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## **The Artist as Historian (of Aesthetics). Richard Long and the History of an English Point of View**

### **Introduction**

In *The Return of the Real*, his famous study of art in the second half of the twentieth century, Hal Foster included a chapter titled *The Artist as Ethnographer*, where he aptly summarised the new role played by artists by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This role, he explained, consisted in recognising the problems prevalent in society and culture in the Reagan and Thatcher era and becoming actively involved in solving them. In his comparison of the Benjaminian „artist as producer” and the new „artist as ethnographer,” Foster suggested that „in this new paradigm the object of contestation remains in large part the bourgeois–capitalist institution of art [...], its exclusionary definitions of art and artist, identity and community. But the subject of association has changed: it is the cultural and/or ethnic other in whose name the committed artist most often struggles” (Foster, 1996, p. 173). In recent decades, it has become increasingly more pronounced that the role of artist nowadays is significantly different from that in earlier periods, encompassing that not only of an ethnographer or anthropologist, but also sociologist, scientist, cultural historian, museologist, and many others, which reflects the changing interests of art itself and the numerous turns that have occurred in art and the humanities at large: turns towards natural and social sciences, anthropological turn, digital turn, etc. For that reason, it is often argued, art criticism and history must also cross the boundaries of their fields and step into the ground of other branches of knowledge. However, the apparently new function of art, that is, its role as a cognitive tool, cannot be seen as specific for this time and age, or for the more recent trends in art where artists engage in non-artistic activity, such as Bio Art or sociologically oriented practice. Rather, it is the current approach to artists and their work that sheds a new light on the actual cognitive value in art, be it intentional or unintentional. The value as such has been perhaps an inherent part of artistic production over the past several centuries, which has been marginalised by art criticism and history due to a much stronger emphasis put on art’s aesthetic aspects and purposes. Noteworthy, in recent decades, and especially in the new millennium, art, both contemporary as well as more temporally remote from us, has become intensely investigated as a source of knowledge other than purely art-historical, and this investigation is conducted

both by art historians as well as by representatives of other fields. Examples of such wide-spread and wide-ranging interest can be found in studies as diverse as Peter Burke's *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (2001), W.J.T. Mitchell's anthology *Landscape and Power* (2002), or Vic Gattrell's *City of Laughter* (2006), a study of 18th-century London on the basis of drawings by famous caricature artists.

In this paper, I would like to investigate examples of Land Art, a movement in British art which has been commonly discussed in the context of aesthetics rather than in the context of its potential as a cognitive tool. Basing my argument on selected art works by Richard Long, I would like to suggest that some of his pieces made in the 1970s and later provide an insight into the history of English aesthetics, valuable especially that throughout the 1960s and 1970s art criticism and theory have been interested in other issues, in particular, in the expanding field of sculpture, dematerialisation of art, or, more generally, in the development of new languages of art seen as a universal goal of the international avant-garde.

### **The artist as historian of (English) aesthetics**

Works made by Richard Long have been widely read as representing Land Art, a movement that emerged in the late 1960s and developed throughout the 1970s predominantly in the United States and in Europe. Significantly, most studies of Land Art present it as an international avant-garde movement and avoid dividing its representatives into „national schools“. All divisions within the movement are seen as results of idiosyncratic artistic languages of individual artists<sup>1</sup>. In Great Britain, the issue of the national style has been of paramount importance for art practice and art theory for several centuries and the question of what constitutes a national tradition and what is a foreign import has come to the fore once again in the 1930s and 1940s, when the Neo-Romantic movement in the visual arts and the revival of the English pastoral novel (endorsed even by major Modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf) sought to reinstate tradition as a response to the feelings of uncertainty and disillusion brought about by the events of the Second World War. In the 1950s and the 1960s „the English version of Modernism“, epitomised by the works of Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, Peter Lanyon, and other abstract artists working at the artistic colony in St. Ives, developed in parallel with the Pop Art movement. In this period, as well as in the following decade, the new generations of artists and critics focused predominantly on broadening the definition of Modernism. Openly critical of the dominating model of Modernism established by such institutions as the Institute of Contemporary Arts and such figures as Herbert Read and Roger Fry, the first generation of Pop Artists gathered in the Independent Group sought to expand the limits of art to include the rising phenomenon of popular culture. In the late 1960s, a new generation of artists extended those limits even further, with boldest experiments undertaken within the field of sculpture. Gilbert and George made postcards and performances that they presented as forms of sculpture, while Richard Long went outside the gallery space and turned his sculpture into walking<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Williams, 2000; Boettger, 2002; Tufnell, 2006; Kastner, 2010; and Malpas, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See especially his *A Line Made by Walking* from 1968.

No one, it seemed, was interested in revisiting the past, in particular the national past. It is only in the recent decades, with the general turn within arts and humanities towards problems of history and memory, that the renewed interest in how art continues tradition rather than provides a clean break from it has encouraged art historians and critics to revisit art made in the postwar decades in search of traces of continuity. Additionally, the rise of postcolonial studies and, later, of global art history, has put emphasis on the local determinants analysed within the context of global power relations. Significantly, although the role of the Empire in the construction of a particularly British aesthetic has become an important subject of study for a great number of contemporary researchers, from political historians to film scholars, the impact of its decline on postwar cultural production has not been analysed thoroughly, with significant lack of data regarding especially the visual arts (Ward, 2001, p. 1–2). There is still a lot to be written about those issues, as well as about how the powerful English artistic and aesthetic traditions were continued or discontinued after the Second World War. In this essay, I would like to suggest that contrary to the dominating statements about the international scope of much of the avant-garde movements in the 1970s, some examples of Richard Long's Land Art can be read both as locally oriented as well as providing a then missing commentary on the significance of English aesthetics for a contemporary artist.

As I have already suggested, the majority of studies of Land Art emphasise its role as yet another step in the international progress of the avant-garde towards the expansion of its language and its medium, indeed, a progress towards dematerialisation of the art field. In this sense, Land Art was seen as making universal comments on art and its scope, while its break with tradition was made in the name of an international community of artists rather than a specific national group. How, then, can the art of Richard Long be seen as providing an (artistic) insight into the history of English aesthetics? One way to deliver an answer to this question is to refer to the recent turn in the study of landscape conducted on the grounds of both visual studies and cultural geography and suggest that any representation of landscape must by necessity involve a statement on aesthetics and politics. As Stephen Daniels argues, „landscape imagery is not merely a reflection of, or distraction from, more pressing social, economic or political issues; it is often a powerful mode of knowledge and social engagement” (Daniels, 1994, p. 8). He notices an important problem: in numerous artworks, there are to be found discourses and practices that have not been intended by artists, yet are introduced by various contexts. In this respect, the researcher must explore the „fluency of landscape, [...] its poetics as well as its politics” (Daniels, 1994, p. 8). An analysis of works made by Richard Long in Great Britain suggest a powerful aesthetic connection with English landscape art, which I shall discuss in the following parts of this essay. However, among Long's numerous works there can be found pieces that can be interpreted as overt commentaries on the English aesthetics, in particular, the English landscape garden and its dominant role in the construction of the English „way of seeing”.

Apart from walking, Long's works involve intervention in visited space through making small sculptures from found materials, such as rocks or driftwood, maps with marked routes and written commentaries, as well as photographic documentation of those interventions. One of such photographic documents of an installation can be found in *England 1967*. The photograph shows a view of a typical English

landscape park. A metal rectangular structure placed in the middle repeats the shape of the photograph thus introducing yet another frame. Another photograph taken in the same location shows the artist standing in front of his work in a casual pose, as if admiring the view framed by his artwork. In his choice of the frame, in his act of taking the picture, Long repeats the framing gesture of a landscape painter who presents to the viewers what to view and how to view, yet, at the same time, he makes a comment on how the act of framing actually works. According to the dominating critical view, Long's perspective is a perspective of a Modernist artist who develops a new approach to nature seen as a medium of art. Yet, for his commentary on framing Long did not choose a random English view, but an epitome of the English landscape aesthetics – a fragment of Ashton Court park in Bristol designed by Humphrey Repton. Moreover, the way the picture was framed recreates the specific way of seeing landscape described by eighteenth-century guidebooks for tourists that instructed them on the rules of Picturesque viewing and inspired the construction of infrastructure that aided this practice. One of these places was an 18th-century stone pavilion offering a view on one of Grasmere's waterfalls in the Lake District, which became – as Malcolm Andrews termed it – „a perfect viewing room” (Andrews, 1999, p. 122). Similar viewing points were offered by country mansions around which landscape parks were orchestrated.

### **Nature into landscape: the origins of the Picturesque**

As W.J.T. Mitchell argues, originally landscape was seen as „a genre of painting associated with a new way of seeing” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 7). The new way of seeing was important, for only this fragment of space that succumbed to it could have been defined as landscape. Elements that were not pleasant to the eye were ignored. As Christine Berberich argued, „landscape painting [...] either emphasised the beauty of the tamed countryside of the aristocratic estates the middle classes aspired to, or, if depicting truly rural scenes, at least attempted to leave out the rural poor to avoid an added social dimension” (Berberich, 2006, p. 210). Yet, this specifically upper class way of seeing landscape introduced rules that became universal. As a result, as Berberich notes, what started as a private perspective on personal property, made an impact on the nation as a whole (Berberich, 2006, p. 210). This way, England came to be viewed through the prism of thus constructed aesthetics and, ultimately, as a whole, it functioned as an aesthetic consequence of thus defined relations of ownership.

In the 18th century and later, in order to be considered landscape, that is, a fragment of space that could be presented in a visual or written form in a particular way, nature needed to realise one of the established canons, be either beautiful, or sublime, or picturesque. The latter was a concept that originated in its modern form in England and came to prominence in this country for both aesthetic as well as political and social reasons<sup>3</sup>. When in 1786 William Gilpin published his *Observations*, he instructed his readers how to paint picturesque landscapes, but also how to look at them. Viewing picturesque landscapes became a fashion and a dominating model of

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<sup>3</sup> The English term *picturesque* originates from the Italian *pittoresco* and the French *pittoresque*; its beginnings are related with the Italian painting of the 16th century. See: Hussey, 1967, p. 9.

looking at nature. In her comments on the politics of English landscape around 1795, Ann Bermingham provides an account of the shift in the mode of representation of landscape circa 1795, when it became less formalised and more casual, which can be read as a response to the English need of developing an original English aesthetics that would even more openly oppose the French order and abstraction. Understandably, this was a purely political reaction to the danger of the spread of the ideals of the French Revolution, representing in the English eyes an unnatural introduction of artificial philosophical system whose power had to be opposed with the typically English propensity for natural, organic order, and a more temperate political doctrine. Timothy D. Martin describes the difference between the new English type of the Picturesque and the French landscape aesthetics in the following manner:

Where the British used the picturesque garden to naturalise parliamentary democracy and posit political debate and negotiation as analogues of natural law, the French used the formal garden to represent the hierarchical political structure of absolute monarchy as an analogue of religious law (Martin, 2011, p. 167).

As Stephen Daniels points out, in his poem *The Landscape* Richard Payne Knight calls for the destruction of landscape parks designed by Lancelot „Capability” Brown so that they grow into a truly picturesque and wild nature (Daniels, 1988, p. 66). It was only this revised Picturesque that was grounded on the opposition against French models that became an aesthetic discourse that was to dominate the English conception of landscape in the following decades.

Another shift within the Picturesque emerged when Uvedale Price defined the Picturesque as an irregularity of form, colour, and even sound (Hussey, 1967, p. 14). His opponent, Richard Payne Knight, suggested that the Picturesque does not stem from an inherent quality of objects, but is a mode of viewing (Hussey, 1967, p. 16). In his introduction to an anthology of texts on the Picturesque, Malcolm Andrews summarises the history of the debate on the definition of the Picturesque and proposes its twofold understanding: first, as a „purely formalist aesthetic: that is, as a matter of evaluating structural principles of landscape painting according to certain established rules”, and secondly, „as a taste with far broader and more complex cultural connotations” (Andrews, 1994, p. 4). He points out that the Picturesque marks a shift from a moral or ethical perspective on landscape towards a kind of aesthetic that appreciates the value of ugliness or the horrific. According to Andrews, the return to ethics is effected in the revision of the Picturesque proposed by John Ruskin in *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and especially in his essay on Turner (*Of the Turnerian Picturesque*) in the fourth volume of *Modern Painters* (Andrews, 1994, p. 31; Ruskin, 1903, p. 9–26). Ruskin sees the picturesque love of ruins and wild nature as a reaction to the emergence of modern cities and, in this sense, the aesthetic of the Picturesque in the 19th century is a compensatory aesthetic (Andrews, 1994, p. 32). Its significance for the newly defining sense of identity was gaining strength proportionally to the pace of social change: the image of the English rural space was becoming more important for English identity when the space itself was undergoing transformation towards the opposite of the cherished ideal. As Wendy Joy Darby observed, „the English countryside became the locus of timeless stability precisely as it was poised to undergo, or was indeed undergoing, violent change with parallel transformation of

social relations" (Darby, 2000, p. 78). As it seems, the immediacy of the change and the resulting need for some form of stability triggered the necessity to formulate an image of the English rural space as a stable, abstracted, and infinitely reproduced image that could synecdochically work as an image of England as a whole. Although society at large, and the ruling classes in particular, vigorously marched towards industrial and urban development, it came with simultaneous lack of its cultural counterpart. If assessed on the basis of cultural production of that period, this development could be seen as an object of collective repression: the new industrial spirit, though providing foundations of the country's wealth, was largely ignored by culture (Darby, 2000, p. 209). Malcolm Andrews noticed that an Exhibition of the 18th- and 19th-century watercolour organised by the Royal Academy of Art in London in 1993 gathered almost 300 exhibits that offered an image of the country filled with ruined castles, old bridges and huts, and completely devoid of factories or any other signs of industrialisation. In this sense „the ‘great age’ of British watercolours seems to be a painterly celebration of decay and obsolescence, or a world apparently untouched by technological progress and rapid urbanisation". It is difficult to „come to terms with the views of a late 18th- and early 19th-century Britain" for they hardly match our „sense of the history of the period" (Andrews, 1994, p. 3). Andrews suggests that this partial view did not illustrate a conscious decision made by curators who sought to present their own vision of the art of that period. Rather, it was a result of the cult of the Picturesque (Andrews, 1994, p. 3). The dominating role of the Picturesque as a way of seeing (English) landscape and its consequences for landscape art have been very much pronounced up to the present day. Yet, even major studies on landscape have often failed to recognise how *seeing* landscape and *representing* it have been interdependent and, indeed, inseparable. Referring to *Landscape into Art*, a classic study of landscape painting by Kenneth Clark, Malcolm Andrews titled the first chapter of his book on landscape in Western art *Landscape into Landscape*, suggesting that the process of transforming nature into art does not proceed in two stages, as Clark wished to see it: landscape does not become art, but first there takes place a process whereby nature becomes landscape, which is then being represented. As Andrews suggests,

a 'landscape,' cultivated or wild, is already artifice before it has become the subject of a work of art. Even when we simply *look* we are already shaping and interpreting. A landscape may never achieve representation in a painting or photograph; none the less, something significant has happened when land can be perceived as 'landscape' (Andrews, 1998, p. 1).

Similarly critical of Clark's study, Mitchell points out the mistake present in its title, which conceals the actual work of landscape and suggests its neutrality where it is always politically motivated:

Landscape painting is best understood, then, not as the uniquely central medium that gives us access to ways of seeing landscape, but as a representation of something that is already a representation in its own right. [...] landscape is already artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before it becomes the subject of pictorial representation (Mitchell, 2002, p. 14).

## The Picturesque and the tourist gaze

The type of gaze presented by Richard Long in *England 1967* is not merely a framing gaze that selects a fragment of reality that is to work as a picturesque landscape. It is also a collector's gaze, or a „tourist gaze.“ As Jeffrey Herf suggests, this kind of gaze makes everything „consumed as a sign of itself; the village as village Englishness, the pub as typical village pub“ (Herf, 1984, p. 2). Places become archetypes, and if they are not archetypes, they are not real places. Photographs and textual commentaries in Long's art turn places into archetypes of places. The artist claims that he avoids typical tourist spots: instead of ascending a mountain, he will circle around it, instead of crossing a river, he marches along its bed.

I am interested – he said – in walking on original routes: riverbeds, circles cut by lakes, a hundred miles in a straight line, my own superimposed pattern on an existing network of roads [...]. The surface of the earth, and all the roads, are the site of millions of journeys; I like the idea that it is always possible to walk in new ways for new reasons (Fuchs, 1986, p. 72–73).

In his avoidance of a tourist manner of visiting particular places and views Long comments on and repeats the gesture of classic English travellers who considered themselves non-touristic, true wanderers who go off the beaten track to seek „authentic“ experience of „real“ untouched nature. Long's photographs do not include any signs of human inhabitation or human presence, and they eliminate all traces of civilisation. *England 1967* shows a seemingly wild park where order is introduced through the artist's gesture, a gesture which apparently harmonises with nature, yet, in fact, it subjects nature to ordering practices. The gaze introduces symmetry in place of asymmetry and views landscape as an arrangement of geometrical figures and compositions.

The work of the Picturesque consisted in that the tourist eye imposed on nature a particular order. This frame structured nature into what was termed „a view“, but also it translated the observed elements into particular categories. This way, the unexpected, bizarre, and exotic became a planned effect of the Picturesque, simultaneously losing its potential as something that was previously beyond *the frame*, beyond what Beauty and Sublime considered worthy of representing. As Andrews argues, the Picturesque „becomes increasingly familiarised and commodified“ and thus „uncultivated natural scenery is, as it were, domesticated – it is accommodated within our daily experience both as an artistic experience and as a tourist amenity; it is aesthetically colonised“ (Andrews, 1999, p. 129). As a result, there is effected a paradoxical uniformity of all that is outside the notions of Beauty and Sublime: „the formulae derived from Picturesque conventions reduce novelty and variety to secure uniformity. The Picturesque makes different places seem like each other“ (Andrews, 1999, p. 129).

The Romantic traveller gaze that insists on an „authentic“ and „non-tourist“ experience of nature seems an opposition of the ordered and structured Picturesque way of looking at landscape. Yet, as I was trying to argue above, the pattern of including „unexpected“ or „bizarre“ elements in an otherwise ordered structure was as paradoxical as it was inherent for the aesthetics of the Picturesque. In Long's works both of these elements harmoniously coexist, just as they did in 18th- and

19th-century landscape art. Long insists on his own, original approach to nature and walking, yet many of his photographs reveal a striking resemblance to picturesque views of Great Britain. They often include their pattern of composition, as well as objects and elements that are unexpected or strange, such as (artist made) circles of stone, lines made of wood, the artist's worn shoes or his backpack thrust on the ground in an otherwise perfectly structured view of landscape. In *A Thousand Stones Added to the Footpath Cairn, England 1974*, the photograph of a mountain landscape resembles classic picturesque views included in Gilpin's *Observations*, with a barely visible rucksack placed within the frame.

### Landscape and the avant-garde artist

A comparison between Long's works made in other locations in the world and those made in Great Britain reveal that the location itself imposes on an artist a particular approach or way of seeing landscape. Works made closest to Long's home (Bristol) manifest a great reliance on local aesthetics. Was the mythical image of England as a „green and pleasant land“ still in power in the decades following the Second World War? As some researchers claim, the spectacular success of „rural England“ as a term and as an (imagined) reality had an impact on the country's economic situation, imposing on some entrepreneurs the necessity to hinder the development of their businesses that could be seen as excessively intervening into natural landscape (Wiener, 1982, p. 42). In his works, Long displays an attitude to nature seen as a national treasure that would come to the fore in the decades to come. He makes a visual commentary on the permanence of the English attitude to their land whose underlying power manifests itself even in most avant-garde art movements.

This attitude is most pronounced in his walking pieces that reveal a need of making one's impact on nature that is intimate and discreet, indeed, very much unlike the large-scale interventions of his American counterparts, such as Robert Smithson or Walter de Maria. His walking pieces are as much about space as they are about time. With his walk he measures time and defines the form of space, drawing its portrait (Long, 2007, p. 25). Initially, Long intended to make each walking piece about a different location. Later, however, he repeatedly walked in Dartmoor, which is located near his home in Bristol. Significantly, he finds Britain a convenient place to make art as it offers freedom of walking. He explained that he is an Englishman in a sense that he is a part of the public culture of ownership of roads, footpaths, and national parks. He can use land without the need of owning it, merely by walking on it (Long, 2008, p. 173). Yet, this freedom does not stem only from freedom objectively offered by the English landscape. It is determined by a particular conditioning of the walker who can feel „at home“ in a space that is most familiar. It becomes obvious when considered in relation to Long's statements about walking in other countries or continents:

I remember the first time I went to East Africa in 1969 I did feel quite overwhelmed just by the vastness and difference of the landscape and of the culture. I felt very small and insignificant and sort of European. I think it does take a long time to really become



absorbed into different landscapes and to kind of understand them in a way which has some meaning (Long, 2007, p. 62).

For Long, walking and struggling against nature is one of the most important spiritual experiences, indeed, an experience so powerful that it may present a subject matter for artistic reflection. However, as I have mentioned above, Long's work is supposed to comprise *a new kind of walking*. His own patterns are imposed on already existing ones. If maps can be considered products of conceptual ordering of space that exists physically in a different form, then Long's *Ten Mile Walk* (1968) is an imposition of the artist's original pattern onto the map. What is important for him is to formulate a concept for a particular walk before it is realised, which suggests a non-romantic and non-impressional approach to landscape. After Long made a plan to make the titular ten mile walk, he realised that the most obvious and the simplest way to do it would be to walk in straight line. Then he had to find a location where walking in straight line for ten miles was possible. Walking is also a way to gain greater knowledge on a place than the one offered merely by the gaze, for the physical act of walking intensifies perception and it reformulates the subject of art from landscape or place into *artist in landscape*. Due to the fact that Long often makes his works in England, if analysed with a map, many of them overlap or intersect. The space near Bristol is marked by them, while experiences of the space and of walking in it become parts of its history, as well as of Long's artistic biography: „For me, Dartmoor is a place of regeneration, knowledge, history, and continuity” (Malpas, 2012, p. 96).

In the interwar period, walking was conceptualised by several important publications, one of which was G.M. Trevelyan's influential work *Walking* (1913), where he described not only routes to be taken but also the experience of walking in landscape as an exercise of will and endurance: „the fight against fierce wind and snow-storm is among the higher joys of walking” (Trevelyan, 1913, p. 18). Yet, Trevelyan was not a member of the increasingly large group of people who practised walking. His point of view was still deeply set in the 19th century and represented an elitist perspective. His romantic language, full of references to William Wordsworth and George Meredith, had to be somehow translated into popular walking. Trevelyan's book contains a distinction into real walking tourists and common walkers who follow routes to reach particular destinations. Long's walking practice continues the former tradition, for it constitutes an original type of walking and is usually undertaken in solitude. He suggested that simplicity and the sense of solitude in a particular place are part of the work. It would be inappropriate, in his opinion, if a great number of people visited a particular location of his work, for that would change its very nature (Long, 2001, p. 248). His walking is exceptional, for it is differently formalised and construed as artistic, ritualised activity:

I am walking, but the purpose of the walk is not to make a journey. Or the way that I walk is not the same way that people might use the road from one village to another, or other people walk in the mountains. [...] The walk is done in a special way for special reasons which is, I suppose, what makes it a ritual. [...] Walking without travelling (Long, 2007, p. 68).

Although in Long's case the distanced gaze that constructs landscape as landscape is of secondary importance in some walking pieces, most photographs of his

interventions contain elements that typified landscape painting in England since the 18th century. This gaze constructed landscape as property. What is important in it is its proximity to nature: its experience as something familiar and something one belongs to. As William Malpas suggests, on some level, Land Art can be considered a confirmation of „home,“ a reinstatement of the notion of „homeland“ not as physical space, but as a cultural and spiritual space, which – just like landscape – is a state of mind (Malpas, 2005, p. 41). Long’s art powerfully embraces this approach, and although it does not provide a continuation of the English tradition of landscape art, it does provide a commentary on tradition of looking at landscape in a picturesque way. His reflection on the role of the Picturesque in contemporary constructions of landscape can be perhaps compared to the way it was conceptualised by Robert Smithson. Smithson’s approach was reconstructed by Yves-Alain Bois: „the picturesque park is not the transcription on the land of a compositional pattern previously fixed in the mind, [...] its effects cannot be determined a priori, [...] it presupposes a stroller, someone who trusts more in the real movement of legs than in the fictive movement of his gaze“ which implies „a fundamental break with pictorialism,“ a break the theoreticians of the Picturesque were not aware of (Bois, 1984, p. 36). In this sense, both in his photographic work that embraces the aesthetics of the Picturesque, as well as in his walking pieces that re-conceptualise the act of seeing landscape through the introduction of a new kind of viewer – a Modernist artist who walks and experiences nature for an entirely modern reason – Long provides a missing link in the history of the English reflection on landscape. Admittedly, Long’s written commentaries on his work are not as theoretically developed as those by Robert Smithson, and cannot be treated as art historical texts in their own right. Yet, they do provide an insight into his approach to landscape – an approach that is, as I was trying to argue, most pronounced in his artistic practice.

## Conclusion

Long discussed his link with English culture in the following fashion: „In a strange way, even though I do work in different countries I cannot escape being an English artist. My sensibility and my culture are completely out of my control: it is an English culture. I like it and I accept it“ (Long, 2007, p. 71). Although Richard Long makes art works in and with landscape all around the world, England is his most frequent and most natural choice. While pieces made in other locations provide an input into the development of the international Land Art, those made in his homeland add yet another dimension: they propose a comment on how one of the strongest and most conceptualised landscape traditions in Europe can be approached on both artistic as well as theoretical levels in contemporary culture. This way, they can be seen as treatises in aesthetics that posit the engagement with landscape as an activity that requires the awareness of the consequences brought about by the emergence of the specific English perspective on nature, the knowledge of its history, as well as the awareness that the avant-garde aspirations to reformulate and expand the limits of art may be developed in harmony with rediscovering and reworking what can be termed national culture.

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### **Abstrakt**

W sztuce ostatnich kilku dekad zaobserwować można przemiany oraz zwroty w kierunku badań antropologicznych, społecznych, czy naukowych. Działania podejmowane przez artystów często charakteryzowało porzucenie zainteresowania kwestiami estetycznymi na rzecz aktywizacji społecznej czy rozwijania nowych technologii i materiałów. Krytyka i historia sztuki uznają ów naukowy zwrot w sztuce jako znak naszych czasów. Jednak perspektywa ta wynika nie tyle z nowych zainteresowań sztuki, ile ze zmiany zainteresowań w ramach refleksji o sztuce. Ta ostatnia widoczna jest także na polu innych dziedzin naukowych, takich jak historia, czy geografia kulturowa, dla których oczywista w ostatnich latach stała się także wartość poznawcza sztuki wcześniejszych dekad i stuleci. Coraz częściej oczywista staje się także konieczność ponownego przyjrzenia się tym kierunkom w sztuce, które dotychczas analizowane były w dość ograniczonym kontekście rozwoju międzynarodowej sztuki awangardowej oraz z naciskiem na kwestie formalne dzieła sztuki. W latach 70. XX wieku, kiedy w sztuce dominował konceptualizm i kierunki zmierzające do dematerializacji obiektu artystycznego, zarówno praktyka artystyczna, jak i refleksja na jej temat zdominowane były przez ideały międzynarodowej awangardy. Sztuka ziemi (Land Art) funkcjonowała w tej optyce jako jeden z wielu ruchów w kierunku rozszerzenia pola rzeźby. Na podstawie wybranych dzieł Richarda Longa w tekście rozpoznane zostają poznawcze wartości sztuki ziemi tworzonej przez artystę w Wielkiej Brytanii, które pozwalają uznać go za twórcę zainteresowanego lokalnymi uwarunkowaniami relacji pomiędzy artystą a naturą, wynikającymi z XVIII-wiecznych i XIX-wiecznych koncepcji malowniczości i przestrzeni wiejskiej jako angielskiej przestrzeni narodowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Land Art, malowniczość, krajobraz, Richard Long

## **The Artist as Historian (of Aesthetics). Richard Long and the History of an English Point of View**

### **Abstract**

In the art of the last few decades, we can see changes and returns to anthropological, social, or scientific research. Activities undertaken by artists were often characterized by abandoning interest in aesthetic issues for social activation or the development of new technologies and materials. Criticism and the history of art recognize this scientific turning point in art as a sign of our time. However, this perspective is not so much a result of new interests in art, but rather a change of interest in the reflection on art. The latter is also visible in the field of other scientific fields such as history or cultural geography, for which the cognitive value of the art of earlier decades and centuries has also become evident in recent years. More and more evident becomes the need to revisit these trends in art, which has so far been analyzed in the rather limited context of the development of international avant-garde art, and the emphasis on formal works of art. In the 70s of the twentieth century, when the conceptualism and directions of dematerialization of the artistic object dominated the art, both artistic practice

and reflection on the subject were dominated by the ideals of the international avant-garde. The art of land (Land Art) functioned in this optics as one of many moves towards extending the field of sculpture. Based on selected works by Richard Long, the cognitive values of the art of the land created by the artist in the United Kingdom are recognized, which allow him to be considered a creator interested in local conditions of the relationship between artist and nature, resulting from 18th and 19th century concepts of picturesque and rural space as an English national space.

**Key words:** Land Art, scenic, landscape, Richard Long

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