

“Blut und Boden”: Naturalizing the Nation

Landscape Design as an Identitarian Tool

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The renewed focus on landscape design today invites a critical reassessment of both its theories and practices. This paper will explore the ability of this discipline to assume and ascribe highly politicized characteristics, thus highlighting the risk of ideological distortion to which landscape is susceptible. It is crucial to underscore the dangers of considering landscape design merely as an aesthetic and politically neutral discipline. Regarding landscape solely through an aesthetic lens would indeed risk undermining the deeper meanings and codes intrinsic to this field. A truly comprehensive understanding of landscape design must acknowledge its inherent complexity. This complexity is well captured by Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, who noted:

“Gardens do not get created independently of contemporary ideas and conventions. They express, perhaps even more eloquently and fully than do other art forms, certain of the prevailing assumptions and habits of mind of their owners and creators.”¹

To investigate this particular aspect of landscape design, the paper will address a deeply problematic chapter in the evolution of the discipline — the landscape of “Blut und Boden” (Blood and Soil). This design philosophy that emerged in early 20th century Germany serves as a highly useful tool for deconstructing entrenched biases and highlighting the political potential inherent in landscape design. The essence of the blood and soil design philosophy lies in its mission: landscape and garden design become instruments for asserting national-racial identity.

This paper will first focus on the deep cultural roots that led to the development of this conception of landscape. It will begin with an overview of the cultural process of nationalizing landscapes that accompanied the nation-building efforts in 19th century continental Europe. Subsequently, the focus will shift to the particular evolution of this process in early 20th century Germany, with special attention given to the specific concept of Nature that emerged in this context. Specifically, attention will be given to the interaction between national-romantic impulses and the growing influence of biological determinism (characterized by an extreme form of hyper-Darwinism) that permeated large segments of the German conservative bourgeoisie. The German *Volk* and its production are regarded as integral components of the biocenosis of the Teutonic natural world and, therefore, subjected to the laws of nature. Simultaneously, nature itself is understood and interpreted through anthro-po-cultural categories, particularly national-racial ones: from this perspective, there is a Teutonic nature, a Slavic nature, a Latin nature, and so forth. This specific notion of nature became the theoretical foundation of the so-called “Blut und Boden” landscape.

The paper will then explore the formal and theoretical frameworks of this experience, focusing on the work of landscape architects such as Willy Lange and Heinrich Wiepking-Jürgensmann. A central aspect of these theories will be emphasized: how landscape design became a tool for asserting national-racial identity. At the same time, the ambiguities surrounding the interpretation of landscape as a medium for identity assertion in contexts ideologically irreconcilable with Nazi Germany will be addressed. This critique aims to encourage reflection on the political

1 Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, “The ‘Wild Garden’ and the ‘Nature Garden’ – aspects of the garden ideology of William Robinson and Willy Lange,” *The Journal of Garden History* 12, 3 (1992), 184.

potential inherent in landscape design and on the risks associated with the instrumental and ideological use of a distorted understanding of the laws of nature. Analyzing the unsettling experience of the “*Blut und Boden*” landscape entails focusing on the substantial political potential embedded in landscape design.

Landscape and National Identity

To understand the key factors that led to the emergence of the “*Blut und Boden*” landscape, it is essential to provide a concise overview of the historical and cultural processes that form the deep-rooted foundation of landscape nationalization. Specifically, it is important to situate this within the broader historical and cultural developments that gave rise to the identitarian conception of the discipline. In continental Europe, alongside the nation-building processes that began in the late eighteenth century, a notion of landscape emerged that was primarily seen as a means of asserting and embodying newly constructed national identities. Svend Erik Larsen provides a succinct and effective summary of this process:

“From the late 18th century, and even more so after the Napoleonic wars, many European countries were engaged in a process of nation-building. [...] The national landscape played a fundamental role in the formation of national identities, both on a collective and individual level. In the national ideologies growing out of Romanticism, especially in the German Empire, language and landscape were the basic constituents of national identity, the former defining and expressing the latter, presenting it as the natural foundation of the nation.”²

The particular significance attributed to the national landscape rendered it a fundamental cornerstone in the nation-state building process, thereby introducing an interpretation of the territory heavily influenced by the ongoing cultural evolution:

“The national landscape is an important component in the traditions invented to support the building of the nation-state. Particular landscapes or landscape uses – such as, say, a certain type of forest and forestry – were not regarded as simple facts shared by nations belonging to the same climatic zones, but were turned into symbols of national specificity – most often a specific superiority – with an impact on national character and thereby on national identity.”³

According to Larsen, the efficacy of landscape as a tool for asserting national identity can be understood in terms of four fundamental mechanisms:

“The national landscape, in its material-symbolic complexity, serves four basic ideological functions in the makeup of national identity: 1) it gives unity to people and place, 2) it provides this unity a unique character, 3) it gives people and place a common origin, 4) it naturalizes that unity and that origin.”⁴

These origins, deeply rooted in the culture of continental Europe, would provide the essential foundations for making landscape a powerful tool for expressing a sense of national identity.

However, it is imperative here to examine how this concept of landscape ultimately deeply impacted design practice. It is particularly useful to focus on a phase in the evolution of this topic characterized by specific spatio-temporal coordinates: Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. From this context of extreme crisis, a radical interpretation of the identitarian landscape design seems to have emerged: the landscape of “*Blut und Boden*.” This design experience, profoundly tainted by a national-racial ideology, represented a fundamental evolution of the concept of identitarian landscape, poised to exert a silent yet decisive influence on the trajectory of landscape design.

2 Svend E. Larsen, “The national landscape – national identity or post-colonial experience?” *European Review* 13, 2 (2005), 296.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 297.

Heimat and Bodenständigkeit: The Nature of “Blut und Boden”

Before considering the specific theoretical characteristics expressed by the main exponents of this design thought, it is necessary to specify the particular cultural conditions that led to its birth. Indeed, it is worthwhile to specify how the “Blut und Boden” interpreted the process of landscape nationalization described above. An inescapable condition for understanding this design experience is the analysis of the particular cultural background and the specific idea of nature that connoted the landscape of blood and soil. In fact, the “Blut und Boden” can be seen as a true cult dedicated to a very specific (and disturbing) idea of nature. Only by understanding the specific interpretation of the natural element that characterizes it is it possible to bring out the fundamental and distinctive features of this design. To accomplish this, it is necessary to introduce two fundamental concepts: *Heimat* and *Bodenständigkeit*. In fact, by analyzing the meanings and the interaction between these two concepts, it is possible to specify the cultural background — characterized by an extremely radical view of Darwinism and a romanticized concept of nation — that allowed the landscape of blood and soil to emerge. If the notion of *Heimat* turns out to be fundamental in specifying the particular sentimental and romantic impulse toward the nation (already briefly introduced in general terms in Larsen’s writings) that characterizes the landscape of “Blut und Boden,” in order to fully understand its specificity, it is useful here to first introduce the notion of *Bodenständigkeit*, which is fundamental in grasping the post-Darwinist influence of this design doctrine.

Bodenständigkeit turns out to be a very complex term that encapsulates the specific post-Darwinian view that characterized Germany in the early 20th century. This term defines an interdisciplinary concept (used in aesthetics as well as in science) that denotes the “quality of something deeply rooted (or uniquely appropriate) in relation to the soil on which it stands.”⁵ The interpretation of reality associated with this term finds clear expression in the work of the natural philosopher Raoul Heinrich Francé, particularly in his book *Streifzüge im Wassertropfen*⁶. *Streifzüge im Wassertropfen* begins with a significant introduction concerning the village of Dinkelsbühl: the built forms become manifestations of the workings of modern biology. According to Francé, human settlements are the result of an evolutionary struggle and adaptation to their environment. As Cupers summarizes, “the human mind was ‘nothing supernatural, not a gift from heaven,’ but rather ‘a child of the earth’.”⁷ Human beings and their production become an integral part of the biocenosis imposed by his environment and are therefore subject to the laws of nature.

If the concept of *Bodenständigkeit* defines the particular Darwinian perspective that characterizes the worldview of “Blut und Boden,” it is crucial to analyze the sentimental and political impetus which is inherent in the other fundamental concept of this projectuality. *Heimat*, loosely translatable as homeland, proves to be a concept characterized by great complexity. Indeed, the term encompasses a multitude of meanings and nuances.⁸ It is of particular interest here to highlight a fundamental aspect related to the concept of *Heimat*: this term introduces the concept of national belonging as an emotional dimension inherent in human beings. It is appro-

5 Kenny Cupers, “Bodenständigkeit: the environmental epistemology of modernism,” *The Journal of Architecture* 21, 8 (2016), 1226.

6 Raoul H. Francé, *Streifzüge im Wassertropfen* [Incursions in a Drop of Water] (Stuttgart: Kosmos, 1907).

7 Cupers, “Bodenständigkeit,” 1233.

8 Silvia Muci provides insight into the complexity of the notion of *Heimat*: “*Heim* in the course of time has come to denote - from the original bed or place to rest - the paternal home with a whole series of connotations, which refer to feelings of pleasure and protection. Consequently, the nineteenth-century *Heimat* becomes an expression of the criticism levelled in chorus by peoples at industrial and capitalist expansion that undermines the environment, traditions, and intimacy of childhood places. In this sense nostalgia, in the words of Russian scholar Svetlana Boym, is a ‘rebellion against the modern idea of time, of the time of history and progress’.” Silvia Muci, “Popoli e memorie: la nostalgia come fondamento delle identità nazionali” [Peoples and memories: nostalgia as the foundation of national identities], *Il Chiasmo* (2018), accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.treccani.it/magazine/chiasmo/storia_e_filosofia/Memoria/nostalgia.html.

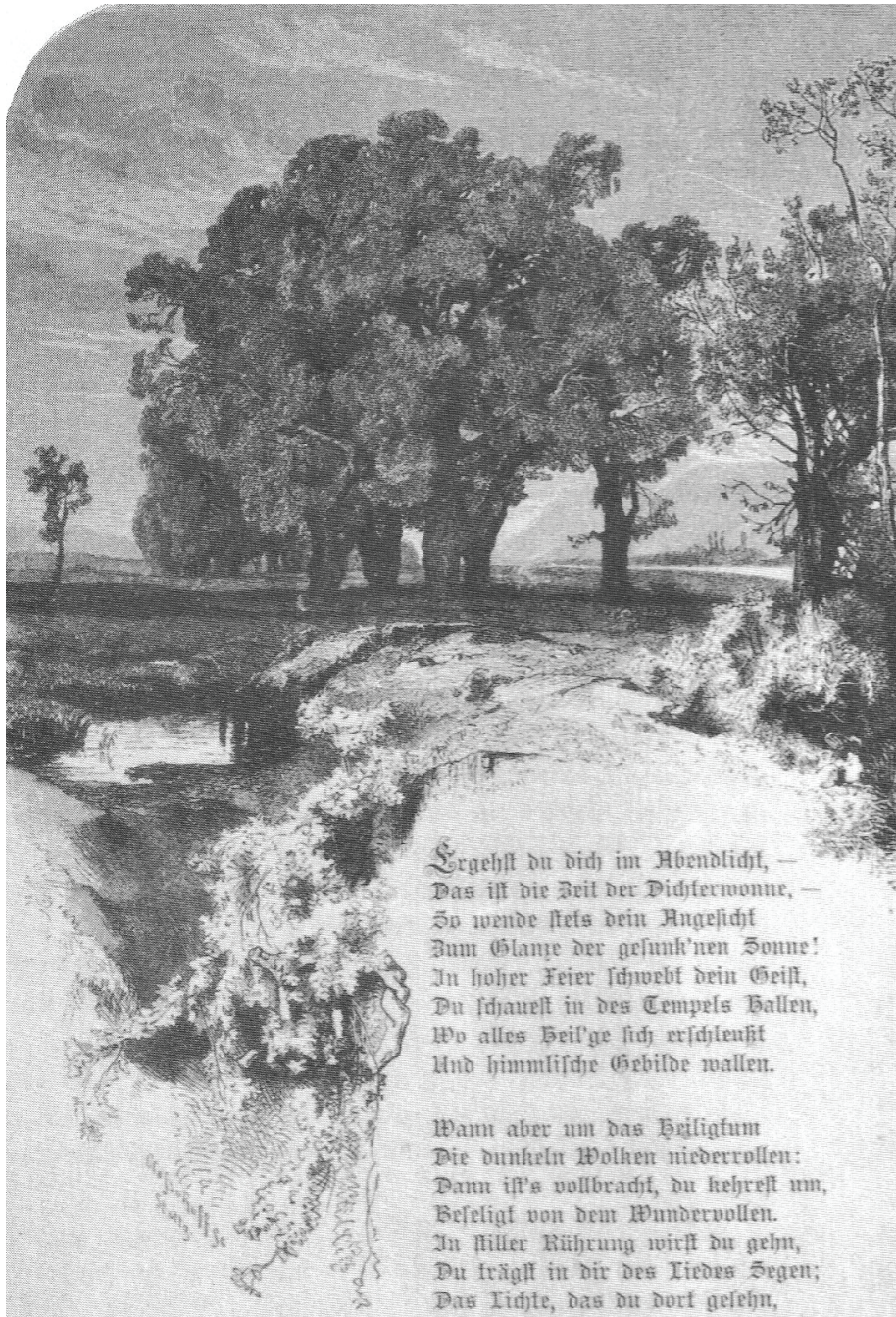


Fig. 1: Tübingen Wöhrd. Sheet from E. Paulus's book *Ludwig Uhland und seine Heimat Tübingen*. Poem by Ludwig Uhland with illustration (woodcut print) by Gustav Adolf Cloß, 1886. This print (associating a drawing of a landscape with lines of poetry) well describes the special sentimental significance of Heimat and its dimension of closeness to nature.

priate here to reference Silvia Muci's reflections on a fundamental implication associated with this term: "To be at home, in the national home, henceforth had to mean being in oneself."⁹ National identity, therefore, becomes an intrinsic dimension of the human being.

The cultural specificity of "Blut und Boden" can be encapsulated by the interaction between the post-Darwinist perspective of *Bodenständigkeit* and the nationalistic essence of *Heimat*: humanity is inherently intertwined with both its ecosystem and its national community. From this dynamic interplay emerges the unique interpretation of the natural element that characterizes this design thought: the national-racial aspect is viewed as an integral part of the natural laws governing the human species. Furthermore, nature itself is construed through national categories: the German *Volk*, alongside the organisms of the Teutonic ecosystem, is perceived as constituting the biocenosis (*biozonisch*) of the Germanic *Heimat*.

Consequently, the reverence for nature presupposes a reverence for the nation: national-racial identity and the local ecosystem converge in the inseparable and harmonious unity of the *Heimat*. This specific conceptualization of nature serves as the crucial theoretical foundation that distinguishes the specificity of "Blut und Boden" design from earlier interpretations of the identitarian landscape. This particular conception of the natural element proves to be the theoretical cornerstone for an in-depth understanding of the theories, practices, and missions of the "Blut und Boden" landscape.

The Landscape of "Blut und Boden"

In early twentieth-century Germany, a concept of landscape emerged that was deeply influenced by this specific idea of nature. This led to a design approach characterized by a radical inclination to use native plants and elements from the deep Germanic tradition. In order to understand in depth the principles of this design thinking, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the main design interpreters and the salient points of their theoretical-operational positions. First, it is necessary to contextualize the conditions that led to the formulation of the theories of the patriarch of this design thinking: Willy Lange (1864-1941). Indeed, the design principles of the blood and soil landscape found an early and fundamental formulation in the "natural garden" of the Berlin landscape architect. However, to briefly outline the context in which this design model emerged, one should consider Lange's theories as a reaction to the "formal garden"¹⁰ and its proponents (including the architect Peter Behrens). The main characteristic of the "Baugarten,"¹¹ as Lange called it, was to understand the garden as an extension of the design principle of the architecture to which it referred, often resorting to geometric forms and the use of species solely for their aesthetic quality (often exotic and constrained within "architectural" forms). In the eyes of the Berlin landscape architect, this type of formal garden was in fact an expression of a degenerate anthropocentrism:

9 Ibid.

10 The position Willy Lange opposes is well summarized by this quotation from Peter Behrens expressed in Peter Behrens, "Neue Sachlichkeit in der Gartenformung," *Jahrbuch der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Deutsche Gartenkultur*, (1930), 17, reported in English in Wolschke-Bulmahn, "The 'Wild Garden'," 194: "What we want today also for the garden is a genuine room. It should shelter us as does a house or the rooms of the house, which complement one another and work together. This will lead automatically to the three-dimensional arrangement of the garden. We recognize the unthought-of beauty of axial views, of the various levels of the terraces, of the delimitation by high and low walls. [...] To enhance such three-dimensional spatiality it would be desirable to place tall and slender trees such as the Italian poplar or *Thuja gigantea* at such places where a spatial enclosure seems adequate [...] It would be highly desirable to extend formal reminiscences of the rooms of the house into the garden."

11 Willy Lange, *Gartenbilder mit Vorbildern aus der Natur* [Garden pictures: with models from nature] (Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung von J.J. Weber, 1922), 22-23. This expression by Lange is intended to denote a garden characterized by an anthropocentric view and the constriction of plants within architectural forms. The term "Baugarten" turns out to be used by Lange as a pejorative of "Architekturgarten," indicating by this term formal gardens characterized by the use of *Architekturpflanzen* (architectural plants), i.e., plants forcedly constricted within architectural forms.



Fig. 2: Willy Lange's Nature Garden

"For example, he [Willy Lange] interprets the formal garden as a sign of an anthropocentric world view: 'Perhaps we owe to the Old Testament the human right of domination over creatures in an arbitrary way: to arrange various plants artificially in the garden, to water them here, to feed them there and to shut them up in the borders of beds. This corresponds to the human sense of orderliness and to the right to rule, which has been preached for thousands of years.'¹²

In contrast to this model, Lange proposed his theory of the "natural garden," characterized by a clear rejection of geometric forms and a strong preference for native species, based on the "natural sciences of our day" and the "New Testament gospel of love."¹³ This way of understanding garden and landscape design, according to Lange, proposes the overcoming of what he refers to as the "phase of the citizen" (*Stufe der Städter*), a phase that finds its spatialization in the "Baugarten," in favor of the achievement of a noble culture (*Edelkultur*) characterized by human

¹² Wolschke-Bulmahn, "The 'Wild Garden'," 194.

¹³ Ibid.

action stamped by love and a deep human understanding of nature.¹⁴ The natural garden is to be understood as a true temple dedicated to the unfathomable laws of Nature:

“In his ‘nature garden,’ Nature was to be designed according to the laws of Nature, laws which he and others considered beyond human reasoning and therefore of special human significance. It was a place for a nearly religious presentation of Nature, a place where Nature was not only protected, but also might be worshipped.”¹⁵

Far from being a new element in the history of landscape, the cult of nature takes on a distinct connotation in Lange’s theory. This is particularly evident in the three fundamental pillars of Lange’s design identity: science, art, and race.¹⁶ These three basic elements of Lange’s theory allow us to extract more precisely the aesthetic-cultural aspirations and the relationship to nature that characterize the Berlin landscape architect. The first two points, science and art, testify to the undeniable modernity of the Berlin landscape architect’s approach to design. In fact, according to Lange, the design value of a garden is based primarily on the application of the biological laws that govern plant life and the search for a harmonious relationship with the ecosystem in which the garden is located. The scientific component translates materially into attention to biological conditions, the use of phytosociological associations between native species and compositional schemes that, rather than referring to anthropogenic categories, reinforce biological alliances and recall figures from the surrounding ecosystem, as well as the enhancement of the qualities of local native species. The inclusion of non-native plants and the modification with respect to the archetype coming from the local ecosystem was made possible by the particular mission that Lange assigned to the artistic component of garden design: to realize biological harmony with respect to the laws of nature, to which the natural garden was called to respond through a work of “nature enhancement” (*Steigerung*). These choices, however, turned out to be motivated not only by the scientific and artistic components, but also by a particularly problematic national-racial ideological dimension. This sentiment is clearly articulated in Lange’s third theoretical pillar, which pertains to race. Indeed, Lange’s inclination towards native plants is not solely rooted in biological or scientific considerations; it is also profoundly shaped by national-racial ideological influences. This is most evident in one of the constraints imposed by Lange in the *Steigerung* operation, which involves maintaining the racial-national character of the garden. Lange considers the identity-political question, framed in a national-racial context, as an integral aspect governed by the immutable natural laws to which the natural garden must adhere:

“Our attachment to our homeland should be rooted in the essence of domestic landscapes; hence, it is German nature that must inspire all ideas for garden design. These ideas may be refined through artistic techniques, but we must not forsake the German essence. Consequently, our gardens acquire a German identity when their design principles are distinctly German, particularly when they draw inspiration from the surrounding landscape.”¹⁷

Lange’s “nature garden” aims to embody the ecosystem of the Teutonic *Heimat*, representing the harmonious fusion of the *Volk* and Germanic nature, while also asserting the inherent superiority of Nordic-racial individuals.¹⁸

These design principles underwent a progressive hardening during the National Socialist era. In particular, it is worth taking a brief look at another particularly influential figure, Heinrich Weipking-Jürgensmann (1891-1973). The Hanover-born landscape architect was (along with Alwin Seifert) the most influential figure in the landscape practice of the Third Reich.

14 Lange, *Gartenbilder*, 22-23.

15 Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn and Gert Groening, “Some Notes on the Mania for Native Plants in Germany,” *Landscape Journal* 11, 2 (1992), 120.

16 Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn and Gert Groening, “The ideology of the nature garden. Nationalistic trends in garden design in Germany during the early twentieth century,” *The Journal of Garden History* 12, 1 (1992), 78.

17 Wolschke-Bulmahn, Groening, “Some Notes,” 121-22.

18 Ibid.



Fig. 3: Willy Lange, Garden in Berlin-Wannsee around 1920

Weipking's theories were strongly influenced by a *volkisch* ideology (often bordering on open racism) and a strong identification between national character and landscape. It is relevant here to recall Weipking-Jürgensmann's words about the Eastern European landscape:

"Landscape is always a figure, an expression and a sign of the people who inhabit it. It can be the noble face of its spirit and soul, as well as the grimace of unspirituality, of human and spiritual depravity. [...] Thus the landscapes of the Germans differ in all their characteristics from those of the Poles and Russians, like the peoples themselves [...] The murders and cruelties of the Oriental peoples are carved with a razor in the grimaces of their landscapes of origin."

Wiepking-Jürgensmann dedicated himself to the project of designing a landscape capable of preserving the German landscape's Teutonic character from the process of cultural orientalization and steppification. The concept of the *Wehrlandschaft* (defensive/armed landscape) represented an approach to landscape design based on the criterion of defensibility, both against natural forces and potential enemy military operations. The process of cultural steppification, which manifests itself in "an open landscape cleared of woods, trees and hedges used for one-sided and materialistic interests with no regard for neighbours or offspring,"¹⁹ thus becomes an enemy of the German *Volk* and of the *Teutonic biocenosis*:

"It is a lucky coincidence [...] that measures of defense against human enemies can be merged with measures of defense against wind, weather, water and sun in a way that does not cause contradictions and contrasts. The opposite is the case: the more we fortify the landscape against the enemy, the more we fortify it against any weather damage! Close to nature and well-fortified in this case is one and the same. [...] The original steppe is a serious and immediate danger in terms of foreign policy, an everlasting one for the whole earth, then the cultural steppe within our country is no less of a danger. It is an enemy inside the country."²⁰

19 Heinrich Friedrich Wiepking-Jürgensmann, *Die Landschaftsfibel* [The Landscape Primer] (Berlin: Deutsche Landbuchhandlung), 1942, 318.

20 Heinrich Friedrich Wiepking-Jürgensmann quote reported in A. Zutz, "Fear of the 'Steppes': Soil Protection and Landscape Planning in Germany 1930-1960 between Politics and Science," *Global Environment* 8, 2 (2015), 391.

The problematic positions of the German landscape architect seem to express very clearly the correlation between landscape and culture that distinguishes the *Weltanschauung* of “Blut und Boden.” For this, it is of extreme interest to consider the notion of native (plant) for Wiepking-Jürgensmann:

“For Wiepking, a plant was native when it was ‘a plant in a German garden or in a German landscape, which has been close to German man for ages, which is familiar to him, in which he lives and which has found access to the German life of feelings, e.g. into songs, into poetry, into good German painting’.”²¹

Wiepking-Jürgensmann’s interpretation of the concept of the native in a cultural sense clarifies a fundamentally important question about the conception of one of the key elements of this design: the particular meaning attached to the concept of the native. The cultural component of the native is in fact seen as perfectly coincident with the native in the biological sense. This appears with extreme clarity in the most tragic and disturbing manifestation of this projectuality: the Generalplan Ost, i.e., the plan for Germanization of the Polish territory occupied by the Nazis in World War II. Indeed, the criminal plan of invasion and extermination of the eastern population by the National Socialists was to be accompanied again by a radical redesign of the local landscape in order to make these eastern territories suitable for the Germanic population. In this context, the particular significance attached to the use of native plant species is key:

“It thus became imperative, under ‘the law of nature,’ to allow for only ‘home’ (*heimisch*) and ‘location adequate’ (*standortgerecht*) plantings and to bear in mind ‘native’ vegetation when a landscape was to be created, such as the Incorporated East Territories for “German people as native population. (...) According to the ‘Landscape Rules,’ settlement and landscape formation were a prerequisite for the full expression of German *Zeitgeist*. In its introduction, ‘Landscape Rules’ ascribes the destruction of the landscape in the East to the ‘inability of foreign people.’ This inability is compared with the (culturally highly evolved) ‘Teutonic German,’ whose native land is proof of one’s harmonic relationship to nature: for Teutonic German man, dealing with nature is a deep need of life.”²²

The disturbing experience of the Generalplan Ost seems to bring out a fundamental feature from the native’s worship of “Blut und Boden.” The landscape of blood and soil establishes a cult of the native simultaneously *heimisch* (native in the sense of domestic, and, therefore, culturally connoted) and *standortgerecht* (native in the sense of suited to the place and with a more strictly bioclimatic connotation), thus ideally making the cultural element coincide with the biological one.

It is precisely in the coincidence of *heimisch* and *standortgerecht* that the fundamental core of this design can be read: the native in the models of the *volkisch* tradition is seen as perfectly coinciding with the native in the bio-climatic sense in the construction of the biocenosis of the *Heimat*.

Naturalizing the Nation: The Political Potential of Landscape Design

The theoretic concepts of the *Blut und Boden* landscape does not merely serve as a historical example, but rather invites critical reflection within the contemporary disciplinary discourse. The experience of early 20th century Germany appears to demonstrate that landscape design is not immune to ideological distortions. On the contrary, it provides an extraordinarily useful lens through which to understand the inherent ambiguities within which landscape design operates. The instrumentalization of the “laws of nature” to promote an identity-based (and thus political) dimension in landscape projects appears to have shaped contexts far less ideologically compromised than Nazi Germany. Indeed, the theoretical and design principles of “Blut und Boden”

²¹ Wolschke-Bulmahn, Groening, “Some Notes,” 121-22.

²² Ibid.

exerted a significant yet subtle influence on the development of the discipline throughout the 20th century.²³ Furthermore, the analysis of “Blut und Boden” landscape offers critical tools for addressing several key contemporary issues. While for reasons far removed from the national-racial mythology of blood and soil, the themes of nativism and the interpretation of nature in national terms remain highly relevant today. In this context, it is pertinent to cite Juliet Jane:

“The link between states, nativism and nature is further paradoxically strengthened by our current way of thinking about nature as biodiversity. The ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity instituted states as the official guardians of biodiversity, rather than making it a common heritage of humankind. Although this came about because of a concern related to intellectual property rights, and was not in any way a reflection of any specific or underlying nationalism, this *de-facto* nationalisation of biodiversity has a perverse consequence in the case of invasive species. Since state parties (i.e. each signatory country to the Convention) have to produce national lists of invasive species, this further entrenches decades-old ideas of direct links between the shape of the nation, nature and identity.”²⁴

Paradoxically, however, the use of identity-based landscapes today seems to characterize ideologically opposing experiences compared to Nazi racial-national imperialism, serving as a means of identity emancipation in post-colonial contexts:

“It is particularly ironic that much of the writing about invasive species is taking place in former colonies in which issues of ‘indigenouness and belonging are discussed in contexts where settler human populations are still coming to terms with their own belonging,’ by authors focusing largely on former European colonies.”²⁵

These experiences thus seem to signal how the operation of the overlapping of cultural nativity (connoted in the national sense) and biological nativity is still an instrument capable of making landscape a formidable tool of identity even outside the narrow and ideologically problematic space-time of early twentieth-century Germany. The ambiguous relationship between the cultural and biological connotations of the native still seems to be part of the contemporary disciplinary debate. It is worth noting here, however, that this figure, while resting on rather slippery ideological ground, does not prove problematic *per se*:

“How slippery the slope between *genius loci* (and respect for all the other spirits in their proper places as well) and ‘my locus is best, while others must be uprooted, either as threats or as unredeemable inferiors.’ How easy the fallacious transition between a biological argument and a political campaign [...]”²⁶

Thus, it would be inaccurate to view these practices as entirely disconnected from biological considerations. In some instances, the protection of local species serves as a particularly effective means of preserving vulnerable ecosystems. Nevertheless, today the narrative of “nativist” landscape is being strongly challenged. In this sense one may recall the positions of Annalisa Metta:

“The idea of the aesthetic, moral and even sanitary superiority of local plants is essentially based on the belief, which is completely contradictory in biological and historical terms, that the first inhabitants of a place live in harmony with each other and with it, and that instead others who arrive there at a later time would inevitably alter its state of grace, taking on the tones of unequivocal aggression.”²⁷

23 See, for example, Dave Egan and William Tishler, “Jens Jensen, Native Plants, and the Concept of Nordic Superiority,” *Landscape Journal* 18, 1 (1999): 11-29.

24 Juliet Jane Fall, “Biosecurity and ecology: beyond the nativist debate,” in *Biosecurity: the socio-politics of invasive species and infectious diseases*, eds. Kezia Barker, Andrew Dobson and Sarah Taylor (Abingdon: Earthscan/Routledge, 2014), 172.

25 Ibid.

26 Stephen Gould, “An Evolutionary Perspective on Strengths, Fallacies, and Confusions in the Concept of Native Plants,” *Arnoldia* 58, 1 (1998), 4.

27 Annalisa Metta, *Il paesaggio è un mostro. Città selvatiche e nature ibride* [The Landscape is a Monster. Wild Cities and Hybrid Natures], (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2022), 49.

Rather than concentrating solely on the biological aspect, it is particularly important to address a central issue: the political significance attributed to these practices of linking communities with local ecosystems entails considerable risks. Using the land and local ecosystems to provide a “natural” foundation for a national community is a highly precarious endeavor, susceptible to instrumental manipulation. As Eric Kaufmann observes, “geography is a highly malleable material for those who seek to shape collective representations.”²⁸ When a primarily cultural element, such as national identity, is imbued with biological significance, the need for caution becomes imperative. More broadly, it is essential to heed Wolschke-Bulmahn’s call to critically reassess the concept of “laws of nature” when applied to human practices:

“It is crucial to remember that we know of no species other than *Homo sapiens* that discovers, rejects, revises, and disputes “laws of nature.” A popular aphorism says, in effect, that the laws of nature will exist after human beings are extinct. We must counter that with a question: Who will then communicate those laws of nature to whom?”²⁹

Nevertheless, the Blut und Boden landscape experience reveals an undeniable truth: the landscape can serve as a powerful tool for both uniting and dividing human communities through its narrative. This potential can be employed to support aberrant ideologies, such as National Socialism, or for far less ideologically compromised causes, such as the reclamation of identity in a nation liberated from colonial rule. Thus, the landscape emerges as a highly relevant narrative-political instrument, one that is by no means immune to ideological distortions. This recognition challenges any purely technical or aesthetic understanding of the discipline. What emerges is a profound responsibility for contemporary practice regarding whereto should the landscape of the 21st century be directed.

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