

Landscape Values

Place and Praxis

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The Landscape of wheat. A landscape of power

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Introduction

The economic context of late-nineteenth century Portugal has given birth to huge economic and political instability. Among the measures taken to mitigate the existing problems, one in particular is worthy of mention, that is Lei da Fome¹. We consider this protectionist measure, implemented in the year of 1899, the critical point that founds a landscape of power, overlapping the power of the landscape itself.

We seek to understand, particularly in Alentejo, southern Portugal, how, in a given time, the ecological diversity and richness of the vernacular landscape gave way to the monotony of cereal. We consider this transformation of the landscape to be a good example of how the landscape of power might lead to the abrupt transformation of an ancestral landscape, with the loss of its ecological memory, and also to the creation of false identities in that same landscape where it is imposed.

Methodology

1 – Our starting point is the concept of landscape as a socio-ecological system that portrays the relationship between people and natural systems. Since this landscape is mainly agrarian, analysis of agricultural statistical data demonstrate a clear intensification of rural production in that particular period of Alentejo's agricultural history, with wheat as the main product. Through the analysis of these data we see how the protectionist measure started the transformation of the socio-ecological system of this vernacular landscape.

Wheat was, and still is, in the context of the history of Alentejo's landscape, the symbol of a multifaceted phenomenon, and a very complex one at that, that sponsored the rupture of a relational bond between people and natural systems. In fact, this *Landscape of Power* demanded a very high price that affected Alentejo's identity, since the wheat crop defines a temporality that emptied the landscape of its social, ecological and cultural meanings and imposed upon it an identity that runs out

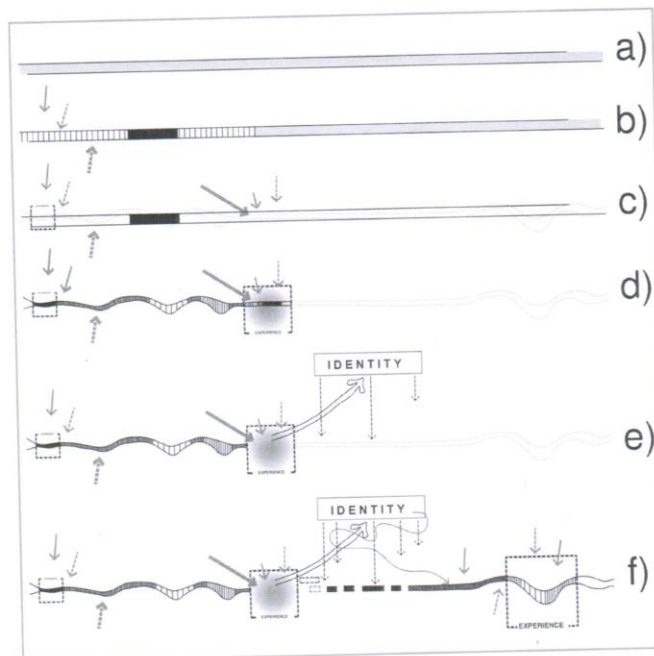


Fig. 1. Construction of the conceptual scheme of the landscape of memory-building process (a) the landscape of memory, expressed graphically by a line, (b) receives materiality that has immaterialities and will be characterized by (c) movements and events (d) that shape this linearity, causing irregularities (e). Sometimes, actions/intense experiences to which the landscape is exposed alter the linearity, assume own time frames or identities, playing themselves out (f) in space and time whereupon the landscape looks to regain its balance. The continuous and systematic process that characterizes the landscape reinvents itself and orientates toward new experiences – whether read-temporality – react in the same way somatising to the line of memory. (author's own collection)