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The scenography of nature in the work of Jean Nouvel

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Abstract

This study analyzes the modernity underlying Jean Nouvel's ideas and evaluates the experience of nature intended in his work by employing scenography and through the artificialization of nature. Nouvel's pursuit of aesthetics is motivated by a desire to transform a site in a natural place. Therefore, his architecture is, as he describes it, 'hyper-specific' and 'dematerialized'. Nouvel's methods and ideas bear the materialist and deterministic aspects of modernity. His works lean towards an artificiality that often exceeds their natural and cultural surroundings. Our experience of nature, though, does not come from the presentation of natural objects alone. It is a continuous 'becoming', a mundane and physical perception. This research therefore highlights the need to look beyond modernity's materialism and determinism and respect the complex and unfathomable totality in the design of a place.

*Aesthetics of nature / architecture / scenography /
modernity / phenomenology*

Nouvel's architectural play between nature and artifice

Jean Nouvel states that in his architecture he uses scenography to 'create a poetics of situation and arouse emotion in everyday life'.¹ He explains his philosophy of architecture in more detail in his film biography:

Emotion is being in a situation and wanting to share it as an act of love; it's completely generous when we are facing an architectural situation . . . we plunge into our memories and desires. I try to capture what I felt at that moment, to transpose it, to magnify it, to ensure that everybody feels what I feel. How to provoke emotion?

The only parameter we have is oneself.²

According to Nouvel his architecture becomes an instrument with which he amplifies and retransmits his own emotional response to a space in order to make impacts on his viewers: 'Architecture is obliged to produce meaning.'³ It should not be dedicated to 'technological purity, constructed tradition, and conformity in reference to cultural models'.⁴ In other words, he uses objects and matter to create a 'poetics of situation', in which nature is appropriated as an 'architectural material' (for instance vegetation or light).⁵ To evoke appreciation and a response from viewers, the production of an architectural scene in conjunction with nature involves the artificialization of the latter,⁶ and make its beauty manifest.

This article evaluates a number of spaces where Nouvel intended to produce these 'aesthetics of nature', as well as the scenographical methods he applied to achieve this. It also evaluates the way viewers experience nature, which is influenced by their perceptions and cultural influences, aiming to address the problematic evaluation of nature in modernity. Architecture historian Hilde Heynen assumes that 'modern', etymologically, means current, new, or transient, and that modernization is a historical process of humans constructing a new world from the past in the



Figure 1 The Guggenheim Temporary Museum of Art in Tokyo

‘light of reason’.⁷ Thus, modernity, as an endogenous conception of modernization, can be both objective and subjective. This dichotomy is rooted in Descartes’ dualistic ontocosmology, which separates soul from matter, subjective from objective, in which nature is materialistic and deterministic.⁸ Our notion of nature, though, is not acquired by our engagement with the natural object alone, but also by way of our cultural and historical relationship with it. Because they live in mundaneness and corporality, human beings engage themselves with a natural object and see it accordingly, rather than as a mere ‘natural thing’.

From this vantage point, I will analyze Nouvel’s architectural play between nature and artifice. First, by exploring how Nouvel’s ideology emerges through the production of a scenography, based upon his writings and interviews, and by investigating what his methods are to create an aesthetics of nature in architecture. Next, I will study the conditions in which humans experience nature and what the features of that experience are. Based on this, I will analyze three examples of Nouvel’s scenography of nature in his architecture to evaluate the natural and the artificial aspects of his methods and works.

Nouvel’s methods for a scenography for an aesthetics of nature

In his architecture, Nouvel tries to invoke the beauty of nature by using natural materials, such as plants and sunlight, as well as by producing ‘scenes’ by manipulating the transparency and reflection of materials such as glass and metals. By doing so, Nouvel refers to his methods of incorporating nature into his work as ‘hyper-specific or hyper-contextual’ architecture and ‘dematerialization’.⁹

Regarding the hyper-specific, Nouvel says: ‘I always try to look for specifics, understood as the input of the complementary object, of the object that makes it reverberate, the missing object.’¹⁰ By staging artificial spaces with contrasting and conspicuous objects, Nouvel intends to highlight the different characteristics of specific buildings, playing with displacement, differentiation, and heterogeneity to intensify the appearances of those features that he considers significant.¹¹ For instance, he places buildings with surfaces covered by plants and trees in a notorious urban context, or gardens with abundant territorial vegetation alongside buildings, or he gives buildings a colour scheme that contrasts with the surrounding natural context. In this way, Nouvel tries to bring nature into an urban, artificial context and the other way around. Through this ‘scenography’ he creates a ‘hyper-specific’, nature-saturated architecture as a ‘singular object’ amid its surroundings, which can also be understood as an ‘artificialization of nature’.

An example of the artificialization of nature in an urban context is Nouvel’s design for the Guggenheim Temporary Museum of Art in Tokyo (2001) (Fig. 1). This never-realized building should resemble a small mountain, with a surface entirely covered by vegetation, such as cherry trees—one of Japan’s traditional natural symbols. Set in industrial surroundings, the building was conceived to be provocative and artificial rather than natural. Here, Nouvel experimented with ‘hyper-artificiality’ by over-contextualizing a space.¹² The aesthetic effect is maximized by the contrast between the building’s nature and its industrial context.

The same effect can be observed in several of the architect’s Paris projects. In the Plan Les Halles (2004), a proposal for a redesign of Les Halles, a shopping complex and transit hub located in the middle of the city,



Figure 2 Belvedere on the roof in the Plan Les Halles

Nouvel integrated territorial forests similar to Compiègne, Fontainebleau, or Rambouillet.¹³ The vegetation around the Church of Saint-Eustache (1213–1754) and on the roof of the station building creates a territorial out-of-the-city ambience in a place abuzz from the urban and ‘civilized’ environment. It even confers a phantasmal and surrealistic atmosphere to the site (Fig. 2). In his design for the Quai Branly Museum (realized 1999–2006), Nouvel brings a form of nature into the city that recalls the forests and prairies of Australia, the Americas, or Africa. He evidently tries to place this museum in a context of natural aesthetics, referring to the indigenous arts and cultures that would be on exhibition:

This is a place marked by the symbols of the forest and river, by the obsession with depth and oblivion. This is a refuge for works once censored or scorned, conceived in Australia and the Americas. . . . The poetics of the location remained to be invented. It will be a gentle transmutation: the Parisian garden becomes a sacred wood and the museum merges into its depth.¹⁴

Visualizing the hyper-specific, Nouvel again tries to maximize his scenography by ‘dematerializing’ architecture, referring to it as ‘bi-dimensional’ architecture, invoking ‘the end of three-dimensional architecture’.¹⁵ ‘Dematerialization’ is the creation of virtual (‘immaterial’) images by the use of real (material) objects through the reflection and penetration of glass or metal, resulting in a collage effect. This method maximizes the synthesis of images in dimensions beyond traditional constructed space. In conjunction with both the hyper-contextualization strategy and the bi-dimensional space of the real and the imaginary, Nouvel aims at a symbolic effect.

The design for the Cartier Foundation (1991–1994) presents an example of his efforts to visualize the aesthetic of nature through dematerialization. The area around the building features more than two hundred different species of plants ‘linked to the cultural heritage of European science and

mythology’, based on the intention ‘to plant a very different kind of garden, a large collection of native plants, flowering at different times’.¹⁶ Co-operator of the project, German artist Lothar Baumgarten testifies:

I wanted it to look like a French brocade interlaced with gold—like a Gobelin tapestry—or like the well-known painting from 1420, *The Little Garden of Paradise*. It shows various meticulously painted plants, wild strawberries, Lily of the Valley, grasses, lilies, large numbers of birds, trees and fruits. . . . I chose to be guided by its botanic density and heraldic richness for the garden of the Cartier Foundation. Then too, the magnifying quality of the huge glass helps to transform the vegetation into such a painting or a tapestry (Fig. 3).¹⁷

This garden is inspired by the mythology of an abundant and verdant paradise. It brings the ‘exterior’ (that is, nature) into an urban, residential district. Nouvel amplifies the existing vegetation by installing, in the middle of the site, a building that is ‘dematerialized’ by glass surfaces. Together, the glass façades of the building form transparent and reflecting layers that make the interior and the exterior appear to interpenetrate. Trees and plants are visually superimposed and multiplied, creating an illusion of profuse and dense vegetation in a relatively small garden area.

A similar method of dematerialization is used in the Richemont Headquarters (2001–2007), located in the middle of Bellevue, a municipality of the canton of Geneva, where the natural circumstances are abundant (Fig. 4). This work is absorbed in the landscape rather than contrasting with it. The natural exterior of the building is brought into the interior because of Nouvel’s wish to preserve the site:

Bellevue’s 100-year-old cedars, delicate, interlacing trees, traditional chalets, natural setting, and view over the lake make it a deeply moving site. It is as calm as an estate anachronistically spared by urban development. One might yearn for it to remain like that. One might also yearn to live there.¹⁸



Figure 3 'The Little Garden of Paradise' (1420)



PHOTOS: YVES ANDRE

Figure 4 The exterior and the interior of the Richemont Headquarters in Bellevue, Geneva.

Here, too, the architect designed the building based on the concept of 'immateriality'. The natural surroundings merge with the interior through transparent or screen-printed glass. In this 'architecture permeated with and permeating the landscape', the interior and the exterior merge and the 'real' and virtual nature interact, giving the impression that the interior is an extension of the surrounding nature, fulfilling Nouvel's desire to see and feel it even inside.¹⁹

Nouvel's ideas on modernity

In Nouvel's methods of representing nature, we perceive an underlying modernity, illustrated by his positivistic efforts to 'create a place'. His intentional re-creation of a space for the purpose of retransmitting emotions indicates that he believes that the characteristics of a space can be revealed through methods and techniques. For instance, Nouvel expressed appreciation for the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, located

in a quiet part of the Danish seaboard, as the ideal architecture in a natural place.²⁰ He admires the museum and its location as a model that harmonizes the forest and the beach. When a site evokes these kinds of feelings, he refers to the 'depth of the place', and he defines architecture as revealing and orienting 'the embedding in the landscape of places that have a tendency to invent themselves anyway'.²¹ This idea is also expressed in Nouvel's dialogue with architecture critic François Chaslin:

I believe that, in each place, there is a soul, and for me, the respect for a preliminary situation, the will to belong to this place is paramount; to necessarily shake it up or to exist against it or next to it is an obligatorily fatal attitude imposed by the era. There is a duty of resistance. It is in the transversality of certain sensations linked with a city, with a region. And when we talk about spirit of place, about genius of place, it is often concerning dimensions which pass in this way. . . . I am not necessarily advocating the sanctification

of places. I am only talking about the affiliation with a place, the strengthening of its characteristics (or identities) as long as we consider them positive.²²

Nouvel reinterprets the qualities of a place according to his notion of 'transversality', which comes from imposing his sensations with an external place onto a site. True to his positivism, he exploits a place's characteristics, unrestricted by any notion of sanctity in a place. He believes that small interventions facilitate transcendence, as he mentions in a dialogue with Jean Baudrillard:

Yet I've still maintained a certain residue of optimism. . . . 'It's beautiful. I'm going to reveal it to you . . .' This is an aesthetics of revelation, a way of taking a piece of the world and saying, 'I'm appropriating this, and I'm giving it back to you for your appreciation in a different way.' In this century, architecture finds itself faced with incommensurable, metaphysical dimensions.²³

In his positivism, Nouvel considers architecture as the 'modification of a physical, atomic, and biological continuum . . . at the heart of our immense universe'.²⁴ He presents the changing quality of nature by staging natural elements and installing glass walls to act as media for the transmission of the (two-dimensional) reflection of leaves, plants, trees, mountains, clouds, the sky, the sun, and the weather conditions. For him, this transmission is deeply related to the invisible, that is the sociocultural or the emotional, because his architectural concept stems from the sense of sight. We can see this in Nouvel's frequent comparison of architecture and cinema regarding the production of images:

. . . the most evident architectural substrate: the look. The one which provokes the sensations that I evoked, the emotional shock . . .²⁵

. . . when I play with the concept of a virtual space, in the magician's sense, it's because space and architecture are things we become conscious of through our eyes. So we can play with anything the eye can integrate through sight, and we can fool the eye.²⁶

From this, we can conclude that his positivist representation of the aesthetics of nature is mainly realized in his use of materials and the way they are visually manipulated.

Nouvel's attachment to the material and the visual is also evident in his reliance on technique to apply, for instance, thin steel frames, different uses of glass, and innovative vegetation: 'What I use, personally, is the most demanding technique, employing the means of hyper-realism.' He insists that 'the domination of the material is the expression of modernity', and he utilizes specialized techniques to invent specific places that go beyond physical and regional limits.²⁷ In this effort to transmit emotion by staging the physical through the help of specialized techniques, we can see Nouvel's underlying positivism.²⁸

Nouvel's positivism and dependence on the material and the visual is evidently based on his modern epistemology, which includes his theory that imagination comes from information:

Imagination is intimately linked to our information system and therein lies our modernity. This doesn't mean that our work is simply a matter of transcribing images and sensations as perceived or experienced in our contemporary state. . . . What is more, we are bound to design buildings whose image will be a factor working for identity and promotion, and because of this, we have to employ expressive means, some of which are complex.²⁹

Nouvel does not use scenography for the sake of the visual effect alone. In order to transmit meaning through architecture, he also tries to express the invisible—that is, the social and the cultural—through the visible. This idea embodies empiricist theories saying that the object is a collection of information, that sensation is the acquisition of the object's 'pure quale' (quality) by the sense organs, that perception is reduced to sensation, and that imagination is associated with subjectivity.³⁰ In empiricism, the perceived subject is composed of 'sensible atoms', and emotion is limited to the association between the sensed and past experience, memory, and knowledge of the subject.³¹ This means that the perceived is determined and 'normalized' as a certain past experience before it is re-synthesized.³² The perceived subject is fossilized and objectified inasmuch as intellectualism fossilizes and objectifies experience. This elementalism—the idea that the whole (that is, the experience) is composed of the parts (psychological 'atoms')—cannot explain the experience of perception varying in time and space and according to the persons who 'inhabit' a given moment in the world.³³ The idea that perception (sensation, experience, emotion) is also involved in the acquisition of an object's characteristics is one of the materialist and deterministic aspects of modern thought.³⁴

In the same vein, Nouvel objectifies the origin of emotions as social 'consensus', referring to Baudrillard: ' . . . adventure is situated in a real world, a world that implies a consensus. You said, somewhere, that a consensus must exist in order for seduction to occur.'³⁵

This idea emphasizes the sociocultural commonality in sharing the aesthetic.³⁶ When perception is based on consensus, it is reduced to the identification of that which has already been described intellectually. In consensus, the perceived is abstracted, objectified, and denoted as information and knowledge, although that which is held in common is a social element that is continuously and variably perceived by different persons. This modern interpretation corresponds to Descartes' intellectualism: the normalization and fossilization of emotion being tantamount to empiricism. In other words, the associations with personal experience are normalized and neutralized by associating them with certain past experiences.

The experience of nature: conditions and characteristics

In order to set norms for evaluating the experience of nature in the works of Jean Nouvel, this experience needs to be considered according to the conditions in which one appreciates nature, the motivations that drive one to experience the aesthetic of nature, and the characteristics of this experience. These questions investigate the subject, the object, and the characteristics of the subject's interpretation of the object.

First, the biophysicality of nature should be considered with regard to a subject's experience of nature. In their definition of 'nature', ancient Greek philosophers included the relationship between physicality and dynamics: an ever-changing material that cannot be conceived of apart from its evolution.³⁷ While a subject's (human's) experience of nature is imposed on natural objects, this experience of nature is informed by those objects at the same time. We anticipate the coming of spring when we see forsythias blooming and feel the changes in sunlight and temperature, experiences that cannot be felt by artificial creations, that are not characterized by a natural flow. Thus, the ecological dimension of nature should be considered the first phase of our experience of it.

Second, the notion of landscape, like the notion of nature, is not limited to these characteristics of the object, although it is based upon it. A landscape is perceived according to human signification of natural things: 'The forest is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock, the river is water power, the wind is wind in the sail. As the surrounding world is discovered, nature thus discovered is encountered along with it.'³⁸ The interpretation of natural objects in a landscape is determined by the inhabitants—that is, *Dasein*, or 'being-in-the-world', in Heidegger's existential term. In the same vein, Augustin Berque claims that landscape as reality is *trajective* according to our interpretation of the object and that it is 'constructed by *trajection* which is a combination of the *médial* and the historical, the subjective and the objective, the physical and phenomenal, the ecological and the symbolic, producing a *médiance*'.³⁹ By separating matter and mind, modern dualism does not permit this notion of *trajection*. Heidegger and Berque do not consider nature, landscape, and experience as deterministic (that is, determined by reason as physical materials); nor are they arbitrary (as imagined subjectively). This idea of *trajection* means that we, human beings with our bodily relationship to the world, see that world, nature, and landscape, while engaging ourselves with it. In Berque's words: 'Nature is always as we represent it to ourselves. It is always mediated, socialized, culturalized from the fact in itself that we perceive it and *a fortiori* conceive it. In other words, it is *trajective*, not objective.'⁴⁰

In this existentialist aspect, people's desire to pursue nature arises from the desire to be away from the urban, from 'worldliness'.⁴¹ So the idea of landscape, springing from the desire for nature, contains the relationship between the internal world (representing the city) and the external world (representing nature). In this sense, the appreciation of gardens and nature cannot exist without the existence of the city and its worldliness.

Third, humanity includes not only worldliness but also corporality, because a person's body influences their consciousness, in the words of Merleau-Ponty: 'Consciousness is originally not an "I think that", but rather an "I can".'⁴² His philosophy is different from that of modern dualism, which degrades the senses to something as simple as the gathering of information and considers the mind's thinking to be absolute. Merleau-Ponty's 'embodied consciousness' does not divide mind and body, and should be considered as more concrete and real than the notion of the autonomous mind. He regards sensation, perception, and movement

as related experiences and actions that prescribe each other. This interaction implies that the human body responds to changing situations and perceives the world variably, according to the movement of 'the living body raising itself toward the world'.⁴³ Thus, nature and the experience of nature are a 'becoming' and a 'being' at the same time. And so is the human body, which perceives and 'is'.⁴⁴

Because of this human involvement, physical nature and the experience of nature are not deterministic but contingent. At the same time, nature and its experience are both *reasonable*, in the biophysical and mundane world, and *variable*, according to the particular situation a person is in. Berque explains this signification of nature as 'the structural moment of our existence'.⁴⁵ Thus, the experience of nature is dynamic both socially and personally. An architect like Nouvel, who tries to transmit sociocultural meaning through his programmed environment, can never be certain that his precise intended experience of nature will be understood.

Thus, the understanding of the natural and the artificial is connected to the interpretation of reality. Because of that, the understanding of the natural and the artificial cannot be objective, but includes the human interpretation of nature and acting within nature.

Artificial aspects of Nouvel's works and the experience of nature

In this section I will examine how Nouvel wants to reveal the aesthetic of nature by creating artificial environments, and how his scenography, which intends to provoke emotions and transmit sociocultural ideas about nature, relates to the viewer's experience of nature.

The first example, the Opera House in Seoul (2006), is representative of what I earlier called Nouvel's hyper-specific or hyper-contextual work. On an island in the middle of the Han River in Korea's capital city of Seoul, he placed pine trees, rocks, hills, and buildings. This application of nature was meant to refer to the geography and ecology of a general Korean landscape, where small hills lie consecutively, and pine trees grow well, even in the sterile soil of the rocky hilltops.⁴⁶ In Nouvel's design, however, the topography is at odds with the surroundings. It strikes a discordant note because the mountain top is brought to the middle of the river. The island, which is located in the lower reaches of the Han, was artificially formed out of a small sandplain in 1917, and cannot naturally sustain a rocky landscape and pine trees—a terrain that would more commonly be found in mountainous areas or further upstream. The typical downstream landscape is composed of sandy beaches, reed beds, and water-friendly trees and plants such as zelkovas and willows. The hyper-contextualization of the opera house thus exceeds the natural biophysicality of the space: the scene is splendid but unnatural. Furthermore, the excessive artificial construction that was required to present the 'natural' aesthetic here also has ethical implications. Thus, this projection is dubious in its efforts to represent a natural place and offer viewers an occasion to contemplate nature. By using a symbol of Korean nature, it anticipates an experience that is dependent on a specific intellectual association with

the existing stereotypes rather than an experience of ‘occurrence’.⁴⁷

The second example, the garden of the Quai Branly Museum, was intended to represent a ‘primitive’ place for the hosting of indigenous art. Bringing the nature of other continents into Paris is another form of hyper-contextualization and represents an ecology that is artificially constructed. Planting material from Australia, the Americas, and Africa might not assimilate with the French soil and climate. Also, the installation in the centre of Paris of plants that symbolize ‘primitive nature’ is artificial as well. Nouvel’s pursuit of nature, as discussed in the previous section, is motivated by the reference to natural conditions outside the city as a mundane world. This setting of ‘primitive’ nature in an urban environment surpasses reality. The urban representation of nature is a cultural substitute for nature—creating a place of rest and leisure, a meeting place for citizens, or sometimes even a sacred place (Fig. 5). The identification of a natural place within the city is based on the city dwellers’ activities and significations and is a difficult thing to preconceive. Nouvel’s intention to create a sacred place via hyper-contextualization is in an indicative mode, which is expected to inform viewers of knowledge and symbols of place. In fact, the garden of the Quai Branly Museum is sooner a place of rest in the city, where citizens appreciate the vitality of nature and its abundance of vegetation, rather than enjoying it as a place from long ago, with ‘primitive nature’ from other continents, that creates an experience of unfamiliarity and of being out of place. The same thing can be seen in Nouvel’s design for the planted hills at the Museum of Human Evolution in Burgos (not realized). This attempt to stage ‘virgin territory’ in the core of a city, in order to recall a prehistoric time, is a case of excessive artificialization.

In the third example, the Cartier Foundation (1991–1994), Nouvel applies ‘dematerialized architecture’ by blending the natural space with its reflections, ‘virtual images’, in order to provoke our visual experience (Fig. 6). When viewing this building and garden from afar, where the reflections cannot be seen yet, the small garden seems to have an abundance of vegetation, satisfying the citizens’ desire for nature. Here, Nouvel did not use vegetation from other territories or continents. The garden is planted with various native species, some of which are replaced according to the changing of the seasons. The closer visitors get to the garden, the more likely they are to experience a sense of confusion and perceive the artificial quality of what, from afar, seems natural. This is due to the superposition of the view of the actual garden and its ‘virtual images’. Nouvel describes it in the following manner:

In a building like the Cartier Foundation, where I intentionally blend the real image and the virtual image, it signifies that within a given plane, I no longer know if I’m looking at the virtual image or the real image. If I look at the façade, since it’s bigger than the building, I can’t tell if I’m looking at the reflection of the sky or the sky through the glass. . . . If I look at a tree through the three glass planes, I can never determine if I’m looking at the tree through the

glass, in front of it, behind it, or the reflection of the tree. And when I plant two trees in parallel, even accidentally, to the glass plane, I can’t tell if there’s a second tree or if it’s a real tree. . . . These are the means by which architecture creates a virtual space or a mental space; it’s a way of tricking the senses. But it’s primarily a way of preserving a destabilized area.⁴⁸

The ‘dematerialized’ reflections in this space amplify its nature, resulting in a splendid illusion and the destabilization of the body. This provocation exceeds the viewer’s corporality; it is, as Nouvel describes it, ‘a mental space . . . tricking the senses’.⁴⁹ In real space, the experience of nature commences with the perception of a subject’s staying within the environment. According to Berque, the immediate notion of the body and the sense of looking from a distance are fundamental for the concept of landscape: ‘Without this gaze, without this formal notice of the subject prevailing within the environment, which is at the same time a structure of the call of the perceiving subject in the image, there can be no landscape.’⁵⁰

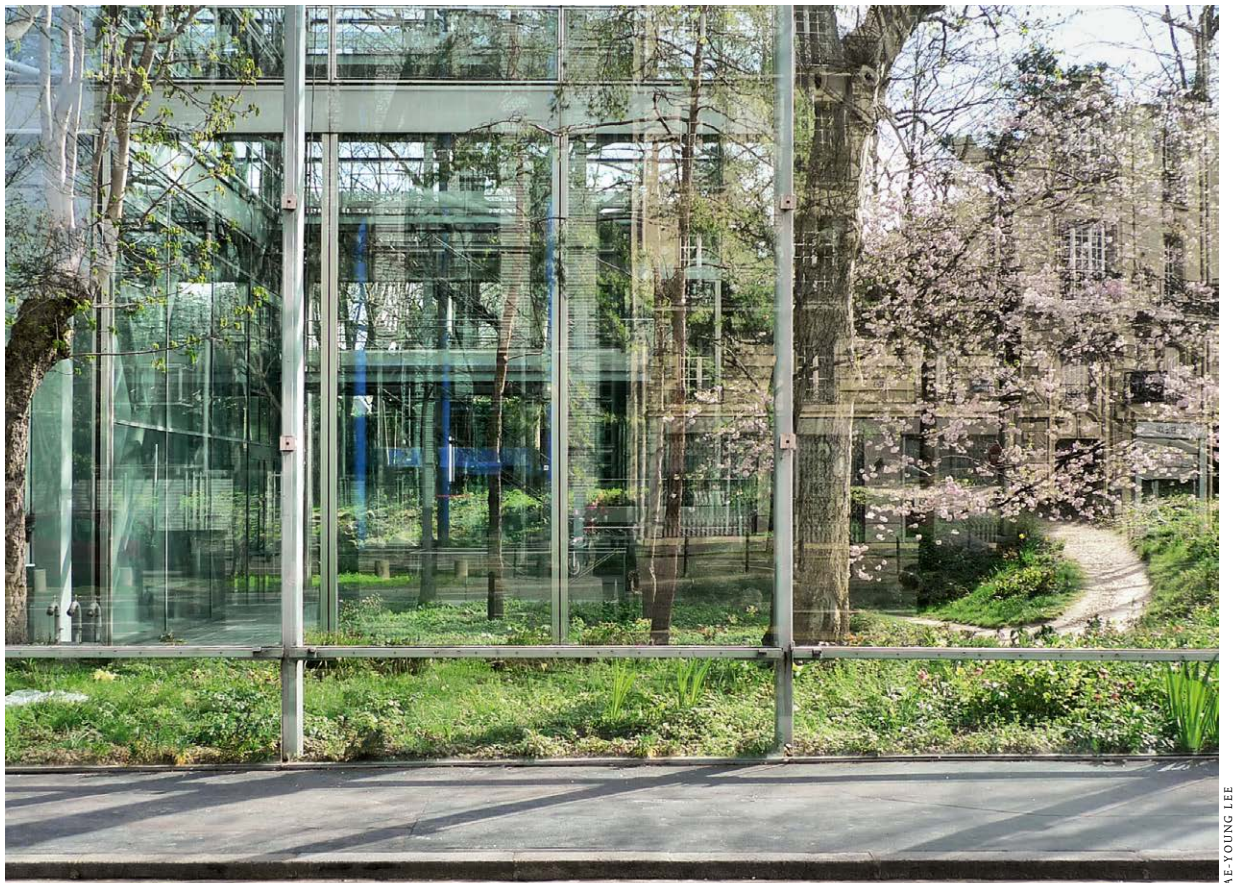
But Nouvel’s confusing images and blurred outlines interrupt the body’s process of self-identification. Architect and historian Antoine Picon views this manifestation of nature as ‘a mental landscape’ as a characteristics of the age of the cyborg, in which space is conceived as the desire to see all surroundings free from the constraints of the physical body.⁵¹ In this ‘mental landscape’, the experience of nature is hugely different from the traditional appreciation of nature, based on promenades along paths and resulting from a direct bodily perception. The observation of the ‘mental landscape’ does not agree with the bodily experience. Bi-dimensional and informative scenes—which, like cinema, show natural (the sky, clouds, the sun, trees, plants) and cultural objects (passing cars, neighbouring buildings)—are indicative for our experience. This association of the natural with the cultural and the intellectual through the perception of scenes cannot result from the intention of a third person, because it is a personal and subjective process of continuously resynthesizing the perceived or sensed bodily experience with that which is ‘acquired’ in the cultural context.⁵²

Nouvel’s intention to reveal the aesthetic of nature through a hyper-specific and dematerialized production of visual perception has modern positivist, materialistic, and objectivist undertones. With his scenography of environments with natural and artificial ‘scenes’, he intends to provoke viewers’ emotions. But his artificial staging and materials do not evoke emotions or responses according to his intentions, since his hyper-methods do not provoke bodily experiences that include the surrounding objects, and their signification in the human world. When pre-programmed intentions concentrate on the object or image—such as Nouvel’s intention to express emotions through the production of images—they attempt to predetermine the emotions that should be prompted by the presentation of materials. Baudrillard criticized this deterministic aspect of modernity in a dialogue with Nouvel. According



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Figure 5 The Museum Quai Branly building and garden



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Figure 6 The Cartier Foundation

to Baudrillard, seduction is not based on consensus; it cannot be made official, nor can it be programmed, and it must remain hidden. He states that place and context are rediscovered in an interactive relationship between opposites: the visible and the invisible, real order and seduction, the supposed reality of the world and its radical illusion. The emotion of a place is hidden, unintelligible, and impossible to predict. Baudrillard points to the 'undetermined' aspect of human experience—that is, the contingency of the 'becoming' of nature and of our experience of nature.⁵³

Conclusion

Nouvel's architecture employs scenography in an effort to create poetic situations that reveal the aesthetics of nature and provoke preconceived emotions. Nouvel exploits and amplifies the characteristics of places through the production of 'images', using the methods of 'hyper-contextualization' and of 'dematerialization'. By planting natural elements in the middle of the city, he intends to create a complementary relationship between the two, amplifying the natural environment with the aid of the transparency and the reflection of the glass. This artificialization of nature through the production of 'images' ('scenes') comes from Nouvel's modern ideology: his positivist belief that small, spatial modifications in architecture can provoke a viewers' visual perception and emotions. Nouvel's visual bias is also rooted in the modern empiricist notion that the object is a collection of information and sensations and that imagination is formed by association with the gathered information. Although Nouvel realizes that the perception of a place is connected to the sociocultural (the 'exterior', according to Nouvel) and is always changing over time, his reliance on the materialistic and his objectivist attitude in the realization of his ideas betray a certain deterministic aspect. Although his positivist and artificial realizations create splendid and attractive scenes, they often exceed the capacity of the viewer to understand the architect's intentions. So his 'hyper-realism' has trouble addressing the transitional character, the 'becoming', of a place, and does not take into consideration the reality of the personal bodily and cultural experience of nature, which is indeterminate, contingent, complex, and obscure—a 'becoming'.

NOTES

- 1 Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, *Jardins et Paysages: une anthologie* (Paris: Éditions de La Villette, 2003), 566.
- 2 Odile Fillion and Jean Nouvel, *EMPREINTES: Jean Nouvel – les traits de l'architecte* (DVD, France Télévisions Distribution, 2009).
- 3 Efrén García Grinda and Cristina Díaz Moreno, 'A Conversation with Jean Nouvel', *El Croquis* 112–113 (2002), 6–25: 11. See also Efrén García Grinda and Cristina Díaz Moreno, 'The Symbolic Order of Matter', *El Croquis* 112–113 (2002), 26–41.
- 4 Jacques Lucan, *Architecture en France (1940–2000): Histoire et théories* (Paris: Groupe Moniteur 2001), 291.
- 5 Grinda and Moreno, 'A Conversation', op. cit. (note 3), 16.
- 6 Alain Roger explains landscape (*paysage*) as the result of the artificialization of land (*pays*) in his book, *Nus et paysages: Essai sur la fonction de l'art* (Paris: Aubier, 1978). The artificialization of nature is connected to the notion of the embellishment of nature and the notion of landscape.
- 7 Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (London: MIT Press, 1999), 9.
- 8 In 1927, Heidegger criticized this quantitative, objective, measurable world, reduced by Descartes' 'thingliness of nature', as he viewed such objectification as a de-worlding (*Entweltlichung*, depriving of worldliness) of the existential meaning of human being. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 108–110.
- 9 'Dematerialization' refers to architecture that is composed of glass or polished matte metal, which has the quality of rendering transparency, opacity, and reflection, so that matter seems to disappear into its surroundings. Through dematerialization, Nouvel's architecture becomes an aggregate of two-dimensional images.
- 10 Grinda and Moreno, 'A Conversation', op. cit. (note 3), 13.
- 11 Nouvel wants to make his objects complementary to the site, in diverse and complicated ways. For example, buildings that follow the shapes of their surroundings and, at the same time, have contrasting colours. Nouvel uses the word 'complementary' for the singular, the hyper-specific, and the hyper-contextual.
- 12 Grinda and Moreno, 'A Conversation', op. cit. (note 3), 16.
- 13 Jean Nouvel et al., *Paris-Les Halles-Concours 2004* (Paris: Le Moniteur, 2004), 50–51.
- 14 Philip Jodidio and Jean Nouvel, *Jean Nouvel by Jean Nouvel, 1993–2008* [vol. 2] (Hong Kong/Cologne/Paris: Taschen, 2008), 422.
- 15 Jean Nouvel, 'Écrits', *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 296 (1994), 48–53: 51.
- 16 Lothar Baumgarten, 'Theatrum Botanicum', *Pages Paysages* 6 (1996), 40–47: 43.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Jodidio and Nouvel, *Jean Nouvel*, op. cit. (note 14), 433.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 The appreciation was written in Nouvel's 'Louisiana Manifesto', published in the preface of Philip Jodidio and Jean Nouvel, *Jean Nouvel by Jean Nouvel, 1970–1992* [vol. 1] (Hong Kong/Cologne/Paris: Taschen, 2008).

21 Jodidio and Nouvel, *Jean Nouvel*, op. cit. (note 20), 22.

22 François Chaslin and Jean Nouvel, *Jean Nouvel: Critiques* (Gollion: Infolio éd., 2008), 129.

23 Jean Baudrillard and Jean Nouvel, *The Singular Objects of Architecture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 18.

24 Jodidio and Nouvel, *Jean Nouvel*, op. cit. (note 20), 22.

25 Le Dantec, *Jardin et Paysages*, op. cit. (note 1), 565.

26 Baudrillard and Nouvel, *The Singular Objects*, op. cit. (note 23), 7–8.

27 Chaslin and Nouvel, *Jean Nouvel*, op. cit. (note 22), 113.

28 Positivism that relies on the material can construct a universe that implies ‘uni-version’. According to geographer and philosopher Augustin Berque: ‘Uni-version is actually possible only in two ways: either by elimination of the incommensurable in favour of the commensurable (as in modern positivism) or by abolition of all measures (as in mysticism).’ Augustin Berque, *Écoumène: introduction à l’étude des milieux humains* (Paris: Editions Belin, 2000), 65. Translation of the quote by the author.

29 Jean Nouvel, ‘Lumières de l’époque’, *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* 276 (1991), 58–65: 60.

30 For ‘pure quale’, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2012), 52 (originally published in 1945).

31 Renaud Barbaras, *La perception. Essai sur le sensible* (Paris: Vrin, 2009), 13–25.

32 For Nouvel, ‘[s]pecificity is linked to the actualization of knowledge. Architectural knowledge is by nature diverse, given its links with all civilization.’ Jodidio and Nouvel, *Jean Nouvel*, op. cit. (note 20), 22.

33 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, op. cit. (note 30), 140–141.

34 Ibid., 266–267. The definitions of perception, sensation, experience, and emotion are ambiguous in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy; they cannot be clearly distinguished: ‘If sense is a moving of oneself, it is an experiencing; or rather, because sense is an affective experience, it implies a movement: literally, perception is an *e-motion*.’ Barbaras, *La perception*, op. cit. (note 31), 95. Translation of the quote by the author.

35 Baudrillard and Nouvel, *The Singular Objects*, op. cit. (note 23), 7–8.

36 Baudrillard agrees with Nouvel’s idea of a ‘destabilized area for seduction’, but he does not agree with the idea that seduction is consensual. He explains that seduction is not consensual but dual: ‘A successful object . . . [is] an object that creates a dualistic relation, a relation that can emerge through diversion, contradiction, destabilization, but which effectively brings the so-called reality of a world and its radical illusion face to face.’ Baudrillard and Nouvel, *The Singular Objects*, op. cit. (note 23), 9.

37 Berque, *Écoumène*, op. cit. (note 28), 153.

38 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit. (note 8), 70.

39 According to Berque, ‘landscape is at the same time reality and appearance of reality’. Augustin Berque, *Les raisons du paysage: De la Chine antique aux environnements de synthèse* (Paris: Hazan, 1995), 16.

Berque also states that reality is the meaning given by us: ‘Things are becoming here. . . . Things do not exist in non-sense (meaning) of a pure in itself . . . we necessarily predicate them in terms of our world.’ Augustin Berque, *Écoumène*, op. cit. (note 28), 144–145. Translation of the quote by the author. ‘Trajectivity’ and ‘trajective’ come from ‘trajection’. Trajection is the process through which one object becomes different kinds of realities. This process is analogous to a predication in logic, as the logical subject (what the matter is about) is signified by the predicate (what is said about the matter). Trajection is also a process of becoming concrete or ‘growing together’. Berque, *Écoumène*, op. cit. (note 28), 93–95 and 144–145.

Médial is used by Augustin Berque as ‘related to human milieux’. Berque, *Écoumène*, op. cit. (note 28), 98.

Médiance (*fūdōsei*, 風土性) derives directly from the Latin word *medietas*, which signifies half, milieu, or intermediary nature. It is defined by Berque as the meaning or the idiosyncrasy of a certain milieu, the relation of a society to its environment. Berque, *Écoumène*, op. cit. (note 28), 128.

40 Berque, *Écoumène*, op. cit. (note 28), 154–155.

41 Ibid., 126 and 159–165. For the historical examples that Berque uses to substantiate this statement, see *ibid.*, 163–164.

42 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, op. cit. (note 30), 139.

43 Ibid., 78.

44 This ‘double’ being derives from Heidegger’s idea of ‘being-in-the-world’ and Merleau-Ponty’s idea of ‘the living body, raising itself toward the world’.

45 Berque, *Écoumène*, op. cit. (note 28), 203.

46 Pine trees are so common in Korea that they appear in the national anthem: ‘. . . those pine trees on the top of Nam Mountain. . . .’ They are also referred to in Confucian ideology; pines are venerated as symbols of fidelity and strength in literature, painting, and gardening, because the tree remains green even in winter, <http://100.daum.net/encyclopedia/view/174XXXK008804>, <http://100.daum.net/encyclopedia/view/b04n0009a>.

47 I use Heidegger’s term ‘occurrence’ to explain the ‘becoming’ of experience over time: ‘Historicity means the constitution of being of the “occurrence” of Dasein as such; it is the ground for the fact that something like the discipline of “world history” is at all possible and historically belongs to world history.’ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, op. cit. (note 8).

48 Baudrillard and Nouvel, *The Singular Objects*, op. cit. (note 23), 8.

49 Ibid., 20.

50 Berque, *Les raisons du paysage*, op. cit. (note 39), 19.

51 Antoine Picon, *La ville territoire des cyborgs* (Besançon: Les Édition de L’Imprimeur, 1998), 100.

52 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, op. cit. (note 30), 132.

53 Baudrillard and Nouvel, *The Singular Objects*, op. cit. (note 23), 16–17.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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