If political approaches take the lion’s share in the analysis of territory and territoriality, they are proportionally less numerous in the case of landscape. Moreover, most political analyses of landscape, often inscribed within a historiographical project and cultural studies, have focused on the staging of monarchical and aristocratic power and on those landscapes that are emblematic of the national imagination.¹ On the other hand, the texts devoted to the contemporary political dimension of landscape in modern or hypermodern societies are certainly less numerous. This essay proposes an analysis of the contemporary status of landscape in European societies, which are experiencing major transformations in their collective and institutional territorialities.

For this analysis I will draw heavily on a work by Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, written in 1958. Admittedly, this work does not deal with landscape—and only marginally with territoriality, by merely evoking indirectly, here and there, the national territories among the products of modernity. On the other hand, it proposes a reflection on the vita active and the different forms of activities that characterize the human condition; with regard to these activities, it is possible to question the status of landscape. One of the advantages of this exercise—so I will attempt to show—lies in the fact that it enables one to emphasize the diverse meanings of landscape and to highlight the contemporary—notably political—stakes of its practices.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt, skeptical of any abstract statement concerning human nature, strives to define the human condition as it is conditioned by our existence on Earth and our material environment: “The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition.”² Her project aims more precisely to investigate “those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition”;³ in other words, men’s (and women’s) embeddedness within the terrestrial world, within a world of objects and interactions. If this project could be described as a philosophical anthropology,⁴ it also emerges as a political philosophy of action. Indeed, Arendt proposes to divide human activities into three categories: labor, work, and action. Labor responds to the basic physiological needs of man—especially food. Labor satisfies those needs in an ever-ephemeral way and must necessarily be continuously renewed in order to

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³ Ibid., p. 6.
ensure the survival of the individual and the species. Arendt links labor to the activity of the
animal laborans: work, the product of the homo faber, which corresponds to the durable
artificial objects that are transmitted from individual to individual, from generation to
generation, and which together constitute humankind’s cultural artifacts. Finally, action “goes
on directly between men” and relates them to each other through acts and words:

Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness [of man]. Through them, men
distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in
which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but qua
men. This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on
initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be
human.

Thus, Arendt considers action simultaneously to be the source of the definition of the political
identity of the subject and the modality through which men in society define what they have in
common and what they place at the heart of the public space.

Arendt anchors her analysis of modernity in this ternary conception of human activity.
According to her, modernity marks the triumph of homo faber, and then of the animal
laborans, to the detriment of the political identity of the subject, which was essential in classic
antiquity. She sees this triumph as the consequence of many factors, in particular the priority
given in our modern civilization to economic production and to the constitution of nation-
states and national societies.

Though apparently remote, at first sight, from the question of landscape, Arendt’s proposition
presents analytical advantages that allow apprehending the latter under the new status it was
given in Western modernity. I will begin by presenting landscape in its status of landscape-as-
labor and landscape-as-work; their complementarity and simultaneity are at the heart if the
modern conception of landscape. I will then pursue the question of the complex status of
landscape in contemporary societies and will identify landscape-as-action that, though not
complying entirely with Arendt’s historiographical perspective, appears to have emerged, in
some peculiar circumstances, in recent decades.

1. Modern Landscape: Labor, Work, and Political Instrumentation

In recent decades, academic works on landscape have often insisted, and rightly so, on the
complexity of the notion of landscape: landscape is simultaneously material (matter) and
representation, construction, and experience. I propose to consider it also as something that
applies, differently according to the situation, to what Arendt calls the logics of labor and work.
Two almost contemporary examples, taken from the eighteenth century, which constitutes a
decisive turning point in this matter, will help to show this.

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6 Ibid., p. 176.
Jean-André Deluc (1727–1817) was a naturalist from Geneva, author of numerous works that stand out in the field of natural history in the mid-eighteenth century. He has been credited with the invention of the word “geology” and with the intuition that geological times are much longer than asserted in Genesis. But he has been also considered a precursor to the human geography of the following century because of the attention he gave to the relations the alpine societies maintained with their natural environment. In writings dedicated to this question, he contributed to the invention and diffusion of the idea that the Swiss mountain people showed a peculiar intelligence in their relations with the environment:

[this people] are certainly as fortunate as they are beautiful. And this means: a lot, since they are one of the most beautiful peoples of the world. But probably they are beautiful for the same reasons that make them happy. . . . How happy is man when he remains in the most natural state?

Deluc finds this same image of happiness in the harmony of some landscapes. In one of his letters to the Queen of England, he gives a description of the plain of Thun, in the alpine region of the Bern canton:

one could not imagine a more pleasant spectacle than that offered by this plain, both for the heart and the eye. Everything here reveals abundance. Not that precarious abundance resulting from the manufactures, but that incessantly deriving from the sky thanks to the sun and the rain, and that the earth concedes to men through abundant vegetation. An almost continuous orchard covers that soil, so good, so favoured by the influences of the air that the inhabitants do not fear to weaken the production of their gardens, fields or prairies with the shadow of trees.

Deluc finds a moral and political explanation of this visual harmony: This letter, entitled “Bonheur des pays qui ont gardé leurs communes [happiness of the countries which have conserved their commons],” is intended as a defense and illustration of collective property at a time when private property, presented by the physiocrats as a condition of the prosperity of peoples, was gaining ground. The celebration of the harmony of the landscape of Thun and the beauty of the residents of the area is thus indicative both of aesthetic appraisal and of moral and political judgment.

At that same time, some painters were giving material form to this kind of discourse. Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, in particular, after an 1804 trip to that same canton of Bern with Germaine de Staël, painted one of the first representations of the festival of Unspunnen. If the raison d’être of these celebrations was principally political, Vigée-Lebrun’s painting confers upon them a communitarian signification: The mountain communities, installed in a harmonious landscape, account through their gathering for the social harmony that animated them.

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10 Ibid.
Both Deluc’s description of the Thun’s plain and Vigée-Lebrun’s painting of the Unspunnen festival are landscape representations, works in the Arendtian sense. But these works share the same principal referent, peasant labor, or, more precisely, the product of peasant labor. They have in common the fact of aiming at a realist representation of material landscapes and of thereby contributing, together with a generation of travelers at the end of the eighteenth century, to the adoption of an objectivist attitude toward the Alps. However, this representation is anchored in a myth—that of the harmony of mountain societies—that was at the time being construed and which allows the perceived reality to be endowed with intelligibility. In this, these representations, textual and pictorial, are indeed symbolic.

Deluc’s text and Vigée-Lebrun’s painting are thus intended simultaneously as works concerned with objectivity and as ideological interpretations of a preexisting reality that they aim to make intelligible. Aside from the myth of the free and egalitarian societies of the mountains, this trend of so construing the landscape representation constitutes a modality largely shared by a great part of the artistic, philosophical, and scientific production of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The landscape representation—the work, textual or pictorial, scholarly or artistic—is subordinated to the vital activity—labor—whose products it makes visible. Note finally that this curiosity about the forms of adaptation of local societies to their natural environment, together with the propensity to identify the latter with local “characters,” led to the production of representations that can be qualified as “territorial”: the work puts together an environment, a landscape shaped by peasant labor, and cultural forms explaining a peculiar form of symbiosis, an idiosyncrasy.
Lancelot Brown (1716–1783) was one of the most famous landscape designers (paysagistes) of the eighteenth century. Almost contemporary with De luc, he gained his fame thanks to some 180 different gardens and parks he designed and developed in England in the mid-eighteenth century. He is often presented as the inventor of a style—the “serpentine style”—generally considered an inaugural form of the English garden. Like his predecessors in Italy, France, and the British islands, the landscapes he composed are extraneous to the forms stemming from peasant labor; unlike his predecessors, however, who worked on the scale of the enclosure of a private property, the developments realized by Brown integrate the surrounding country into the field of vision. The perspectives designed in his parks combine groves, lawns, and meadows within the space of the park, but also woods, villages, and clearings without, the limits of the private property being concealed from view in the form of ditches, the famous “haha.” Through the inclusion of the countryside into the composition of the landscape, villages and rural activities became the object of contemplation and composition.

However, the countryside in question is not the one Deluc describes and mythifies. It is a countryside where the peasants are involved in a double revolution: a revolution that first concerns land and economy and will lead, owing to the massive appropriation of land by a new generation of, to use the English term, “landlords,” to a massive regrouping of lands—the “enclosure” movement—and to the adoption of a new mode of production; second, a revolution of the sensibility, insofar as this rural aristocracy elaborates new aesthetic codes that guide the appraisal of the inherited landscapes and of future developments. Consequently, the interventions of Lancelot Brown are not generally confined to the perimeter of the parks; they extend beyond the “ha-ha” and lead (for example) to the destruction of villages considered inelegant and to the modification in the appearance of fields and forests in the name of that landscape harmony which he seeks to establish around the property. As a side-effect, a part of the local peasantry was co-opted into the service of the nearby property or made to work in accordance with the expectations of the owner.

Brown’s landscapes are works in the same way Vigée-Lebrun’s Fêtes d’Unspunnen and Deluc’s Lettres are. Yet as works, they are very different from the other two: Brown’s landscapes are conceived for duration, unfolding on the surface of the Earth, unlike those of Vigée-Lebrun or Deluc, where only the referent, peasant labor and its products, unfolds in that fashion, and are works in themselves with no reference to labor. In a certain way, they are even a negation of the preexisting forms of labor. At best, labor, in the trivial sense of the word—that of the gardeners, of the peasants put in the service of the aristocratic property, and so on—is subordinated to them. It is never either their referent or the source of inspiration. What motivates the work in Brown and his clients (sponsors) is an ideal of nature as mere symbolic representation.

**Political Readings**

These first two examples are almost contemporaneous. This concomitance is indicative of the plurality of forms the attitude toward landscape always takes: Here we have seen the distance that could exist between two forms of landscape work in their reference to peasant labor, and the distance between two forms of representation.
To this double attitude we have to add another, more political or institutional. This third attitude is fundamentally bound to the ascendancy of dominant groups and political institutions explicitly or implicitly seeking mastery over the landscape as a modality of their territorialization. Many academic books and papers of the last quarter of the century strive to emphasize how the landscape had become a social and political stake for the definition of dominant codes, “the discursive terrain across which the struggle between the different, often hostile, codes of meaning construction has been engaged.” Denis Cosgrove, in particular, has promoted a neo-Marxist interpretation of the definition of new landscape codes, especially for Brown’s England. Other works, at times by the same authors, have also insisted on the role of the modern states in the management of the resources and the iconography of the landscape. These modern states, especially in Europe and North America, have construed their visibility and their legitimacy through landscapes emblematical of the territories on which they exercised their sovereignty. Landscape is seen as one of the numerous devices intended for the construction of a national territory and a corresponding national society, specifically through the manipulation of the appropriate symbology; this system is what Gottmann calls “iconography.” In other words, the landscape has been put in the service of the construction of mindscape, which integrate landscape figures shared by the members of the same national community. These figures tended to become components of the national identity in two senses of the term: on the one hand, an expression of the singularity of the nation itself and of its territorial roots; on the other, a factor of the definition of the individuals composing the nation through the familiarity acquired with, and the attachment aroused by, those figures emblematic of a “we” under construction.

Social Body, Political Body, and “Earth’s Body”

Many authors thus resorted to the double metaphor of the body in order to account for the whole or part of the triangular relation between state, nation, and landscape-territory. First, Marcel Gauchet, among others, suggests that the modern state is characterized by a massive investment of the territorial reference:

there is a transition from a power in extension to a power in depth, where the operation of the sovereign becomes to conduct in the interior of its limits the collective body in full correspondence with himself.

Then Claude Raffestin sees in the process of territorialization, where the modern state has no monopoly, a corps-à-corps, in other words, an adjustment of the social and political body to

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13 See Schama, Landscape and Memory; Walter, Les figures paysagères de la nation; Cosgrove and Daniels, “Spectacle and Text.”
16 [The French “corps à corps” is untranslatable in English; literally it means “hand-to-hand” —Tr.]
the body of the territory. This is also the case, more important for us here, in the work of Kenneth Olwig, who showed that English and American landscapes were put in the service of the body politic. He has shown very aptly, with the help of these examples, that the modern nation-state produced a standardizing landscape illusion in order to mask the reality of territories divided in numerous regions with different laws and customs:

A consequence of this mindscaping is that landscape and country have come to be perceived largely in scenic terms. The identification of country as a polity characterized by a socially constituted political landscape has become subordinated, in many ways, to the idea of country as scenic physical landscape.

Thus, he suggests that the way landscape becomes scenic and emblematic of the nation-state implies a conception of landscape as something like the outward face (la face apparente) of the social and political body.

If, on the one hand, in *The Human Condition* and her writings on the nation-state, Arendt does not speak of landscape and hardly mentions territory, on the other, it seems possible to consider this appropriation and manipulation of landscape symbols as part of what she calls the alienation of the modern subject. With the increased importance of labor in industrial society, and the irruption of the public sphere in many areas that until then had been reserved for the private domain—phenomena to which she dedicates several pages—the institutionalization of landscape can be seen as constituting a modality of the capacity, diminished in modernity, of the individual to be an actor, to acquire his or her own identity through action. In other words, the political institutionalization of landscape by the modern states is not based on—but is rather the opposite of—a mobilization of individuals as political actors in this process.

The modern age—or the “first modernity,” as some call it—is thus characterized by three landscape trends: the production of scholarly and artistic representations of landscape as it is shaped by, and sees itself as subordinated to, labor; the appearance of the idea of landscape-as-work with its deployment first in private and then in public spaces, which requires that a specific labor be subordinated to the production of the representation; the subjection of certain representations of landscape to the needs of the territorial and cultural project of the modern nation-states, which is part of the alienation of their relative individuals.

2. The Contemporary Landscape: Triumph of the Work and Emergence of the Society of Empaysagement

Compared to this organization of the representations, productions, and instrumentalizations of landscape that characterize the first modernity, in what degree does the actual situation—

19 Ibid., p. xxxii.
agree to call it, with some authors, the “second modernity,” without questioning this terminology here—present reorientations or significant ruptures? This second section will address this question, first through the exposition of tendencies well identified in the spatiality of contemporary societies, and then by considering these tendencies together, which will allow for an explanation of the new value acquired by landscape.

**Diversification of Contemporary Practices and Territorialities**

We have today a body of observations focusing on the evolution of the spatiality of individual and collective practices in the second modernity. I want to highlight a few points in particular.

The explosion of individual mobility was facilitated not only by the relative drop in the costs of the means of transport, as well as the multiplication of those means, but also by the lessened capacity of states and communities to limit and control such mobility. This augmented mobility led to an individualization of life spaces, progressively made up of places more and more distant from each other and connected to each other through practices of motorized displacement. The result has been a great social diversification of spatial and territorial practices, and a lessened capacity of modern territories to serve simultaneously as containers and normative references for collective practices.

These new mobilities are strictly connected, in a relation of codetermination, to new logics of assemblage of the objects in space. In fact, the increased potential of mobility made possible a dissociation in the space of various practices, especially the well-known dissociation between place of residence and place of work. Urban planning thus tended to promote a functional specialization of places within the urban space, the logic of specialization having prevailed over the promotion of a general organization of those spaces. This paradigm also prevailed in architecture, in favor of the progressive autonomization of this art from city planning: In Françoise Choay’s words, cities have tended to become groups of juxtaposed objects that no longer constitute a system; she sees in this trend “the death of the city” and the triumph of the “urban.” Similar manifestations have been observed in the irruption of objects that remain strange and extraneous to their environment: Great numbers of airports, nuclear plants, highways, high-tension lines, and rapid trains have come to punctuate or cross spaces to which they remain fundamentally extraneous, in the name of conceptions of space and of metrics independent from those of the places being punctuated or crossed.

**The Weakening of Political Territorialities**

The contemporary tendencies observed in the evolution of the practices and usages of the space have major political implications that are also identified by various authors. The circulation of people and information on macro-geographical scales helped to weaken the capacity of nation-states to regulate the processes of socialization and acculturation that ensure a certain form of homogeneity across the territory. The social sciences are on the verge of freeing themselves from the paradigm that presupposes a codetermination between nations, cultures, and territories—a paradigm through which they have long apprehended a collective spatial anchorage. By acknowledging the full scope of this evolution, the social

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sciences should be able to better explain intercultural relations, the heterogeneity of forms of territoriality, but also, for example, the strength of transnational movements.21

This evolution also constitutes a challenge for political institutions on a local and regional scale. Since political representation in Western democracies rests on the double network of electoral districts and collectivities (French and Italian regions, Austrian and German lands, Canadian provinces, American states and counties, etc.), any weakening of the coherence of the corresponding spatial systems burdens the capacity of the political representatives to have control over their territory and to present an image of it that takes part in the construction of the corresponding political bodies. This is notably the reason why in many countries, when considering the growing rupture of individuals’ space of life, the municipal puzzle and the corresponding question of political representation have appeared obsolete. This is also why the absence of a network and of political representation at the scale of the urban area—the scale on which many of these spatial practices are constituted—has appeared to be a deficiency of our democracies.

The Empaysagement

The evolution of material and symbolic spatial practices, on the one hand, and the weakening of political territorialities, on the other, constitute, in my view, the two main motifs of the contemporary demand for landscape. This demand is considerable, as has been already acknowledged long ago. The term has invaded public debate and the question has become the object of numerous public policies. Landscape design (paysagisme) and landscape architecture as a profession have become important components of town planning and of rural development, especially in Europe. As for landscape consumption, it is, and has been for a long time, one of the main reasons for tourism.

This trivialization of the invocation of landscape and of landscape concerns in any form of intervention constitutes the visible face of what I propose here to call the empaysagement of our societies. This neologism22 should not be understood as a synonymous with landscape design, or with paysagement,23 where these terms refer to a growing social demand for landscape, and a growing technical ability to produce them, respectively. Empaysagement rather designates, on a more general level, a turning point in the way in which contemporary societies see themselves and see their material inscription through the intervention of landscape representation and landscape action.

The origin of this empaysagement of consciousness must be sought, on the one hand, in a desire, often backward-looking or nostalgic, to compensate for the evolution of our spatial practices and the endangerment of political territorialities; and, on the other, in a concern for reconstructing a political project with new territorial bases.

22 The term originated in a discussion with Claude Raffestin on this topic.
23 The term paysagement was proposed by Augustin Berque in “De paysage en outre-pays,” Le Débat 65 (1991): 4–13, to designate the contemporary concern to combine the sensory (those of the experience) and rational (those of science and technology) approaches to landscape.
Landscape as Modality of Compensation

The geographical forms that result from the evolution of ordinary and professional practices of space (those of inhabitants, city planners, architects, developers) in the past decades have not generally been perceived as generating quality landscapes. Attempts at artistic reinterpretation of these new types of developments have been rare and little recognized compared with land art. So far, they have also been hardly adopted by Western societies. Under these conditions, interest in landscape has generally remained true to classical models of landscape aesthetic, especially in the case of the countryside. These models correspond, however, to modalities of life and production that are largely obsolete, and often put the emphasis on traditional agricultural practices that are in decline, if not already disappeared altogether. Consequently, attachment to this type of landscape can be seen as largely nostalgic or patrimonial, indeed schizophrenic, since the most praised landscapes are those that least correspond to the way of life of those who praise them.

This preoccupation is shared by numerous politicians for two kinds of reasons: On the one hand, they take it into consideration on account of the well-being and quality of life of their fellow citizens; on the other, they might see in it a symbolic instrument to court or restore the idea according to which traditional territorialities, which in the past had justified the modalities of political representation, retained a certain pertinence.

To illustrate the first point, we can take as an example the contemporary importance of landscape sensibility in Switzerland. It is well known—and the very old example of Deluc mentioned above was a remarkable illustration of this—that the Helvetic national identity owes much to the alpine myth and the alpine landscape. If contemporary Switzerland has seen a great evolution in its identity, its population and its elite remain strongly attached to the quality of the alpine landscape. The demand for landscape remains very strong among tourists, including Helvetians, to the point that it has been possible to try to assess their economic value. It is equally very strong among the urbanites and those living in suburbia. This demand reveals itself in the perpetuation of a policy of support for the mountain farmers that remains to this day one of the most expensive and ambitious in the world. Certainly nowhere else in the world has the idea of making mountain farmers into “nature gardeners” been so analyzed, worked on, and finally adopted by the majority of the professionals concerned.

To illustrate the second point, we can mention the effects of decentralization in France between 1980 and 2000. France, traditionally a centralized nation, committed itself since 1982–1983 to an ambitious policy of decentralization that transferred competences and responsibilities to its communes, its départements, and its régions, especially in the matter of urban planning and territorial development. The collectivities endowed with new political competences, confronted also with the necessity of acquiring a new form of legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens, invested very much in institutional communication and in the valorization of the territory entrusted to them. Heritage patrimony and landscape have been thus raised to emblematic status for these new-generation political entities. A similar process has concerned Spain and Italy owing to the introduction of their own policies of decentralization, and also the United Kingdom at the time of the devolution of autonomy to Scotland and Wales. In other words, in numerous European countries these collectivities have attempted to reinvent to
their advantage the mechanisms through which the nation-states put emblematic landscapes in the service of the national imagination. It is possible to affirm, about this instrumentalization, that the landscapes thus evoked constitute potentially just as many fictions, that is, they are objects severed from the spatial practices of the people to which they are addressed; but they are very believable fictions, so strong seems to be the desire for landscape.

Landscape as Modality of Project

To this first group of political initiatives, largely placed in the hands of the political elite, we can counterpose a second group, which results much more from collective and participative interventions. At this stage, two examples, one from France, the other from Canada, can help elucidate the issue.

During the past thirty years, France, at the time when it put in place its institutional decentralization and during its deployment, created new levels of territorial organization: the regional natural parks since the 1970s, the *communautés de communes*\(^{24}\) and the *pays*\(^{25}\) since the late 1990s. These entities of different status were given the principal mission of conceiving and implementing territorial projects on their scale. Those who have followed the implementation of these policies have often been amazed by the importance these emergent territorial levels conferred upon the question of landscape. When local inhabitants and politicians asked what constituted the unity or the identity of these intermediary territories, the answers often invoked the surrounding landscape, especially in the rural areas. This invocation had many advantages: It bypassed the usual divisions anchored in sociopolitical customs; it satisfied the demand that we characterized above as nostalgic and schizophrenic; and finally, it allowed politicians and residents to address a resource long neglected, with its prospective valorization in projects of tourism or residential development. However, besides this convergence of interests, it also and foremost presented the advantage of building a consensus in terms of quality of life across very heterogeneous populations, which nevertheless shared in common the fact of living all or part of their lives in these places.

Another example, this time Canadian, of the concept of landscape-as-collective-project is provided by the role entrusted to a hill, the Mont-Royal, situated near the historical center of Montreal. The contrast that this relief presents with the Montreal plain quickly led city dwellers to identify it as a special place, to christen it non-officially as *la Montagne* or the *Mountain*, and, from the mid-nineteenth century, to develop in it very particular practices (especially of recreation) and institutions (cemeteries, public parks, and religious and academic institutions). During the twentieth century, this place, assigned to very particular usages, acquired the double status of urban icon, like the Eiffel Tower for Paris or the Empire State Building for New York, and emblematic place. A great many Montrealers, of extremely different origins and languages, have built with this place a familiar and affectionate relationship, which contrasts with the functional usage they maintain, like most of their

\(^{24}\) This is a new institutional level created in 2000 for improving the coherence of municipal policies (especially in planning) for contiguous communes.

\(^{25}\) This is another level of organization, larger than the previous one, created in 1999, which requires a set of adjacent communes (between 6 and 20) to adopt common development and environmental strategies.
contemporaries, with the majority of the city areas they nevertheless frequent every day. It is as if this singular place, whose singularity has been developed through decades of landscape-design condensed all the expectations of landscape and anchorage in a shared space of a multicultural, hypermobile, and heterogeneous population. Moreover, considering its visibility from most areas of the urban agglomerate, the Mountain has become a landmark in function of which many urban projects have been conceived. This status of emblematic landscape has been recently acknowledged by the state of Quebec in its law on cultural heritage, after a large public conference and a strong appeal from residents and associations.  

The two examples above do not present exceptional traits; they could in fact be complemented by many other illustrations. Their interest lies in the fact that they attest to the emergence of landscape projects that link politicians, professionals, and residents in a reflection on what the landscape represents in what all of them think they have in common. They also testify to the capacity of landscape today to represent a point of commonality, at a time when cultural identities, especially in great cities like Montreal, and the individual spatial practices show—indeed, exalt—diversity and heterogeneity.


26 It is interesting that among the tools utilized for this consultation was a Webpage that displayed a map of the city along with many photos showing Mont-Royal as it is seen from many points in the city: <http://www.cbcq.gouv.qc.ca/grand_dossiers/mont_royal/index.html>. For a history of the place and the relationship the Montrealers have built with it, see Debarbieux, “The Mountain in the City: Social Uses and Transformations of a Natural Landform in Urban Space,” *Ecumene*, 5 (1998): 399–431, and also Bernard Debarbieux and Charles Perraton, “Le parc, la norme et l’usage: Le parc du Mont-Royal ou l’expression de la pluralité des cultures à Montréal,” *Géographie et Cultures* 26 (1998): 109–127.
Further Remarks on The Human Condition

Once presented in the variety of its forms and motivations, this revival of landscape in the sphere of the political deserves to be analyzed along Arendt’s typology of the *vita activa*. From this vantage point, the present situation, if compared to that in which Deluc, Brown, and Vigée-Lebrun were actors and witnesses, and if compared also to that of a nineteenth century marked by the burgeoning interest of the nation-states in this object, shows interesting reversals.

Today, labor, in the sense understood by Arendt, plays a very marginal role in the shaping of the materiality on which the landscape, or what is recognized as such, is construed. The everyday life and the trivial acts of most of our contemporaries no longer “make” the landscape: They usually combine places and objects the arrangement of which is not generally acknowledged as presenting the character of landscape.


In contrast, more than ever, a landscape is a work: the work of landscape professionals in the precincts of gardens, parks, or cemeteries, even more in residential estates or recreation parks, for the management of which the expertise of landscape architects is required; the work of farmers when they are compared to “gardeners of nature,” thus reducing the productive dimension of their activity; the work also of the landscapes themselves, conserved as national heritage. The landscape-as-work triumphs on every scale and in every place, thereby creating
large numbers of employment opportunities in the service of its conception, realization, and maintenance.

However, since it remains the business of specialists, this type of landscape continues to be part of a process of alienation. This is the principal argument, besides the concept of alienation, of a much earlier book, which posed the problem, especially regarding its effect on home owners: “In fact, the elimination of effective participation in landscape-making has been so complete, with total house and streetscape designs and the breadth and minuteness of hyperplanning controls, that the suburban house owner cannot modify his place in anything other than trivial cosmetic ways.”

For landscape-as-action, the contemporary diagnosis requires a more delicate formulation. The interest of the nineteenth-century nation-state in landscape was described above in terms of alienation. The revival of objectives and modalities of that instrumentalization of landscape by political collectivities endowed with new competences, for example in France, Spain, or Scotland, is certainly a matter of the same form of alienation. In contrast, the same surely cannot be said about territorial projects and landscape projects when both expressions designate a convergence of social expectations and a true collective participation in their elaboration. This revival of landscape concerns, within the frame of new political and democratic practices, provides an illustration of what can be called landscape-as-action, the term “action” being evidently understood in the sense Arendt confers upon it: Action is conceived—I want to emphasize this one last time—as the source of the definition of the political identity of the subject and the modality through which men and women in society define what they have in common and what they place at the heart of the public space. Arendt also insists strongly on the role of objects, understood as works, in the definition of the “public” and the “common” that men and women furnish themselves in order to live together:

the term “public” signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us. . . . This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artefact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.

The landscape can become such an object — a “work” — and be directed at the construction of a “common” — an “action” — and this all the more so since the spatial practices of individuals tend, through their diversity, not to have much in “common” anymore.

Further Remarks on the Metaphor of the Body

Finally, by way of developing matters a little further, I will pursue again the metaphor of the body, which constituted a moment of this essay. I suggested above, by referring to authors in

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28 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 52
whom this idea appears, that landscape could also be conceived as the territorializing representation of an adjustment between two types of body: the Earth’s body as it shows itself from a certain perspective, and the social body when it embraces a political project. Landscape was thus conceived as the visible, spectacularized form of these two bodies entering into a correspondence.

Nevertheless, the arguments developed above push the metaphor to a certain analogy: an analogy between the body of landscape and the human body. Our modern societies—the fact is known and well documented by numerous works—have developed a great attention to and a real knowhow of the mastery of the human body. Cloning, genetic therapies, but first and foremost, as far as this essay is concerned, the consumption of cosmetics, aesthetic surgery, the recourse to prothesis, the conservation of corpses, and voluntary scarification constitute as many laboratories and hopes of societies more and more concerned with the appearance of individuals and the modalities of exposition in public space.

What kind of parallel, what kind of analogy can we reasonably construe between this concern with the mastery of the body and (what we called) the *empaysagement* that would help analyze both concepts? In both cases, what is expressed is a preoccupation with the control of forms taken by living systems (the organism in one case, territory in the other, in a common perspective of illusory resistance against processes considered degenerative); an imaginary of the production of ideal forms (conservation of anterior forms, actualization of ideal forms); a narcissistic concern, individual and collective, for the exhibition (*mise en scène*) of the self or of the “us”; and, incidentally, the entrance of both into the economic and political spheres.

Posing the question in these terms, by way of starting point, at the end of this essay, I merely want to suggest that the question of landscape in our contemporary societies leads us well beyond its political nature. Here as well, as for many other objects, the political question joins the anthropological question.