

# Conferences

## REPRESENTING THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE: IMAGES MODELS, WORDS

November 10 & 11, 2000. The Pacific Film Archive Theater, University of California, Berkeley, California.

Reviewed by Alan Berger

Representing the Designed Landscape was convened at the University of California Berkeley on November 10 and 11, 2000. The event was co-sponsored by the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning and the College of Environmental Design and held at the Pacific Film Archive Theater a few blocks from renovation-shrouded Wurster Hall.

The conference was organized by architect Marc Treib, Professor of Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, who is well known in the landscape disciplines for his writings about Modern landscapes. The two-day conference was broken into four sessions, two mornings and two afternoons, with seven speakers presenting each day.

Treib gave a brief introduction by stating four purposes for the conference that are embedded in the topic of representing the designed landscape: “to reveal how ideas are conveyed to others as well as ourselves; to show that representation is not neutral communication; to show that representation has a social dimension; and to show landscape representation from past, present, and possible future uses.” While the presenters touched on all of these areas, no area was investigated deeply enough to grapple with substantive issues facing representation in the allied landscape professions. To Treib’s credit, the four purposes of the conference were broadly defined and the speakers were seemingly given generous parameters to work within. Unfortunately, this mostly translated into a collection of reflective, practi-

cal and historical ideas about representing the designed landscape rather than a calling for fresh, inventive approaches that could open the subject for serious investigation.

The first morning session’s theme was “sketching and drawing” and included four lectures. The first lecture, entitled *Color Fields*, was delivered by Walter Hood, chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning at the University of California Berkeley. Hood structured his talk around three topics: the concept sketch, field sketch, and color field. Using his well-known color collages along with field sketches and a few models, Hood delineated his process for making imagery and graphically communicating ideas.

Hood said he painted with color fields in order to distill what he sees, in other words, to see beyond detail, form, and perhaps even design in order to capture an essential gesture of a landscape. His colorful abstract paintings were done in the studio at the American Academy in Rome (after his trips into the landscape) as memory devices to try and capture his experience of the essential gesture. For Hood, color fields are personal and sentimental exercises trying to record personal experiences so as not to lose, or to gain, what was the most important gesture of a landscape. Unfortunately, Hood’s topical use of the imagery did not explain the intellectual motives behind his methodologies.

Chip Sullivan, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of California Berkeley, delivered the second lecture entitled *Analytical Imaging*. Sullivan demonstrated how drawing is used as a representational tool in at least five analytical ways in fields as diverse as measured drawings and comic books. Whereas Hood’s color field painting

seems to efficiently eliminate most of the landscape in order to record an essential gesture of a place, Sullivan believes that “through the unnecessary, one invents and perhaps receives new design ideas.”

One analytical drawing type was what Sullivan called “climactic studies” or analytical drawing as a way of discovering the environmental conditions of a place (or its designer’s intent for making microclimatic experiences). Sullivan’s elegant line sketches of Italian gardens (yes, he too won the Rome Prize) were interwoven into an interesting discussion about his personal experiences of phenomenological conditions, and how field sketching informed his perceptions of climactic change in designed landscapes.

The importance of comics to Sullivan’s work were explained using examples from R. Crumb’s famous illustrations and comic-type sketches from Frank James, his self-declared mentor. Comics, says Sullivan, contain a representational idea of not knowing where you are going in a design until you are in the drawing and it takes you there. Another comparison could have been made between comics and landscape, both of which are frequently represented in perspectival spaces, which perpetuate scenographic qualities as part of their narrative.

Dorothee Imbert, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University presented *Slanted Reality/Garden Axonometrics*, which reviewed space and axonometric representation in the modern garden. There were five points to this lecture: 1. Garden is element and develops out of other elements such as plane, line, mass, form, point, etc. (all modern ways of dealing with landscape space). 2. Garden is not symmetrical. 3. Garden is self-referential. 4. Garden is a graphic construct. 5. Garden is functional and economical. The axonometric drawing was used to illuminate and

evaluate these points from a modernist landscape platform.

Imbert develops an argument that the axonometric was a representational invention that was meant to look different than other, older types of representation because of modernity itself. With a dearth of supporting evidence, Imbert framed Modernity within mid-twentieth-century landscape architecture. This is important to point out because modern landscape architecture is typically not associated with the larger Modernity defined by the Humanities as originating in the shift toward rational thinking in the sixteenth century. In fact, as Perez-Gomez has demonstrated, mathematics, geometry, and empirical observation transformed modern tastes, but the transformation had very little to do with stylistic concerns and aesthetic codes and much more to do with philosophy (see Note 1).

Wrapping up the morning session, Georges Descombes, Professor of Architecture at the University of Geneva, presented *Notes Toward Landscapes*, or the use of representation in his professional practice. Descombes states, "Drawing is a process of elimination" (or editing out bad ideas). Unlike Hood's editing process, which seemed to end prior to designing for built form, Descombes's seemed to fit seamlessly into the way he designs, tests ideas, and eventually places built form into a site. His drawing process allows a reading of the site that allows him to "do almost nothing" on the landscape. One project displayed how he used books to build experiences. *De Monschach a Brunnen* (the book of the temporary trail) was a collaboration with the artist Richard Long who made mapped walks in landscapes an art form. The book was used as a representational device for creating a fictional reading of the landscape as well as documenting site-specific phenomena.

The first day's afternoon session began with Dianne Harris, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois, who presented *Framing Representations: The Use of Historic Landscape Prints* (or

Can we trust views of gardens that were produced before photography?). Using graphic examples of estate prints from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Harris critically pointed out that landscape historians repeatedly misuse these representations to frame their arguments and that the prints have other dimensions dealing with their reception, communication, and perception. Landscape historians, Harris argues, typically view these representations in isolation to mine information about the garden design, which was not their original intent. Another point in Harris's thesis is that contrary to reasons why landscape designers draw today, (such as to sell a design, or to build it) the estate prints were made after the gardens were constructed to communicate the most recent cultural tastes of its owner. Thus, estate prints could be used to construct an idea of the social reality of the past. "Historic landscape representations construct cultural history and do not merely reflect the design of a landscape or even a generalized cultural context." Landscape historians, unlike art historians, are more likely to trust the views of gardens prior to photography, but as Harris says, we need to question representations, especially gardens and "the authenticity of documentation."

Stephen Daniels, Professor of Geography at the University of Nottingham, gave a rich historical accounting of Humphrey Repton's work, influences, and milieu in a lecture entitled *Repton's Representations: Scenic Transformation and Landscape Improvement*. He described Repton in the context of his contemporary culture and focused his analysis within multiple aspects of his times.

Daniels explained how time was represented in two ways in Repton's projects: the sudden and spectacular (scenic transformation) and the gradual and mundane (landscape improvement). He described Repton's tendencies and illusionistic

slight of hand (his famous "flap over the original scene" drawings) to make the present seem worse than his projected future, which was criticized by many of his contemporaries as frivolous showmanship. Daniels draws the conclusion that Repton's niche was working in the space between high culture and popular culture, elite and ordinary, high-minded and vernacular. "Repton was always interested in the venerable parts of estates and renovating them with entertainment. He seems more comfortable working with renovations of old and mixtures of new instead of beginning from more seductive all new projects."

Peter Walker, from Peter Walker Partners, a landscape architecture firm in Berkeley, presented *Landscapes in Three Dimensions*, which described the influences of photography and model making in his design practice. Acknowledging the importance of photography to his prolific career and commercial success, Walker reminisced how the 1960s and 1970s corporate landscape firms were very large and required a full-time photographer simply to document the quantity of work being built at the time. He described the photographer as the "documentor" who captured images, details, as well as processes and finished designs. According to Walker, "the field man was the first most important person in the firm, and the photographer was second."

Walker also described how models are used in his design process. "They're made to be photographed," he says, "to be used by the designer to test the design, explain the design to clients, and sell it. Modeling (and its photography) helps bridge the unfamiliar, magical moments of a design with a tangible reality that clients more likely will want realized." The gorgeous models by his various firms revealed the graphic power of photography and model making, overshadowing drawings as effective tools for representing landscapes. While Walker never admitted that models work well for him because his designs rarely ever change over time (and need meticu-

lous maintenance to keep their form) it was revealed through the built landscapes that very often appear as living replicas of the models.

Unlike the first morning's "sketch and drawing" theme, the second morning had four widely varied topics. These included Randolph Hester on community design processes, Laurie Olin on construction documents, Hope Hasbrouck on computers, and James Corner on diagrams.

Hester's lecture title *No Representation without Representation* described how he uses representation to deal with diverse, large public audiences in his practice. As Professor of Landscape Architecture at Berkeley, Hester has become a well-known advocate of "community design" issues through writings and applied research. He broadly outlined how drawing was used in his applied research (practice) to design and engage citizens. Hester's lecture had the flavor of a "how-to" session of drawing techniques for community groups to include their views and to build consensus. For example, "how to draw upside-down" so he can draw ideas when people are speaking at a round-table discussion.

One of Hester's design concepts is "representation by consensus drawing" to help citizens gain "stewardship" of their landscapes. The resultant designs of this process, whereby the landscape architect becomes a facilitator rather than a designer, are soft and smack of altruism. While his process may lead to a built landscape that has fewest conflicts among citizens, nothing new is made, essentially leading to a landscape that maximally can only facilitate people's current social conflicts, or desires, enough for them to coexist. Thus, one could argue that the built works that come out of Hester's process are not as fluid as the social processes they represent and only capture a still frame of a social condition.

Laurie Olin, from Olin Partners in Philadelphia, presented *Drawings at Work: Construction Drawings* (CDs) and began by painting a lucid image of how construction documents func-

tion in the design world: "CDs are instructions for operations . . . CDs are only made to tell people how to do things . . . CDs lack expression and other qualities form conceptual drawings."

Using examples from his office, Olin described notions of how CDs are translated. He managed to make the ordinary subject of construction drawing into an illuminating critique of how CDs are "translated" to reality and perhaps even how then one can adjust CDs to make better translations in their subsequent projects. Another important component was Olin's insight into the problems with contemporary computer-generated drawings. He notes: the screen is too small to see the entire landscape; things "look finished when they really are not; computer infrastructures are too expensive to build in small firms, and computers are sometimes too slow. However, he says the best part of computer technology is that his office can now coordinate with the other consultants on the underground mechanical systems early in the design process (via electronic files). Regardless of the prospects and limitations of computer technology in the design fields, Olin confirms what many others (lecturers and attendees) stressed: "If you can't draw it, you can't build it." Citing the prospects for construction drawings for advancing the profession of landscape architecture, Olin believes that construction drawings and specifications tell us about designers and allow us to learn more for future built work.

Hope Hasbrouck's lecture, *The Computer Made Me Do It: Data Structures and Digital Models* described how computer rendering is really only data structure manipulation. That is, data structures evolve into what we eventually see in the computer, which then should determine how we should use digital data for representation. For example, pixels are the data structure that create surfaces we see on the screen. Other

data structures we work with include bits, words, and numbers that hold information that can be altered. Hasbrouck, an assistant professor of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University, showed examples from her forthcoming book, *Landscape Modeling*, of how single images can be represented multiple ways based on data manipulations.

In an area not yet widely used for landscape representation (at least by landscape architects) Hasbrouck displayed QuickTime examples of what she called the "movement attribute to a geometric entity" (another manipulation of data), or the simulation of moving experience or "full immersion" in a designed landscape. She said the use of computers could take two unique directions for landscape representation. Optimistically, computers can open new avenues for us to explore and see landscape. For example, hidden data structures in computer representation (and models) may lead to novel discoveries. Less optimistically, computers will invent new ways to structure us in order to use them. Deliberating about how landscape architects use the computer to make imagery, she says, "computers made all of us do it (though digital structures)."

James Corner, chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, presented a half-theoretical and half-practical presentation called *Formats*. The theoretical half was about operative diagrams and ideas for using them in practice for designing with time and process. The practical half described his proposal for the Downsview Park Competition to create a national park in Toronto, Canada, for which his firm, Field Office (with architect Stan Allen) was a finalist.

Corner focused on the generative potential of representation using the diagram as a tool. Corner's interest in diagrammatic drawings is nothing new for him, and has been represented in his noteworthy schemes for the Governor's Island and Greenport Waterfront design competitions. His interest lies in the agency with diagrammatic representation to open

up possibilities for the performance of the work and how the landscape performs on its own, over time. The most interesting part of Corner's lecture came when he discussed how diagrams, used primarily as a representational tool, can be used to simultaneously design performance "into" a site, while allowing the site itself to perform its own work through processes outside of human control. Diagrams, he says, help us reveal landscape's hidden systems.

The second part of Corner's lecture described his design proposal for Downsview Park, in a recent design competition that included Bernard Tschumi, OMA and Bruce Mau, and Foreign Office Architects. While this is not the appropriate place to describe the design of his competition entry in detail, it suffices to say that his drawings and diagrams were more akin to those one would see in the architectural field, which is more open to theoretical experimentation than landscape architecture is at this time. In what is sure to be published in many forthcoming books and articles about the design competition, the representations used by Corner to describe the ideas of the project were mostly diagrammatic, which he described as "an approach for life to unfold over time." Corner's presentation spanned new intellectual ground and fluently shared myriad idea-generating processes of his practice.

Landscape architect Kirt Rieder, speaking for the absent George Hargreaves, briefly discussed the lineage of model making in Hargreaves's office, before presenting examples from the course he taught at Harvard called the "clay landform workshop." Rieder believes (and we are to assume Hargreaves does as well) that modeling with clay teaches students to make landforms as "constructed" elements. "Clay is still the most versatile tool," Rieder stated, for transitioning three-dimensional ideas into two-dimensional construction documents. Unfortunately, his discussion of clay was no more than a form-generating procedure to make shapes out of the land, to then be

used to configure topography. The most interesting portion of his talk was when he gave us glimpses into Hargreaves's own design process. That is, how Hargreaves Associates thinks about, visualizes, crafts, and eventually builds the sinuous landforms that have become the firm's trademark. What remained unclear is how the present use of this process would transition into any new directions for the firm's work.

Marc Treib's lecture, *Photographic Landscapes: Time Stilled, Place Transposed*, began with a blunt categorical use of the landscape photograph as a means of representing a landscape forever. "We make photographs!" he exclaimed, referencing Susan Sontag's drawings and Jonathan Crary's seminal *Techniques of the Observer* (MIT Press 1992). We subjectively represent landscape through the camera lens, sometimes seen through landscape architects but most often by others such as professional photographers.

Treib discussed three aspects of representing the designed landscape and photography: the frame as a reconstruction device, time, and displacement. The frame reorders the designer's composition so that the photographer actually becomes the artist, regardless of the landscape's maker. Treib says photographs can remove a work from its context and in doing so may heighten its importance. Photographs change their subjects by extending their lives into eternity. For example, temporal landscape projects such as Andy Goldsworthy's flicks of water and branch tosses seemingly live forever through his books. Photos condense time so one can experience different times simultaneously. Photos displace by allowing landscapes that could never be experienced at the same time be put next to each other. Photographs can also transform scale, making a small landscape detail appear to be more important than the designer's intentions. Treib closed his lecture by saying we should strive to make landscapes that have more

than what a photo can capture, implying that designed landscapes should be much more than photographic moments and framed images. Unfortunately, he never explained how this could be approached, which would have been a much more interesting avenue for discussion.

The question and answer session following Treib's lecture provoked interesting dialogue between himself and Peter Walker about bringing "icons" or "very recognizable images" of landscape into the media mainstream. Treib says it would be impoverishing to think that landscape's loss of cultural importance is due to its lack of media prominence. Peter Walker, along with Laurie Olin, two of the most prominent American landscape architects of the late twentieth century, promptly added that wanting the body of diverse landscape works that are currently built to be known and seen is not impoverishing. Rather, they suggested, this might be one of many reasons why designed landscapes are not held high in the cultural hierarchy.

Kenneth Helphand, Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Oregon, gave the conference's final lecture, entitled *Location and Set: Film and the Garden*, which was a precisely choreographed exchange of film, imagery, and ideas. He used films with recognizable gardens to detail how landscape is essential, both as background and foreground, to the thinking of the director (through contrast of the story to the landscape and vice versa). Helphand succeeded, where the other presenters largely did not, in communicating the social relevance of landscape representation through designed landscapes (either that already existed or were produced for a particular stage set) in film. Helphand showed films that contained garden imagery that he deemed significant to the story being told by the movie (including setting, plot, and narrative). But instead of isolating the story alone, as most movie critics tend to do, Helphand revealed how the landscape was

much more than mere background for the action and plays a larger role in the storytelling. He didn't use film for teaching us how the designed landscape was represented, but rather for dispensing ideas in film from art and history to reveal a new representation of the landscape. Helphand roused the audience with his presentation. A subtext about representation was also revealed through Helphand's use of film and video, which greatly contrasted with the standard slide presentation format used by all but one other lecturer. After his lecture ended and questions were opened to the audience, there were more questions than time to answer them. Referring back to Treib and Walker/Olin's earlier confrontation, maybe landscape architects need to experiment more with representational devices (like Helphand did with video) to make landscape visible on a larger scale.

"Representing the Designed Landscape" was not the most intellectually stimulating, nor the most topically interesting conference I have attended. All attendees, however, did not share my dissatisfaction, and in fact, most of the audience (mainly consisting of practitioners and students and not academics) seemed pleased with the conference's content. It would have been helpful for the conference organizers to mention something about the timeliness of the conference's subject or what purpose it would serve to redirect professional or academic investigations. A more focused and timely accounting of "landscape representation" as an idea, rather than as a practice, would have yielded new ground that this conference largely failed to create, but that the landscape architecture profession so desperately needs.

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#### Note

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## DOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD LANDSCAPE MATTER?

Department of Landscape Architecture and Planning, University of California, Berkeley, October 19–22, 2000.

Reviewed by William C. Sullivan

### *NEIGHBORHOOD LANDSCAPES, DEMOCRACY, AND COMMUNITY*

A quarter century ago, in *Neighborhood Space*, Randolph Hester put forth a compelling notion: that neighborhood landscapes matter because they affect social patterns and political actions within a community. Judging from papers presented at a recent conference at the University of California at Berkeley, there is growing evidence to support Hester's insight. What was also striking was the theory and evidence presented that suggests neighborhood landscapes serve additional, and perhaps surprising, functions.

The conference, *Does the Neighborhood Landscape Matter?*, was sponsored by the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning at Berkeley during October, 2000. Marcia McNally and several of her colleagues in the Department organized the conference, which included seven case studies of San Francisco area neighborhoods and eighteen empirical and theoretical papers from scholars, practitioners, and activists. The seven case studies, developed in a graduate studio taught by McNally, examined the history, character and functioning of neighborhoods old and new, homogenous and diverse, conventional and New Urbanist.

This diversity of perspectives yielded rich and at times provocative answers to the question posed by the conference—answers that are particularly interesting to consider at a time when New Urbanism is sweeping the nation with its promise to produce neighborhoods that satisfy our needs. I've grouped the answers

into four categories below. I wonder if you'll agree that these answers raise a number of important questions for practice, research, and public policy.

### *Neighborhood Landscapes and Democracy*

Several of the papers echoed Hester's notion that by catalyzing change, neighborhood landscapes nourish participation in democratic processes. Lisa Caronna, Director of the Parks and Waterfront Department for Berkeley, argued that by working to improve neighborhood landscapes, a neighborhood increases its capacity to influence local decisions—initially about the landscape, but soon after about schools, or traffic, or other areas of public concern. The extent to which neighborhoods gain a stronger voice in local decision-making as a result of improving the landscape depends, according to McNally, on the extent to which neighbors initiate and shape that change. Landscape improvements initiated and supported locally produce greater benefits (e.g., more politically savvy neighborhood groups, and greater probability that a leader will emerge from the process) than projects initiated or funded by outside institutions. For both Caronna and McNally, the power of the neighborhood landscape comes from its capacity to stimulate a group of neighbors to create a vision, to lead, and manage community change.

Neighborhood landscapes certainly provide opportunities to exercise one's democratic privilege. Take, for instance, conflicts over neighborhood parks or activities that might occur in public spaces. Louise Mazingo, from the University of California at Berkeley, showed that a century ago neighborhood parks were expected to help homogenize our ethnically diverse urban neighborhoods. But today many neighborhood parks have become places in which diverse groups assert their identity and actively resist homogeneity. This conflict, according to Laura Lawson, is played out when users initiate activities—community gardens, street vending, skateboarding, dog walking—and seek to claim

and adapt spaces as their own. Lawson, from the University of Illinois, wondered whether neighborhood landscapes could sustain such user-determined insertions as part of the public domain.

The notion that the physical layout and design of a neighborhood might stimulate citizen participation in local political processes was advanced by Hester. He called for neighborhoods of approximately 5,000 people and a walking distance of not more than a quarter of an hour to its center or to a functioning natural ecosystem that serves as its primary boundary. Hester also emphasized that neighborhoods should be designed to express their uniqueness. This combination of a small population, a center, a natural boundary, and a particularity should enhance, according to Hester, democratic participation by increasing personal identity with the neighborhood and with the community.

Recent work by political scientist Michael Krassa indicates that Hester is on to something here. Through a series of careful studies, Krassa and his colleagues have shown that neighborhood form has systematic and regular impacts on the distribution of information, civic values, and voting participation within neighborhoods (Krassa and Flood, 2000; Krassa 1997). Perhaps it is not a surprise then to learn in separate case studies presented by Rachel Berney Quirondongo, Elizabeth Weir, and Janet Gracyk, that neighborhood form was associated with varying levels of interaction between residents. According to Krassa's work, higher levels of interaction may well lead to higher levels of local civic engagement.

If neighborhood landscapes can promote citizen participation and democratize decision making, there was also evidence that they can strengthen communities.

#### *Shared Common Space and Strong Communities*

Walter Hood, Chair of Landscape Architecture at University of California at Berkeley, argued that to fulfill their promise, "neighborhood landscapes must be shared, loved,

and used. "I'm not sure about the loved part, but Hood's notion that a community benefits from shared, well used, close-to-home common spaces received theoretical and empirical support. Clare Cooper Marcus, for instance, emphasized the importance of nearby shared green spaces such as community gardens, and common landscaped areas like those seen in historic communities such as Radburn, Baldwin Hills, and Sunnyside Gardens. According to Cooper Marcus, these shared green spaces "bring neighbors together while they play with their children or walk their dogs." In doing so, such spaces provide ongoing opportunities for social interactions among neighbors, a necessary ingredient in the formation of strong community ties (Greenbaum 1982). Cooper Marcus, who is also from the University of California at Berkeley, cautioned that it is exactly these kinds of spaces—privately owned but accessible to the public—that have all but disappeared from New Urbanist communities.

The systematic disappearance of shared common spaces is a profound loss, according to Frances Kuo, from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Kuo reviewed the literature in psychology and environment and behavior and reported on her own studies regarding features of neighborhood landscapes that matter for children. Kuo found that neighborhood landscapes should: be rich (e.g., incorporating many different kinds of objects and spaces to explore), manipulable (e.g., water, vegetation, sand), include some undefined areas (e.g., back alley, dead-end, abandoned orchard), offer refuges (spaces with some sense of visual overhead), and afford ready access to a healthy social environment. Her evidence suggests the benefits associated with these features, at least in the short term, include healthier patterns of development such as more social play, more creative play, and an enhanced capacity to pay attention. Kuo empha-

sized that the disappearance of shared neighborhood spaces that contain these features may have systematically negative impacts on generation after generation of children.

The importance of shared common spaces was further developed in a paper that Kuo and I presented that reported on a series of discoveries we made in inner city neighborhoods. We presented evidence that shared green neighborhood spaces tend to attract residents outdoors, thereby increasing opportunities for social encounters among neighbors, and ultimately fostering the development of stronger neighborhood social ties. Moreover, we showed that higher levels of greenness in these shared spaces tends to increase the amount of informal surveillance within these spaces and therefore increases the sense of safety that residents experience. We found that greener common spaces predicted fewer incivilities (noise, vandalism, and graffiti), and most surprisingly, lower levels of crime. Thus, for the inner city neighborhoods we studied, green common spaces influenced not only the strength of the community, but also the degree of safety experienced by the residents.

Anne Whiston Spirn, now of MIT, examined the value of a particular kind of shared neighborhood space: the community garden. She studied eight community gardens in Philadelphia and in comments reminiscent of Hester, concluded, "community gardens are places where individuals apply energy, knowledge, and skills to shape their neighborhood. They are places for planting, growing, and harvesting food and for many other life processes: for sharing and trading, meeting and playing, making and building, dreaming and worship. They are scenes of cooperation and conflict." The shared aspect of these gardens helps break down ethnic and class stereotypes and can create lively, connected, communities.

At the other end of the spectrum are neighborhood landscapes that physically restrict access into what would otherwise be shared neighborhood space. Mary Gail Snyder, of San Francisco State University

examined neighborhood-initiated gating and asked whether gates and street closing have reduced crime or strengthened communities. She concluded that they had accomplished neither, but have produced negative side effects such as creating physical barriers to access and privatizing community space. Snyder concludes the challenge for designers is to provide neighborhood environments which are as reassuring and popular as those with gates, but which attain quality of life without exclusion.

Together these papers provided compelling evidence that green, shared, neighborhood spaces can help transform a collection of individuals into a healthier, stronger, more vital community. But there was evidence that neighborhood landscapes can do even more.

#### *Beyond the Neighborhood*

For me, one insight from the conference was particularly compelling. That insight came from several papers describing how neighborhood landscapes exert influence in a city, a region, and even beyond. Paul Gobster's research, for instance, shows that neighbors and the neighborhood landscape play a critical role in how metropolitan open spaces are perceived, used, and maintained. According to Gobster, a scientist with the U.S. Forest Service, all metropolitan open spaces are first and foremost neighborhood spaces: "Far more than outsiders, it is nearby neighbors who are the premier supporters and critics of open space design and planning. By understanding the influence of neighbors on the nearby landscape, designers and planners can create more effective open space systems."

There is evidence that New Urbanist patterns of neighborhood design are beginning to influence the design of suburban office parks. Gregory Tung, of Freedman, Tung, & Bottomley in San Francisco, provided a compelling example from his work in Yuba City, California. Instead of single-use office building and parking landscapes—with their ever-larger "pods," closed internal circulation, controlled entry points, and "space-occupying" buildings—Yuba

City is pursuing an alternative vision in which residential, retail, and office buildings are integrated with squares and greens. The result is a richly textured, green, lively neighborhood. Together, Gobster and Tung illustrate how neighborhood landscapes influence the physical design of places outside their boundaries.

This notion was further developed by Tom Fox, President of the Fox Group in New York. Fox argued that neighborhood landscapes hold the key to the future of conservation in America. According to Fox, when individuals have meaningful contact with nature on a daily basis, they become advocates for and protectors of our national parks and forests. Involving citizens in the design, development, management and maintenance of neighborhood landscapes seems to Fox a tremendously effective way to stimulate a connection between an urban resident and the natural world. This is a compelling notion, one worthy of empirical examination, for if Fox is correct, this insight may provide additional support for incorporating nature into every urban neighborhood.

#### *Opportunities*

These examples of how neighborhood landscapes influence spaces and ideas beyond their boundaries raise the question of whether neighborhood landscapes could help address other issues. Joe McBride, from the University of California at Berkeley, thinks they could. McBride described the success of neighborhood level fire-reduction landscaping in California. Although McBride presented evidence that such design and maintenance practices do indeed reduce the spread of fires, he indicated that the widespread application of this idea awaits the development of a fire-safe landscape aesthetic.

Certainly the neighborhood landscape might contribute in other ways as well. Neighborhood landscapes can become testing grounds for reducing our unwavering reliance on the automobile (Ewing 1997).

And a great deal more could be done with vegetation—to reduce energy consumption by cooling neighborhoods (Akbari, Davis, Dorsano, Huang, & Winnett 1994), to develop low cost, neighborhood based systems for purifying water (Todd & Todd, 1994), and to enhance the economic vitality of business districts (Wolf 1999).

There are important questions left unanswered as well. We need careful assessment of New Urbanist communities—under what conditions do they deliver on the social and environmental promises their designers make? It appears that the geographic distribution of green spaces matters to the healthy functioning of a community, but as Kuo (2001) has asked, which forms or doses of nature enhance effectiveness? And we need a more comprehensive understanding of how neighborhood landscapes support and hinder individuals of all ages and in a variety of life circumstances.

Marcia McNally is negotiating a contract to produce an edited book from the papers presented at this conference. Such a book would be strengthened by the addition of several papers: one from Rachel and Steven Kaplan on the psychological value of nearby nature, another dealing with transportation, a third focused on revitalizing public housing in North America, a fourth with gentrification and diversity.

At the conference, Kenneth Helphand of the University of Oregon presented his work examining film as a way of understanding what we value, idealize, and yearn for in a neighborhood landscape. He found the yearning for neighborhood in film is consistent with the desire for the comforts, pleasures, and satisfactions that New Urbanist neighborhoods promise—a rich community life, security, and a sense of well being and belonging. By examining these issues, the Berkeley conference provided evidence that neighborhood landscapes matter in profound and meaningful ways: they can catalyze citizen participation to bring about community change, bring neighbors together and help strengthen communities, and pro-

vide a critical testing ground for new ideas. Twenty-five years after *Neighborhood Space* was published, the challenge for designers and design researchers is to find ways to deliver these benefits more uniformly to citizens throughout the Americas and the world.

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## TERRITORIES: CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

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Reviewed by Elizabeth Meyer

### MAGIC GREEN FINGERS AND SPRAWLING BLUE BANANAS

"We are on automatic pilot by Mr. and Mrs. Green Fingers."  
A lecture by Adriaan Geuze,  
Netherlands

"European landscape architectural practice is kicking America's butt."  
A response from Martha Schwartz,  
U.S.A.

When was the last time you left a professional symposium entertained, enlightened, and inspired—and all by the same person who, at the urging of the audience, spoke twice as long as his allotted time? Adriaan Geuze, partner in the Rotterdam landscape architecture firm West 8, gave such a memorable and provocative talk on the second day of the *Territories: Contemporary European Landscape Design* symposium.

The first half of Geuze's talk provided an insightful/inciteful critique of the profession of landscape architecture which has not yet come to terms with the contemporary realities of urbanization and its relationship to nature. On the one hand, the early twenty-first century city is no longer the threat to health that gave rise to the nineteenth-century urban park movement. On the other hand, most landscape architects still rely on the pastoral images of nature that were associated with that nineteenth-century social and environmental reform milieu. Although this type of critique is not new, Geuze placed a particularly European spin on the argument that was refreshing and at times illuminating.

He associated the unquestioning reliance on "landscape architecture's magic green fingers" with banal "soap (opera) culture"—the culture of background images that circulates from society to society through the media of TV and radio. And he compared this mythology of natural nature or "first nature" with the realities of Europe's landscape, a thoroughly human-altered "second nature" of agrarian, industrial, and (sub)urbanized practices (note, I am relying on the constructs of first, second, and third nature articulated by Cicero and Jacopa Bonfadio, and most recently interpreted by John Dixon Hunt in *Greater Perfections*). It is perhaps this very found condition, and its associated constructs of nature, that most differentiates Europe and North America. For despite our ubiquitous sprawl, vast acres of industrial agriculture, and managed forest and wilderness preserves, North Americans still hold on to the mythology that the wilderness or "first nature," not "second nature," is our foundation matrix.

For a landscape architect such as Geuze who grew up in the intensely managed, engineered, and constructed "second nature" of the Netherlands, this "soap culture" version of nature pales in comparison to the "high-functional, anti-decorative" aesthetic of a working, productive landscape infrastructure. This was evident in the second half of Geuze's lecture which he (disingenuously?) offered not to give when he ran out of his allotted time. The audience urged him to continue, and to her credit, organizer Dorothee Imbert permitted this breach of schedule to occur. Geuze and West 8's interest in matter-of-fact social and ecological processes as shapers of landscape form and experience was evident in the powerful and poetic minimalist infrastructural works that he discussed, including the well-known and published Schipol Airport Grounds, (scheduled for demolition for airport expansion), the compact and saturated site plans for Borneo-Sporenburg courtyard housing in Amsterdam, the surreal Erasmusian reading/water garden, and plans for re-colonizing a dune land-



scape leveled by the Germans during World War II.

Geuze's lecture left several of us in the audience marveling at his intellectual and personal growth over the past five years. He exudes the confidence of an artist with passion, conviction, and ambition, not only for himself, but the larger practice of landscape design. It's no wonder that Martha Schwartz, one of the leading landscape architects in the United States, responded to Adriaan Geuze's lecture with such admiration, envy, and even defensiveness for her reliance on the very "decoration" that Geuze eschews.

More than two hundred visitors joined the Graduate School of Design landscape architecture faculty and students to hear Adriaan Geuze and about two dozen other design practitioners and theorists discuss the state of contemporary European landscape design. Several of the European speakers were well known to the audience as they have taught as visiting faculty at the Graduate School of Design and/or lectured on the American university lecture circuit over the past few years, and most of them have been published in *Topos: European Landscape Magazine*. This two-and-a-half day event marked the opening of an associated exhibition in Gund Hall, curated by Assistant Professor Joe Disponsio and Visiting Design Critic Sébastien Marot, a philosopher and landscape critic from Paris. To appreciate the significance of this event, one must consider how unlikely it would have been just two decades ago. Prior to the 1982 Parc de la Villette competition, contemporary European landscape design was not on the radar of American landscape architects. But with the considerable self-generated publicity surrounding Bernard Tschumi's winning entry, and the 1984 publication of Catherine Barzilay's competition catalog, *L'Invention du Parc*, North Americans were introduced not only to Tschumi, but to dozens of competition entrants through their proposals for this Parisian park. The new public spaces designed in Barcelona during that decade added to the perception that a vibrant landscape design culture

was emerging in Europe. And since the early 1990s when *Topos: European Landscape Magazine* began publication, over thirty issues have documented contemporary designed landscapes that have equaled, and at times surpassed, the quality of North American landscape architecture design and its prevailing modes of graphic representation.

So what did this symposium reveal that publications and travels to Europe cannot? For someone who has worked to stay informed about these developments, I can attest that the symposium was more than a report on the state of the art of European landscape design. And despite the pleasure in connecting the well-known works with their designers' faces and personalities or vicariously experiencing the collegial relationships between those designers (which seemed much less competitive and antagonistic than relationships between the alpha-dog designers in North America, but that's another essay), there was still more gained from attending the symposium. Those in the audience witnessed the products of changes both within the European academy as well as within European culture. As such, by the symposium's conclusion, one understood European landscape design as a cultural product more than a professional practice. Its vitality and invention cannot be separated from events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989); the Chernobyl tragedy and its impact on European environmentalism; the Barcelona Olympics and the urban transformations it served to catalyze; the recognition of the suburban/urban sprawl that has challenged regional identity through the formation of the "blue banana," a continuous east to west urbanized strip that respects no national boundaries; the educational exchanges possible through Erasmus; and of course, the various initiatives for continental unification sponsored by the European Union. This is not to say that individual designers present are not responsible for the inventive

work and ideas shared. Of course, they are. But their work has evolved less within the traditions of a profession, such as landscape architecture, and more within the challenges and traditions of contemporary urban and transnational life, and the concomitant challenges to prevailing constructs of ecology, landscape, and nature.

Some of the energy of the symposium, as well as the differences between European and North American practice, can be conveyed through the very words and phrases that filled Piper Auditorium during the lectures by Sébastien Marot, Christophe Giroit, Robert Schäfer, Marc Treib, Peter Latz, Thörbjörn Andersson, Stefano Boeri, Dirk Sijmons, Bart Lootsmaa, Michel Desvigne, Adriaan Geuze, Marcel Smets, Beth Galí, Carmé Fiol, Jeppe Aagaard Anderson, George Descombes, Petra Blaisse, Kathryn Gustafson and Xavier Vendrell. They included such phrases as: Landscape Urbanism . . . . The Territory. . . . The blue banana. . . . Landscape as palimpsest and hypertext. . . . Transregional landscape types. . . . Gardens resist globalization. . . . Uncertain States of Europe. . . . Mobility and the media are creating a new urbanism. . . . European space is formed by accumulation, not by erasure or tabula rasa; rather by re-use and metabolization. . . . These things (green magic fingers. harmony with nature. hippie dreams. . . .) are so piled up when landscape architects debate and discuss their work . . . The Catalonians really kicked our (Dutch) asses. Grids, Casco, Clearing, and Montage. . . . Do we have so little faith in our culture that we have to hide our products? . . . Magazines don't count so much; what is space and how do you use it? . . . I want to speak of the importance of one line in the landscape. . . . Expel from the park anything that can be done somewhere else.

The talks were also structured through images, in particular the huge slide projections choreographed by the Graduate School of Design Audio-Visual staff Doug Cogger that make any lecture in Piper auditorium a visual treat. *Territories'*

images ranged from the beautiful photographs of Marc Treib which demonstrate his respect and empathy for the landscape subjects he visits and studies; to Andersson's photographs of European forests, recording their phenomenal differences owing to different climates, soil types, and species; to Gustafson's extraordinarily evocative photographs of her work in France, speaking more eloquently about her intentions than even her words. Boeri used images as an analytical tool to record the state, form, and experience of the European landscape. His aerial photographic transects through various Italian regions' urban to rural landscape are persuasive documents of the impact of suburbanization on the geography of Italy. They were well known before the conference because of their exhibition at the Venice Biennale. But his new project, conceived in collaboration with dozens of colleagues in numerous disciplines across fifteen countries, is remarkable in its ambition to record new uses and forms of urban and suburban space. Boeri and his colleagues are relying on photographs and videos to record these new spaces as they are, and in doing so are suggesting that traditional grammars and typologies are no longer effective for describing or designing the scale and use juxtapositions, the diffused and varied settlements, and the self-organization and metamorphosis of these places. It was hard for a North American designer not to think of the wallpapering of our suburbs with nostalgic New Urbanist developments at a time when we don't have the will or curiosity to really understand the beast we call sprawl. Might so-called "smart growth" be better served by a careful look at the forms created by our global economy and multicultural society rather than those created by streetcars and for "traditional families?" Petra Blaisse, an interior designer with OMA (Rem Koolhaas's Office for Metropolitan Architecture) presented the second use of video, using this medium in order to communicate the experience of sound and motion in her interior installations, phenomenal experiences that have landscape-like quali-

ties. Her work stretched the definition of landscape, but also raised the bar for considering landscape's sensuous and playful qualities that can be interiorized through sequence, texture, light, scale, and material. In short, the symposium provided a wealth of illuminating and seductive still and moving images that supplemented many talks, compensating for the wide range of English language proficiencies that such a gathering inevitably yields.

My comments thus far are episodic, moving from memorable moment to moment, as my recollections of the event are just that. For despite the organization of lectures into four half-day sessions, "Is there a European landscape architecture?," "Territories," "Landscape Urbanism," and "What Park?," those themes and the following moderated discussions (also known as "the time for those in the audience to make declarative statements with a perfunctory question attached") did little to weave together the fascinating and disparate talks. This was especially the case on the second day of the symposium. Nonetheless, there were a few points made by speakers, such as Girot, Descombes, and Marot, that deserve deeper examination. Upon reflection, I have identified some significant continuities among talks as well as issues for further inquiry that are relevant to both European and North American landscape design practice.

At the end of his lecture entitled "Looking for the garden: Comparing Cultures of Landscape in Europe," Christophe Girot, formerly of the Versailles landscape architecture program and now at the ETH (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) in Zurich, called for the development of more precise and critical tools for theorizing the designed landscape. For all the design innovations in European practice, he believes that a critical language has yet to evolve that is capable of analyzing and interpreting, not merely describing, the designed landscape. The situation

that Girot described, where practice is ahead of theory, is not unusual, but demands attention. For without attempts to theorize from within and between the designed works, we will be left with a multitude of voices—whether regional or individual—each with an associated style and will leave unexamined the threads that tie, albeit loosely, the works together.

What are the tools and lenses by which these designers see, read, and re-work the site? While it is difficult to imagine a designed landscape that was ever entirely siteless, there are differences between site-specific design strategies today and earlier design approaches. Contemporary European designers such as Descombes, Geuze, and Desvigne are indebted to a post-Robert Smithson, post-Robert Irwin era of site-specificity that approaches the site as more than a canvas, a place to build, or a set of ecological processes to protect. And yet, the work has moved beyond the temporary installations and remote locales of Irwin and Smithson, into areas not clearly theorized. Along the river in Lyon, Desvigne and Dalnoky, in association with Descombes and Corajourd, are designing a park by initiating processes without a fixed idea of final forms. Instead of a guiding park master plan, they have developed a taxonomy of ways that the land and water meet. Conceptualized in sections, and never as a comprehensive system, this pragmatic way of working is more than ad hoc. How does this strategy compare to Descombes' at Parc Lancy where he has deconstructed the cultural, industrial, and natural histories of a suburban site in order to add a new layer? Both these projects expand the site from a thin surface to a richly layered, (sub)urban matrix, and from a context of ecological systems to a program with cultural content.

Marcel Smets introduced a North American audience to a Dutch term, *casco*, which gives a name to this sense of the existing site as a palimpsest to be read and decoded. *Casco* refers to the cultural landscape context created by human agricultural and settlement practices within an underlying geological formation

and hydrological regime. *Casco* is an armature. The concept of *casco* describes an interpreted, not actual, pre-condition. Like the concepts “open space” or “cleared site” or *tabula rasa*, *casco* requires an act of sight-seeing. It substitutes site interpretation in the place of site analysis within the design process and, in doing so, reduces the sharp distinction between analysis and conceptual design. It should be noted that both Marot and Girot have written short provisional essays that theorize such site practices in Europe; they were published in James Corners’ anthology, *Recovering Landscape* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).

But, given the plethora of site approaches presented in *Territories*, considerably more work is needed to figure out the difference between *casco* and contextualism, and how a reading of *casco* can be a poetic interpretation, not merely a method of rational site analysis. Smits’ assessment that it requires a “talented eye” to scan the existing site/*casco* and discern its poetic potential does not help in the least, as it simply perpetuates the “work of a genius” myth of superficial design criticism.

Another area which deserves theoretical examination and exploration was also noted by Girot when he identified global communication and the new nature aesthetics emerging out of screen/art culture as the common experiences which shape landscape practice across European regions and countries. How does one reconcile the pervasiveness of global media culture with the intensity of exploring local place identity with attendant phenomenal experiences? The landscape descriptions in Andersson’s, Blaisse’s, and Gustafson’s talks were unapologetically about the construction of intense landscape experiences. And no one would confuse Fiol’s Barcelona plazas with Latz’s German infrastructure parks and gardens. So, while global communication connects, it doesn’t necessarily erase regional landscape practices. Surely there is more to the interconnection between these two conditions than the now twenty-year-old theory of “Critical Regionalism” codified by Kenneth Frampton in Hal

Foster’s anthology, *The Anti-Aesthetic*. Two talks during the symposium suggest future directions for such theoretical work, Stefan Boeri’s suburban documentation project, and Bart Lootsma’s “Media and Mobility” talk which suggested temporary and digitally-constructed ways to imagine urban territories and belonging other than those of nostalgia-laden place-based theories.

“We no longer have to fear territories and territories.”

A self-conscious “Bushism” by  
Thorbjorn Andersson, Sweden

Maybe the primarily American audience was still too shell-shocked by the November election to fully appreciate Thorbjorn Andersson’s concluding remarks to the Saturday session. Or maybe the two days of talks had numbed our senses of humor. We didn’t laugh much at the joke. But, the comment struck a chord with me on two levels. First, it underscored how ironic it is that Americans might seriously consider a unilateralist foreign policy in this fluid, dynamic, creative, exciting, and uncertain time. And second, it reminded me of comments made by Descombes and Marot over the course of the symposium about the connections between American and European landscape architecture practices. While our professional cultures might be quite different, given the current fluidity between architecture, urban design, and landscape design in Europe, our intellectual traditions and our disciplinary discourse are shared, intertwined, and inextricable. Our intellectual territories overlap and our boundaries are not fixed. For instance, Marot spoke of the influence of Americans Smithson and J.B. Jackson on European practice, and chided Smets for not acknowledging the urban theories of Cornell urban design educator and architectural theorist Colin Rowe in his talk. Descombes spoke to the debt that he owes to Christopher Tunnard, Garrett Eckbo, James Rose, and even Ian McHarg, and the impor-

tance for designers on both continents to know of each other’s historical and theoretical traditions. He continued this thought by obliquely, but clearly, criticizing one of the other speakers whose work displayed formal debts to the early twentieth-century modern landscape works of Gabriel Guevrekian, Robert Mallet Stevens, and Garrett Eckbo, but they were never acknowledged. Descombes concluded, “We are so stupid we repeat what we do not know.” In other words, the forms and shapes of our practices may be different, but we have shared an intellectual discourse, and we should again.

Such cross-Atlantic exchanges need not result in the homogenization of landscape. As Girot said, “Gardens resist globalization,” for as landscape design theories travel from site to site, they take on different forms and meanings depending on how a site is construed as content and structure. We need not fear territories and barriers, and for that we can thank Dorothee Imbert for her considerable intellectual and organizational efforts in coordinating this symposium. Since many design practitioners were in the audience, some from as far away as Portland (Oregon), San Francisco, and Los Angeles, I hope the impact will be substantial and varied. North American landscape practice can benefit from the poetic, yet pragmatic ways that site is being construed and interpreted by the Dutch, Swiss, and French landscape architects. The Catalonian urban landscape has much to teach us about the joy of designing in historic districts with a contemporary aesthetic. We can learn from the seriousness with which contemporary social spaces of the “blue banana” are researched, documented, and analyzed. Our public officials should see the site reclamation and urban hydrological infrastructure projects that have been built in Germany. And for starters, can someone introduce *casco* to New Urbanism, so that its practitioners can turn off their automatic magic green fingers?

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