by this term. Despite these doubts, Descola seeks a common ground that could bring together the Western interpretation of landscape and the context relevant to his field of anthropological research – that is, the autochthon cultures of the Amazon and their dominant model of the relationship with the environment. According to Descola, such a universal-based approach should be guided by two principles: first, to avoid the intention of aestheticisation, and second, to abandon the binary opposition of nature and culture.[13]

In order to meet these requirements, a radical change of perspective (in terms of attitude and praxis) should be the starting point. That entails a shift from the focus on the supposedly objective characteristics of the landscape to what Descola calls transfiguration, explaining that this term defines the process by which a specific territory is transformed to acquire the sign of symbolic representation. Descola explains the concept of transfiguration by analysing how Amazonian communities understand the relationship between the "anthropic nature" and the "wild nature," more precisely, between garden and forest. According to him, this approach should be seen as a process of the self-formation of the milieu, ensured by the cooperation between humans, deities, and elements of animate and inanimate nature. Thus, the main factor in this process is no longer a human intention or even a recently created symbolic representative order (speaking of the case under consideration – a garden), but the fact that this order is balancing on the permanent border of disappearance, the crossing of which already implies the transition to another structure. The environment is treated here as a process characterized by temporal and situational perspectivism – like a whole series of metamorphoses generated by activating the overlaps and retreats of different layers and their intensity. As Descola argues:

> In all these cases, the relation between the garden and the forest, or between the cultivated plants and the sylvan plants, is not expressed in the form of an opposition between nature and culture, or between the wild and the domesticated, but rather in the form of a series of metamorphoses in which forest transforms into garden, garden transforms into forest, persons transform into plants, divine bodies transform into gardens, human bodies are treated as plants, animals reveal themselves as plants.[14]

[13] Descola, 'Landscape as Transfiguration', 4–5.
[14] Ibid., 11.

This approach, as described by Descola, maintains the element of human activity as an integral part of the ongoing process of transfiguration. Yet, it is seen no longer as the decisive force that consolidates the specifically defined landscape identity but as one of the factors in a much broader process that continues simultaneously in different modalities. From this comes another crucial feature, which can be characterised as a priority condition of the process itself. The transfiguration remains fundamentally resistant to any fixed definition; therefore, it becomes impossible to place it within any teleological framework. Unless we consider the provisional "goal" of the so-called result, the condition achieved here is never static, and it functions as an active network of connections in which the various biotic communities are related.

## The Limits of the Symbolic Categorization of Territory: Waste and the Paradox of Inside and Outside

In this section of the article, I will turn again to the issue of the Anthropocene and pollution, trying to comprehend how the landscape model proposed by Descola might serve as a constructive analytical instrument in the context of the Anthropocene while also considering the limitations of this approach. Two key aspects are particularly relevant in this regard. First, Descola proposes the reconceptualisation of landscape that shifts from a purely visual perspective to a multidimensional process. This approach is particularly generative in contemporary discourse as it opens up the possibility to discuss the concept of landscape beyond conventional aesthetic criteria of beautiful nature, which, as previously argued, contributes to the anesthetization of the perception of reality. Instead, Descola situates the landscape within a processual and performative paradigm, necessitating the dismantling of the dichotomy of nature and culture that, in his opinion, has become epistemologically unproductive. This point leads to the second significant aspect: Descola's formulation of landscape as a multidimensional process provides an alternative view for engaging with the environment in a broader sense. Descola's position entails a fundamental inversion of the perspective: rather than being subjected to an externalizing and totalising gaze, landscape is treated as an active natural milieu,[15] co-constituted by human and non-human agents.

On the other hand, it is evident that the physical and semantic structure of the Anthropocene landscapes is not solely composed of living beings and natural elements but also of such factors as waste, garbage, and pollution, which can no longer be conceptualized as invisible or external material. Non-biodegradable waste and pollution actively shape the surface of the Earth, functioning as significant agents. If we keep to the term proposed by Descola, waste contributes to the process of transfiguration of the landscape. Considering our entanglement with pollution and waste, it is essential to ask whether Descola's theoretical approach, rather than supporting the all-encompassing perspective typical of modern thought that dissociates from situativity, might instead encourage a more reactive stance, one that is specifically rooted in a distinct locality? At this point, attention must be drawn to a crucial difference between biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste, which, in many cases, is toxic and dangerous; thus, its management requires a systemic approach. Here, it is handy to briefly remember that Mary Douglas defined a

[15] Kristupas Sabolius clarifies the conceptual differences between the terms 'environment' and 'milieu' (Sabolius, 'Forget the Environment').

similar kind of systemic requirement as "organic solidarity." The latter concept Douglas uses in her book *Purity and Danger* is taken from Émile Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity. In Douglas's analysis, though, the fundamental differences between modern society and the so-called natural society are related not to the disparate rationalisations of reality but rather to the varying complexity of the social organization and the social differentiation that helps to establish organic solidarity. As she argues,

> One inevitable by-product of social differentiation is social awareness, self-consciousness about the processes of communal life. And with differentiation go special forms of social coercion, special monetary incentives to conform, special types of punitive sanctions, specialized police and overseers and progress men scanning our performance, and so on, a whole paraphernalia of social control which would never be conceivable in small-scale undifferentiated economic conditions.[16]

Thus, thinking along these lines, in the time of the Anthropocene, the issue of toxic and non-biodegradable waste has emerged as a challenge necessitating an appreciation for the interconnected dynamics of the world and encompassing both natural and social systems without disregarding the significance of either of those.

To illustrate the complexities inherent in conceptualizing environmental issues exceptionally through the lens of territorial locality (treated as distinct and separate), I'd like to refer to the recently published article "Waste and Disposal in Indigenous Lands: the Experience of the Gavião Pyhcop Catiji with Solid Waste in the Amazon (Brazil)" by the Brazilian anthropologists Maycon Melo, Airton Alves de Lima, and Francarlos Diniz Ribeiro. In this publication, based on ethnographic research, the authors aim to describe how the Amazonian Gavião people confront the challenges related to waste, particularly solid refuse and petroleum-derived products deposited within the Governor's Indigenous Land. The study highlights that waste management within the Gavião community has become increasingly precarious in recent years, and these difficulties are not only related to logistical problems but also are influenced by the symbolic classification of the territory.

As the authors observe, the Gavião people historically subsisted through agriculture, fishing, and hunting. They had little contact with the outside world. Consequently, the waste they generated was predominantly organic and thus readily biodegradable, posing no significant threat to the people and environment. Even in the present day, locally produced organic waste does not constitute a serious concern. However, since the 1960s, intensified interactions with urban centres and commercial infrastructures have profoundly altered the community's environmental conditions, introducing novel forms of pollution that disrupt existing socio-ecological dynamics. The authors note that community members tend to ignore the danger of non-biodegradable substances, resulting in an increasing accumulation of urban waste in the Amazon rainforest. The practice has been established in the community of throwing industrial waste into a large hole in the back of the houses: "When the hole is full, they burn the waste. What does not deteriorate immediately remains in the hole".[17]

[16] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 114.
[17] Melo, Alves de Lima, Ribeiro, 'Waste and Disposal', 8.

As the authors draw attention, it has to be kept in mind that "garbage is not a self-evident object, but a socially constructed category, more precisely—the result of separation".[18] According to them,

> we will deal with three categories that the Gavião use to refer to garbage, which formulated in English would be: poisonous waste, dangerous waste, and our waste. Each one of them refers to a type of waste and the impacts they cause on the life of the community.[19]

Therefore, at this point, it is crucial to emphasise that in Gavião culture, dividing waste into these three categories is based on the distinction between what is considered "ours" and "not ours" concerning the living space. All waste that comes from the territory where Gavião lives is treated as "our waste" so that it "can be reinserted into the very land it came from".[20] The other two categories are considered as "not ours": "poisonous waste," such as tyres and plastic products, according to Gavião people, provokes toxic smoke and small bonfires when burned at home; meanwhile, "dangerous waste," such as empty metal cans or broken glass bottles from food and beverages left over the territory, causes injury.[21] As it is possible to understand from the research, the response to the danger provoked by waste and garbage is quite controversial. Nevertheless, certain substances are classified as dangerous and poisonous and are managed based on the separation of the origin of waste between "our" and "not our." Thus, it can be argued that this kind of classification leads to a paradoxical situation where the danger itself results in separation from what is considered dangerous and poisonous. When industrial petroleum derivatives and other non-biodegradable materials are burned in living space, they are disregarded as threats primarily because they are not of local origin. Perceived as "not ours," such waste is distanced from the community's sphere of responsibility, resulting in a lack of appropriate management mechanisms. Thus, in the given situation, symbolic categorisation ultimately precedes the material toxicity of waste and pollution. Therefore, this example helps emphasise that a similar kind of symbolic categorisation when a particular territory is treated as distinct can be appropriate while considering organic waste, but it does not function in the case of non-biodegradable substances.

At this point, another important aspect should be noted. It is related to the consumerist trend, which can be identified within this context, challenging the prevailing romanticized portrayal of autochthonous ways of life as an inherent counterbalance to consumer society. To elucidate this aspect, it is helpful to recall the distinction between consumption and use as it was elaborated by Giorgio Agamben in his text "In Praise of Profanation." Here, Agamben examines how symbolic separation establishes specific topological structures, such as the sacred and the profane domains, connecting this process to the dynamics of visuality with a particular focus on the concept of spectacle. Referring to Walter Benjamin's fragment "Capitalism as Religion," Agamben conceptualizes the use and consumption practices primarily in political terms. According to him, use constitutes a relationship with objects that reintegrates them into the sphere of

[18] Ibid., 10. It is the quotation the authors take from the research made by the anthropologist Carmen Rial and Colombijin Freek (Colombijin, F. Rial, C. 2016. 'Introdução: abordagens antropológicas dos resíduos sólidos nas sociedades pós-industriais'. In *O poder do lixo: abordagens antropológicas sobre resíduos sólidos*. Ed. Carmen Rial. Rio de Janeiro: Associação Brasileira de Antropologia. 7–41, 20).
[19] Melo, Alves de Lima, Ribeiro, 'Waste and Disposal', 10.
[20] Ibid., 10.
[21] Ibid., 10.

common circulation. Consumption, in contrast, represents the opposite process, extracting and removing objects from common use.[22] While use, in Agamben's view, is associated with creativity and the practice of play, consumption functions as a mechanism that sustains capitalism, as it manifests itself in the inability to use things, instead fetishizing them. For the problematics analysed here, it is even more significant that Agamben draws particular attention to the visual dimension of consumption – according to him, the capitalistic mechanism is generated by the exhibitionistic need to treat consumption as a specific form of spectacle. As he argues,

> If, as has been suggested, we use the term "spectacle" for the extreme phase of capitalism in which we are now living, in which everything is exhibited in its separation from itself, then spectacle and consumption are two sides of a single impossibility of using. What cannot be used is, as such, given over to consumption or to spectacular exhibition.[23]

Thus, relying on Agambenian terms, use can be exemplified by the practice of recycling organic waste. Conversely, the disposal of non-biodegradable waste by merely removing it from sight (therefore at the same time leaving it in the living space) can be classified as an act of consumption since, along with separating waste from the threat, it also entails separating waste from the sphere of common use in terms of political and creative *praxis*. It is interesting to note that, extending Agamben's thought, the distinction between use and consumption takes on an inverted form when applied to the example of waste management. Firstly, rather than referring to objects as such, this distinction pertains to what remains after the objects have been consumed – waste and garbage. Secondly, instead of the exhibition as a spectacle-consumption dynamic, this situation reveals a dialectic between what is exhibited and what remains hidden. The tension between what appears comfortable to vision and what is left obscured or ignored, even if it is exposed and can be perceived differently, is characteristic of this dialectics.

On the other hand, one must add that Agamben's theoretical perspective, while making it possible to see the clear link between consumption and waste management, simultaneously helps to highlight the global dimension of this problem. In other words, it has to be admitted that, ultimately, ignoring what is exposed, visible, and perceivable has to do not with the limitations of a particular cultural behaviour but is rather common to how human beings, in general, dissociate themselves from such factors as waste and the polluted environment.[24]

## Anthropocene Landscapes: The Skin of the World Between Pollution and Inflammation

As this article has attempted to demonstrate, the dissociation from the pollution problem can be influenced to a certain extent by both the totalising perspective from which the environment is observed and perceived and the symbolic classification of the territory. Consequently, it can be argued that the challenges of the Anthropocene require us to

[22] Agamben, *Profanations*, 81–83.
[23] Ibid., 82.
[24] At this point, it is helpful to refer to the insights of Mintautas Gutauskas, who paraphrases Heidegger's concept of the tool (as 'ready-to-hand'), explaining how everyday consciousness pushes waste out of the field of attention by perceiving it as 'under-the-feetness' (Gutauskas, 'Phenomenology of Waste', 72–74).

rethink the conventional distinction between the "inside" and "outside," which generally characterizes the current understanding of the landscape and environment. Thus, thinking about the possible reformulation of the notion of landscape, if we consider the situation of the Anthropocene and the pollution problem, I would like to conclude by briefly discussing two metaphors that come from different contexts: the first one is related to the philosophical insight of Jean-Luc Nancy; meanwhile, the second one is reflected in the art project "Inflammation" by the Lithuanian artist duo Pakui Hardware.

In his book "The Fragile Skin of the World," Nancy recalls the ancient image of the world as a large animal. He then discusses the opposition to this comparison formulated in the Enlightenment, when a machine was the prevailing image of the world. Nancy continues with these metaphors, adding that "the world is neither an animal nor a machine – it is we ourselves".[25] Therefore, according to Nancy, regarding the contemporary discussions on globality and ecological fragility, the ancient image of the world as an animal, to some extent, becomes productive again, as it allows us to arrive at the idea of the skin of the world. According to Nancy, when applied to the world, the metaphor of the skin does not refer to the surface of the Earth but to the planet's unique unity and interconnectedness. On the other hand, it can be added that the metaphor of skin includes several quite controversial characteristics. We can remember that in physiology, the skin is regarded as a unique organ, distinguished by its dualistic nature, as both fragile and protective. The latter aspect makes it difficult to define a clear boundary between what should be treated as the skin's outside and what's inside. On the one hand, the skin is the largest organ of the body, covering all the other ones; on the other hand, it functions as a complicated, dynamic system of cells and vital processes such as regulation of body temperature, preservation of hydration, and similar. For Nancy, it is exceptionally important to mention that the skin is an organ that transcends the autonomy of an individual organism. As he explains, the skin.

> does not assure a function inside of an autonomous system: it exposes (one could write, playing on the word *peau* or "skin", that it "expeauses') this autonomy to all possible outsides. One could rightfully say that the skin is the organ of the heteronomy of an organism. That is, the organ that relates to others that which, at first glance, seems made only to relate to self.[26]

Thus, if we aim to reformulate the concept of landscape, keeping in mind the context of the Anthropocene, Nancy's definition of "the skin of the world" becomes quite a proper reference point. Thinking about the landscape in terms of the skin of the world has the potential to bridge the gap between the totalising perspective of landscape common to the Western tradition and the one represented by Descola, where the landscape is treated as a multidimensional process, strongly linked to the symbolic classification in terms of a particular territory. The underlying aspect of the skin allows us to incorporate the planetary perspective, on the one hand, and to emphasise the dimension of processuality that involves our bodies in parallel with the natural and social systems, on the other hand. Thus, taking into account this unifying and, at the same time, processual dimension of the skin, the singular body, the natural environment, and social structures appear as interconnected systems, all sharing a common characteristic of vulnerability.

[25] Nancy, *The Fragile Skin of the World*, 85.
[26] Ibid., 88.

If we try to extend the metaphor of the skin of the world to the context of contemporary art and look for a relevant example where the image of the Anthropocene landscape is interpreted, revealing the aspect of vulnerability and, at the same time, foreseeing a certain coherence between the singular body and the planetary dimension, in my opinion, it could be the art project "Inflammation" (2024) by the Lithuanian artist duo Pakui Hardware. The general idea of the project, which was exhibited at the Lithuanian National Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale, is to dismantle the perspective of the Anthropocene as a purely visual aesthetic spectacle and to demonstrate that we are all currently implicated in the destructive planetary conditions caused by human activity. Inspired by Rupa Marya and Raj Patel's book *Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice*, Pakui Hardware draw a direct parallel between the vital processes inherent in our bodies and those occurring on the planet — in both cases, pollution and the pursuit of economic progress exhaust vital systems, bringing them to the state of inflammation. As noticed by Marya and Patel,

> The inflammation in your arteries and the inflammation of the planet are linked, and the causal connections are becoming increasingly clear; your physiological state is a reaction to social and environmental factors. Racial violence, economic precarity, industrial pollution, poor diet, and even the water you drink can inflame you.[27]

Upon entering St. Antoninus Church, where the "Inflammation" was installed, one might get the impression that the floor is covered with soil and the remains of wilted leaves. However, a strong smell in the room reveals that it's not organic matter but shredded recycled plastic elements. In the upper region of the installation, a series of dynamic forms reminiscent of prosthetic organs and the structural frameworks of vital systems move along electrical pathways. The visitors find themselves situated in an uncanny, polluted post-landscape, in which objects resembling human organs, as well as those mimicking natural elements, in addition to different technological components, are integrated into a unified, therefore at the same time heterogenic system. In contemporaneity, distinctions such as singular body and planet or organic and artificial have become quite relative. As Pakui Hardware demonstrates, the boundary between the registers of "naturalness" and "artificiality" is not anchored in the ontological level of reality but rather functions as a structure formed from a human perspective, which operates by assigning increasingly more things to the category of artificiality.

Although the overall mood of the project is rather gloomy, paradoxically, there is a moment of hope encoded in its idea. If one refers to the context of medicine, inflammation is a sign of disease; therefore, it is also the body's way of defending itself by eliminating pathogens and toxins. As noticed by the curator of the pavilion, the metaphorical application of medical inflammation to the planetary situation can also be interpreted as a manifestation of hope for the planet, suggesting the potential for healing and a more salutary future.[28] However, in my opinion, the most significant message of this art project is the insistent reminder that the distinction between "inside" and "outside" is no longer valid. The Anthropocene places us in a situation of expanded vulnerability when the sensitivity of a singular body (or an element of a particular milieu) resonates

[27] Marya, Patel, *Inflamed*, 9.
[28] Klimašauskas, 'Chronic States' 19.

in other bodies and all environments. The current state, perhaps, should be accepted as a transitional condition in which the boundaries of apparent autonomies are eroded, and new, hybrid patterns of coexistence can be formed.

## Conclusions

The article posits that there is a correlation between the problem of pollution in the Anthropocene and the need to rethink the concept of landscape as an interconnected visual, symbolic, and material process. In addressing the issue of pollution, the analysis distinguishes between two concepts of landscape. The first of these is rooted in the tradition of Western landscape painting, with the emphasis on visual perspective. In this regard, it is proposed that the concept of the "complex of landscape", which is defined as the reduction of the environment to a visual perspective structured by aestheticisation and separation. By tracing the influence of landscape painting on the perception of nature, it is emphasized that the aestheticisation of nature leads to the dissociation from the environment (a totalising perspective), thereby reinforcing the inside/outside distinction. As an alternative to this perspective, the second concept of landscape is discussed, which treats the environment as a multidimensional milieu. This notion is exemplified by the case of Amazonian autochthonous culture, in which the relationship with the environment is not shaped by visual and aesthetic factors but rather by symbolic classification. Consequently, when considering waste disposal in this cultural context, it becomes apparent that symbolic categorisation takes precedence over the material dangers posed by polluted substances. It is thus demonstrated that dissociation from pollution is mediated by both a detached, totalising gaze and culturally embedded symbolical classification of the territory. By foregrounding these distinctions, the article advances the concept of landscape as the "skin of the world", emphasising the corporeal and planetary entanglements of pollution and inflammation. From this viewpoint, landscape is not considered to be solely a visual or aesthetic phenomenon, nor is it confined to a local scale. Instead, it is conceptualised as an experienced, dynamic environment that connects local, embodied experiences to global processes. This perspective challenges the conventional dichotomy of "inside" and "outside", thus demonstrating that the problem of pollution in the Anthropocene demands a re-evaluation of the boundaries that structure perception and behaviour.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

Publication is funded by the Research Council of Lithuania under the Programme "University Excellence Initiatives" of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania (Measure No. 12-001-01-01-01 "Improving the Research and Study Environment"). Project No.: S-A-UEI-23-12.

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