

Books

A section for the review of books is a regular feature of *Landscape Journal*. The opinions and ideas expressed in the reviews are those of the reviewers and do not necessarily represent the views of the *Journal's* editors or the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture. Suggestions for books to be reviewed are always welcome, as are comments regarding the reviews published. All correspondence should be sent to the book review editors:

Book Review Editors

Charles Andrew Cole

Department of Landscape Architecture
The Pennsylvania State University
121 Stuckeman Family Building
University Park, PA 16801
cac13@psu.edu

Liat Margolis

John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design
University of Toronto
230 College Street
Toronto, ON M5T 1R2
Canada
liat.margolis@daniels.utoronto.ca

Living Systems: Innovative Materials and Technologies for Landscape Architecture

by Liat Margolis and Alexander Robinson. 2007. Basel, Switzerland: Birkhäuser. 191 pages. 331 illustrations, 250 in color. \$89.95. Hardcover.
ISBN-13: 978-3-64377-00-7

Reviewed by Eric Ellingsen

ACTING THEORY

I mutate The Practice of Everyday Life, turn it into a hotel text. Thus I make it habitable. I push the book away from its proper identity. . . . I steal time from the boss, divert it, use it for my own purpose.

—(Kostenbaum 2007, 13)

I'll begin with the ordinary engineer Henri Poincare, and then I'll begin again.

Henri Poincare was an ordinary engineer—at least that was the title awarded by his first official degree: Ordinary Engineer (ingénieur ordinaire des mines) given in March of 1879 from the *Ecole des Mines*. As an ordinary engineer, Poincare's life was spent measuring *out there*—for example, solving the

three-body problem of determining the position and movements of celestial bodies—and the *in there* as a mine inspector who measured, analyzed, and wrote about mine shafts and transatlantic telegraph cables. The measures of *out there* and *in there* took place simultaneously and continuously—through his teaching, writing, directing, editing, researching, policy making, and mathematical predictions—by merging theory and acting into a simultaneous gesture. Peter Galison describes this as “intertwined abstraction and concreteness” (2004, 48). For Poincare there was no separation of thinking from doing, acting from theory. Another way of describing this might be *action theory*.

Action theory is an alloy methodology, a methodology of inseparable simultaneity. On one hand, as the cognitive scientist Gerald Edelman states, it embraces the neurological idea that thinking is itself *efficacious*. On the other hand, it endorses post-Galilean scientific methodology, which calls for the systematic testing of hypotheses through action rather than through thought alone. The methodology of action theory organizes everything in *Living Systems* from the index to the images.

INDEXING

I'll begin again with the index of *Living Systems*. The index is an astonishingly nerdy and wonderful enterprise. Instead of park as *park*, a park is indexed as a “Mechanically Stabilized Landform,” or a “Multi-Operational Modular Surface.” Instead of gardens we have “Hedge-Trimming Armature,” and “Fire-Escape Ecosystem.” Why?

First, the index categorizes things by what they do (function) and how they do it (process). This is important, because at present many terms have no meaning or value. For example, calling something a “public space” is almost meaningless; it is very difficult to know what anybody means by “public space.” As a concept it suffers from over circulation. Like the word “sustainable” it has become a term that has been devalued by overuse. The term “public space” gives no understanding of the latent relationships and real forces that converge in a city. Generic categories and names, like park or garden, can be sufficient, as long as the categories and names don't presume a false specificity and reinforce a disengaged laziness.

Second, the details you *nerd out* on uncover both the flexible and invariant constraints of the discipline. You may like hexagons and other geometric patterns, but if you do not nerd out on soil isolation layers, channel velocities, root wad

walls, algae blooms, porous substrates, mycelia mats, things that rot, remediate, drip, colonize, and dismantle, then you may be more interested in composing pictures and should consider a discipline other than landscape architecture. Nerding out is the most real way of separating the poseurs and imposters, because it allows the designer to discover the material constraints that matter. Whether it's parametrics, poetry, or the pragmatics of running a budget, you have to trust your inner nerd.

Third, is the subtle idea that searching for information may begin to inform not only how we think about things, but may also suggest a different way of intervening. For example, when linking categories from the *Living Systems* index together you get: *Vegetation growth supports and reinforces, suppresses and inhibits. Wind flows adapt, power, register, and resist.* Looking anything up in *Living Systems* entrains the user to the book's categorical methodology. The book turns reading into using. Developmental psychologists state that using Google's search engine for three months physiologically changes the neural patterns in the portion of the brain where we take in, process, and evaluate information; it also changes how we make decisions with sets of spatial options as we move through the world.

SYSTEMS

Let's turn to the projects in *Living Systems*. The *Impression of Rain*, Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten's Park Hyatt project, is a great example of what nerding out on the flat profiles of stones can achieve when combined with techno-phenomenology. A western version of a Japanese stone garden, the *Impression of Rain* choreographs the experience of a number of more and less obvious relationships of systems and place, the most important being a connection between the flow of weather systems and the flow of guests through the hotel.

Hotels are strange places. Wayne Koestenbaum says they are "a method of not-staying," a way of "not being at home" (2007, 48). They are places of structured groundlessness and dislocation. Hotels are systems of spaces into which we are enmeshed as we travel through the world. Generic and personal, hotels provide a context for alternate rhythms, holding patterns of our own lives as we drift in and out of cities and spaces.

Can we think of gardens the same way—as the interaction of organic and inorganic materials over longer time frames? Why not think of the organization of hotel rooms a bit more poetically? *Stanza* in Italian means *room*, from the

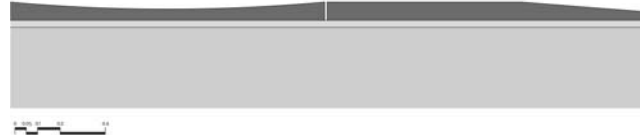


Figure 1. Impression of Rain, Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten. Section of pavers in courtyard (Courtesy Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten).

Vulgar Latin *stantia*, meaning *stay*. What a wonderful opportunity for a garden to choreograph the stanzas.

Inside the Vogt garden, each similarly sized stone is shaped slightly differently, so that each stone holds onto the weather for different lengths of time, just as each similarly sized hotel room holds hundreds of different lives for different durations (Figure 1). Hotel vacancies map the changing seasons of economy and place nearly as well as the colors of leaves, or the weather that collects on the ground. On the Vogt garden's ground, changes in duration over the different seasons stage the surface as constantly recomposed weather poems (Figures 2 and 3). The stones steam, heat up, puddle, collect snow, and melt differently depending on the day, the season, the location, and the relationship to sun and shadow in the garden. These processes produce shapes *on* the stones—shapes that are, as Rudolf Arnheim says, "experienced as patterns of forces and are relevant only as patterns of forces" (1969). Seeing the weather patterns inscribed on the stone garden—and as Olafur Eliasson says, "seeing ourselves seeing"—we realize *we* are also living systems in the design. Our movements, our memories, our desires, imagination, intellect, are in constant rates of change and flow, stopping and starting. Awareness is triggered that *we are the weather too*.

The location of the garden forces our bodies to view the garden from hotel rooms that are positioned above and on the periphery of the garden. In a similar manner, the garden is positioned above and on the periphery of the street. Just as we never or rarely ever enter each other's hotel rooms, hotel guests are not allowed to enter the garden. Sight, sound, smell, and touch are physically extended from the hotel room to the outside to be terminated with the view of the inside of another hotel room across the garden. Like an abbreviated *Ryōan-ji* perhaps, our senses are divided up, and the motor part of our body is physically held back, while other sense mechanisms are extended. We have the opportunity to become aware of all our senses—differently—in relation to our body and movement. The design allows us the opportunity to see the sky by looking at the ground and to become conscious of the things that remain and leave our lives and the patterns we make and are made of.

Living Systems allows the reader to see how pragmatics and possible poetics operate in a design. On a level of methodological utility, *Living Systems* asserts the importance of using technology in a phenomenological manner to inform operational strategies in landscape design. On another level, *Living*



Figure 2. Impression of Rain, Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten. Courtyard (Courtesy Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten).

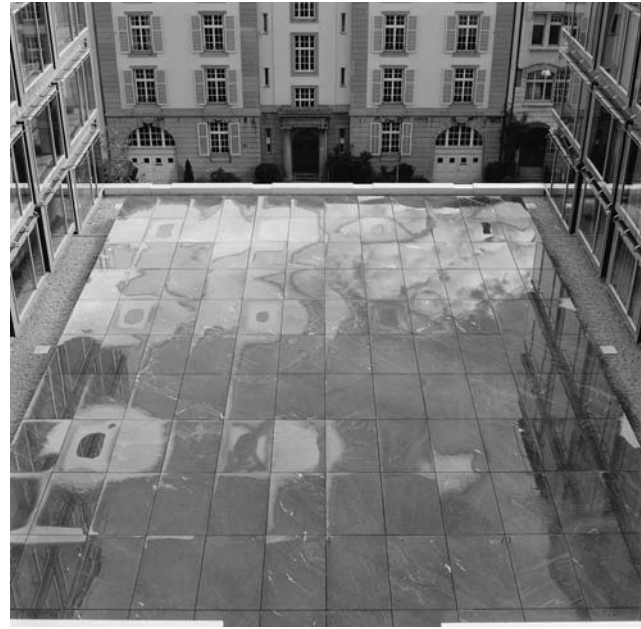


Figure 3. Impression of Rain, Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten. Courtyard (Courtesy Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten).

Systems also makes clear that that technology is a requisite part of the modern condition, which also conditions our experience and embraces the possibilities of our time. The phenomenological patterns of our lives are also technologically infused patterns. Through projects like the *Responsive Cloud Machine* by Christian Werthmann & LOMA, or the *Dynamic Thermal Wind Wall* by Ned Kahn, we become conscious of these patterns and relationships, and by embracing the opportunities afforded by these processes and relationships, we can see ourselves as living systems *patterning* these places and ourselves. We understand ourselves *as* these places, and not merely being *in* these places. As designers, we must not simply design experience, we must ask *why* the experience is what it is; what conditions (patterns) set up the possibility for the experience.

Living Systems effectively reiterates its methodological structure through its selection and use of images. The publication eliminates the near ubiquitous emphasis on publication eye candy, the inedible garnishes that often gussie up our design books. Most design oriented books present images that enforce a distance between the reader and the thing, keeping the reader outside of the thing they are looking at. Images can offer entrance, informing the reader of the particular set of relationships which constitute a thing, and, to paraphrase Arnheim again, “the actions that brought them about” (1969). There are seductive images in *Living Systems*. However, they do not appear out of thin air. The images, like the categories, are two-way streets that both describe and feed a technological criticality.

Designers need fewer competition renderings and more images of messy operations. Designers need more images

that communicate the *making* of a thing—precision images that show *how* the thing was made, and not simply that it was made. Designers need more images of technical interventions; more images of site manipulations. Designers need more images that communicate the constraints of the design situation, the invariant points discovered during the design process.

These images make us aware of the complexity of messy operations, and we can no longer pretend to deal only in finished products. As designers, we need to be aware that the images we make and look at also organize and condition our thinking. Images can be pretty pictures, or they can be models—multi-dimensional information handlers signaling what is important. As George Lakoff, Evelyn Keller, and Olafur Eliasson all state in various ways, *models condition our understanding*.

Living Systems may be missing references to urban farming and agricultural practices. New artificial growing systems and urban agricultural practices are changing landscape architecture, urbanism, and architecture. Of course, saying these are missing from *Living Systems* is not the same as saying that they were missed by the authors. It is a call for another book.

Living Systems is important as a resource pointing to all the possibilities in design today. If you do not care for tree support devices, you will still remember West 8’s “Tree Crutches Growing Guide” under *Grooming*. You learn that a more modern shaping, grooming, and manipulation of vegetation is possible. Landscape experiments can be as exotic as natural systems themselves. The real consequence of manipulating a tree is that it also manipulates the way we understand nature and city. Bending a tree also bends the way we move around trees: we duck, lean, slow down, speed up in space, and

through space. In Japan these tree crutches are used on nearly every corner and park, in every part of the city. The device literally bends the way we see things. Again, this redefines what “natural” means, and subtly reiterates that our concepts are neither static nor fixed.¹ How we define or categorize something also establishes the terms in which we participate in those systems.

The projects in *Living Systems* give your imagination a good shove to get up and experiment. When StoSSLU cuts up the synthetic rubber dermis in *Gradient of Resilience*, they are not merely resorting to the latest trick in control points on a spline curve and assigning color patterns. The project is demonstrating, through the design, the relationship between lifting and landing, running and jumping, sky and ground, inside and outside. The garden is played, not just played in, as the body becomes part of an exotic process of strange and fascinating movements. The design demonstrates that there is an immediate correspondence between the shape of the ground and the performative possibilities of having a body. Simultaneously, StoSSLU is navigating below the strict and sterile impossibilities of playground codes and transforming those codes into new potential.

StoSSLU’s design refers to the historic, linking to the prospect-refuge typology that has deep roots in landscape history. It also refers to technology by nerding around with a range of recyclables in their experimental infancy. The design is phenomenological, staging an opportunity for people to run and jump, walk and roll, and safely land. The garden has no boundaries, no clear edges; it spills into the larger park, erasing the clear delineation of what *inside* might mean—inside the park and outside the garden. *Living Systems* is full of these spirited examples.

The classification system in *Living Systems* is categorical without being exhaustive or deductive. It does not reinforce a separation of thinking and making, or enforce a distinction between designer and consultant that is often latent beneath the structure of most materially and technically oriented books. The categorical system is all verb, all action, and does not force the projects into categories.

The projects in *Living Systems* serve as models for method and action. For example, the Acconci Studio + Wolfgang Hermann Neimeyer project *Powered by Wind, the Ground is a Turntable* in Munich, shows us that in order to reach a destination across a moving plane, a constant synchrony between the body, location, and place is required. Because the surface

of the park is rotating beneath your feet, stopping for any reason could turn you around so that you are walking *forwards backwards*, returning to the place where you started. A re-tuning of walking speed and a constant updating of locational awareness is required. The park forces us to be conscious of ourselves as instruments of measure and movement, making us aware that we can calculate our distance to and from something while the ground is spinning below us by using our body and mind at the same time. As we are moving, the ground is moving. We remember the earth is spinning—what a beautiful and simple realization. Aligning all these variables creates a system of body and mind and timing and spacing and materials and technology all at once. But perhaps the most satisfying thing about *Living Systems*—as I write this now—as I keep re-using the book, is the projects and the categorizations leaves me with a thrilling buzz that says, “hey Vito, that’s awesome, but I could do it better.”

It is the “that’s awesome, but I could do it better (and now I have a better idea of how)” feeling that is often missing from design books. Many design books present projects as trophies, as a stamp of superiority holding the reader at arm’s length, turning us into gawkers and voyeurs. Technology is often portrayed as an impersonal, deterministic solution—much like the instruction book that asserts *insert technological parts here*. That’s not the feeling I get when I use *Living Systems*. I feel that when Liat and Alexander state that “categories are not meant to be absolute, or exhaustive . . . but merely a starting point for a new language,” (11) they are not ducking out of a critical chokehold. They are saying, “these categories and projects and products are awesome, but by using this tool you should define your own systems and methodologies for design.”

Even if it is naïve (to think that I can design a better *Multi-Operational Modular System* than Field Operations, or a better *Turntable* than Acconci), it is a productive naïveté to have. It does not mean that I will not study the hell out of *Multi-Operational Modular System*, and revisit the park again, and again, and again. I will. I do. In Manhattan, there is no such thing as *the ground*—there are only *grounds*—multiple layers for staging movement. Most of the time I walk the High Line for the pleasure of moving about the city in section, above *a ground*, in the city, in a park small enough in one direction to measure the distance in feet, while being long enough in another direction to understand that distance in footsteps. I can see the flows below me, above me—I can be flow myself, caught in a drift of seeds and grasses and people. There is

pleasure in walking a rail line that used to move flesh around, as I am flesh myself, moving at a different rate while listening, looking, smelling, strolling, extending, and contracting in direct contact with the city and people and processes. The *that's awesome but I could do it better*, is a naïveté bordering on ludicrous, but I *am* inspired and empowered and informed by a fascination of what is out there, and a growing understanding of what is possible in there.

NOTES

1. 'Nature' is the most generic and perhaps contested of terms—'trees can't naturally do that.' For a fantastic introduction into the complications of the word 'nature' take a look at Raymond Williams *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1985. Cambridge: Oxford University Press).

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Eric Ellingsen is a director at the Institut für Raumexperimente, an experimental educational program of the Olafur Eliason Studio and the Universität der Künste Berlin. Eric also participates in projects of the Olafur Eliason Studio.

Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape

edited by Marc Treib. 2009. New York: Routledge. 268 pages, black and white illustrations throughout, \$150.00 / \$53.95 hardcover and paperback.

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Reviewed by Susan Herrington

Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape draws upon papers presented at the symposium, "Spatial Recall: The Place of Memory in Architecture and Landscape," held at the University of California, Berkeley, March 9–10, 2007. Edited by Marc Treib, this collection of twelve essays from scholars, artists, and design professionals examines the intersections of

memory, body, and the built environment. Essays range from theoretical speculations on the nature of memory, to personal reflections regarding an author's *oeuvre*, to the polemics of memory construction. Treib cautions readers in "Yes, Now I Remember: An Introduction," that authors use memory in a very broad and imprecise way. He notes in some "contributions a reader could justifiably claim that 'history' or 'culture' or 'civilization' would more accurately apply than the word 'memory'" (xiii). Yet, the unfettered accounts of memory in *Spatial Recall* unveil how it has seeped into practices not normally associated with the act of recalling or encountering the past. The extension of memory into unconventional territories, such as river restoration, is a valuable contribution of the book. Another valuable aspect of *Spatial Recall*, is the visual quality of the book itself. The black-and-white photographs that accompany the text are of consistently high quality, and well-placed. A note about the text: Treib's editorial contributions to all of the essays provide a stylistic cohesion that is commendable given the diverse backgrounds and languages of the authors.

With remarkable symmetry, the tripartite organization of *Spatial Recall* consists of four essays on memory and body, four essays on memory and landscape, and four essays on memory and architecture. In the opening essay of the first section, Juhani Pallasmaa offers poetic speculations on memory derived from direct bodily experiences with the built environment. In unmoored prose, Pallasmaa reminds us that "our existential space is never a two-dimensional pictorial space, but a lived and multi-sensory space saturated and structured by memories and intentions" (22). This insight links past encounters and the imagination, which is critical to designers who often called upon to envision anew with past in mind. The following essay by Susan Schwartzenberg reveals how memory and associations work together to inform her own work. Schwartzenberg's project with Franco Magnani, a former chef in San Francisco, is particularly noteworthy. During the 1980s Magnani created paintings based on memory of the small Italian village where he lived as a child in the 1930s. Schwartzenberg returned to this village and photographed scenes depicted in Magnani's paintings. The paired images of paintings and photographs are strikingly similar, revealing the palpable way people carry their memories over long time periods and vast geographies. In "The Place of Memory" Donlyn Lyndon explores how various built environments, such as the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco by Bernard Maybeck, serve as earthly calibrations of

our personal and communal memories. An artist since 1975, Alice Aycock redirects the exploration of body and memory to her own work. Looking at the images of her sculptures that accompany this essay, it is evident that remnants of the industrial past have provided a consistent source of inspiration. She notes that some sculptures may appear simple; however, an actual experience with them is not (88). Indeed, her underground tunnels, wells, shafts, and scaffolding invite the body to subterranean spaces where air, light, smell, sound, and thermal comfort are experienced in stark contrast to life above ground.

Matt Kondolf's "Rivers, Meanders, and Memory" begins the landscape section; revealing how cultural memory can distort knowledge concerning the restoration of alluvial systems. Uvas Creek in California, for example, was restored to match an idealized version of rivers witnessed in English landscape gardens. The creek was made over as a serpentine, single channel with a series of logs and plump boulders lining the sides. Unfortunately creeks in this part of California are wide, with sand-and-gravel beds. One year after this extreme make-over, Uvas Creek reverted to this less visually desirable formation. Kondolf warns that despite our cultural preference for the single meandering channel "the river usually remembers and reasserts its true nature, which is often more dynamic and messy" (117). Building upon the idea that landscapes are not stable entities in either the external world or the mind, George Descombes describes how his approach to design seeks to imagine the past and recall the future. His exquisite restoration of the formerly channelized River Aire in Switzerland retains parts of the straight concrete walls in juxtaposition with the unwieldy movements of the newly freed river. Adriaan Geuze offers readers the greatest surprise. With a professed Dutch-bred aversion to anything sentimental, Geuze brimmed with pride and optimism regarding Dutch landscape architecture in the late 1990s (Weilacher 1999). However, in *Spatial Recall*, the subject of memory evidently put Geuze in a maudlin mood. Having confessed to being "born three meters below sea level, a condition which has to have affected my perspective," he laments over the rural landscapes of the Netherlands. Fearing that non-urban land, "the pure essence of Dutch culture" (139) is becoming more like Los Angeles; he notes that authentic landscapes are being replaced by "clichés of leisure and recreation parks" (138). Returning us to a customary site for memory, Luigi Lantini explores the role that contemporary cemeteries and memorials

play in perceptions of death. Latini notes that these twentieth-century landscapes continued their traditional role as "guardian of meaning linked to memory and commemoration," but they also increasingly expressed "personal and collective memory while shunning the rhetoric of traditional monuments" (158). This point may not be new to readers, but what is new is the intriguing array of cemeteries designed in Italy since the 1940s. The German Military Cemetery designed by German landscape architect, Walter Rossow, and German architect, Dieter Oesterlen, in Passo Della Futa, Italy (1967–69) is extraordinary for both its dramatic setting in a mountain pass and the restrained treatment of design elements. For Lantini, it is a place where walking "produces a sense of measure to the path, keeping its distance from the overwhelming dimension of the gigantic common grave" (167).

The final section continues to pursue the polemical dimensions of memory, reminding us that not all memories are necessarily good ones. In Esther da Costa Meyer's perusing of urban renewal in nineteenth-century Paris, she cautions readers that "recollections are the fruit of conflict and compromise, indelible but unstable" (177). In her account of the repressed topologies caused by Georges-Eugène Haussmann's aggressive urbanism, she demonstrates how the ambitious planner not only demolished buildings, but sites, such as the hill from where France's national heroine and Catholic saint, Joan of Arc, launched her attacks on the British in 1429 (180). Da Costa Meyer also notes that the tumultuous revision of Paris coincided with new reproduction technologies. As a result, photography became a witness, and perhaps accomplice, to its distressful transformation. Continuing the theme of design and destruction, Treib compares the appreciation and treatment of ruins in the eighteenth century, such as Fountains Abbey, and ruins after World War II, such as St. Michael's Cathedral by Basil Spence in Coventry, England, with contemporary industrial ruins at Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord by Latz and Partner in Germany and the Shipyard Park by Konjian Yu and Wei Pang in Zhongshan, China. For Treib, these industrial artifacts are remnants rather than ruins. In "The Memory Industry and its Discontents: The Death and Life of a Keyword" Andrew Shanken assails the "memory industry," finding that there might be too many memorials. Recounting the last thirty-five years of memorial frenzy, which has swept North America, he questions the very premise of permanent memorials. He asks "is it just we moderns, with our fingers on the stopwatch and memory leaking out of our calendars and

archives, or Blackberries and computers—is it only we who demand permanence?” (238). Jorge Otero-Pailos brings to light the obvious question one might ask when considering memory and architecture—the intention of historic preservation. In an essay that would make Karl Marx proud, Otero-Pailos reveals the intent of historic preservation to garner collective political identity at the expense of unmediated personal experience. He argues that preservation asserts its power by transforming private meaning into public value. Otero-Pailos notes, “the clichéd pose that tourists assume before the Leaning Tower of Pisa (in order to appear in their photographs as if they are propping it up) suggests that responses to historical places replicate on-site images established in the mind long before” (256). This is an interesting critique to conclude with as it brings us back to discussions on the body and memory in the first section.

Together, the essays in *Spatial Recall: Memory in Architecture and Landscape* avoid the outsized romantic impulse to sentimentalize the built environment with excessively subjective accounts of memory. On the other hand, it also refuses to sustain inquiry at the level of only cultural critique, detached from human needs and emotions. In doing so, *Spatial Recall* offers a highly relevant examination of memory that defies these categorizations, a difficult feat in the contentious terrain of memory.

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Susan Herrington is a Professor in the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of British Columbia.

Greening Cities, Growing Communities: Learning From Seattle’s Urban Community Gardens

by Jeffrey Hou, Julie M. Johnson, and Laura J. Lawson. 2009. Seattle: University of Washington Press and the Landscape Architecture Foundation. 232 pages, 140 illustrations, 130 in color. \$40.00, paperback. ISBN-13: 978-0-295989-28-0

Reviewed by Lee-Anne Milburn

Jeffrey Hou, Julie Johnson, and Laura Lawson’s new book *Greening Cities, Growing Communities* explores the premise

that community gardens address urban issues such as social equity and personal health. They claim that these gardens have implications for social, economic, and environmental urban sustainability, and use detailed case studies to explore and argue the relevance of community gardens for substantive change. These goals may be lofty and challenging, but for the most part, the case study structure of the book provides support for the authors’ claims. More importantly, the book is an accessible tool for students, educators, professionals, and community members that provides support for decision-making regarding community garden structure, design, organization, and programs.

The book is simply and intuitively structured without the rhetoric and self-conscious terminology so often adopted in scholarship today as authors attempt to provide credibility to ideas lacking an evidentiary basis. It is generous in its use of 130 color photographs and maps, and the images are accompanied by descriptive titles that make connections between the text and images, and ensure that the reader accrues maximum benefit from the varied forms of information. Its bibliography is extensive and exhaustive; the reference list alone will be a valuable tool for many readers. The language and images are accessible and descriptive, and will serve the needs of a wide range of readers.

While Mark Francis’ (2001) seminal article on case studies in landscape architecture provides specific and detailed guidance on preparing and writing case studies, few examples currently exist which demonstrate the potential of this approach to research. This book very effectively uses case studies to appropriately demonstrate the scale and scope of issues on a site-by-site basis, as well as explores specific complex issues in a way that retains the richness of the dialogue. It works with the strengths of the case study approach: in depth information about a specific site to provide contextual insights that can form a baseline of data. The book appropriately recognizes that the situation in Seattle cannot (and should not) be generalized to other cities, but proposes that multiple cases provide a breadth of information and insight that can inform situations outside Washington’s borders.

The authors provide a brief summary of existing research and the current status of community gardens in the United States followed by an outline of the most common steps in community garden initiation, design, implementation, and management. A brief discussion of Seattle and its specific environmental, social, historic, and economic context provides

sufficient background for the six case studies. Each case is described in text form and associated with both context and site plans. The chapters begin with “fact sheet” data presented efficiently and coherently in such a way that it is easy to find relevant information without struggling with excessive narrative text. Most readers will find the information they need on this first page, though costs and budgets seem to be one of the few neglected areas. The background and history of each garden, design process adopted, funding and support models used, organizational structure, and programming are described briefly but with sufficient detail to provide a comprehensive understanding of the development and management context. Each garden is used to explore a “special lesson:” an issue identified earlier in the document to which the garden is particularly well suited as an example. Lessons include empowering change, serving elderly immigrants, using design/build processes, green building strategies, and garden/park synergies.

As is often the case with these types of studies, the primary weakness in the cases is a tendency to present the narrative without an accompanying critique. As stated by the authors: “our goal in this book is to critically analyze how community gardens achieve dimensions of urban sustainability.” The case studies chapters would have been stronger if they had been expanded to include the descriptions of social and community activities, placemaking, strategies for connecting with the neighborhood and surrounding community, and education and interpretation strategies which are addressed in the chapter on sustainability but neglected elsewhere. Environmental and economic strategies and impacts seem to be strangely lacking; there are few descriptions of tools and techniques used to improve environmental conditions within the garden, or use of the gardens as a key contributor to green infrastructure in the communities. Beyond large-scale discussions of economic issues and funding models, capital and operating costs, staffing commitments, garden income, and other financial considerations are rarely addressed.

Chapter 11 encapsulates the likely future of the urban community garden as a hybrid open space. As the availability of funding and land for public open spaces, parkland, and green infrastructure decreases, these projects will come to be seen as public park resources. This has significant implications for the way the public will view this land use, as well as for the continuing control of the gardens by the users. This chapter also challenges the expert design assumption that green spaces should be designed by designers, and that the

most successful spaces have evidence of professional “expert” involvement. While this may discomfit designers, this book provides ample evidence that professional design expertise is rarely a prerequisite for the effective design of a community garden. In the book there are examples of gardens which embrace a range of design and maintenance approaches from “funky, ethnic, and ad-hoc” to “groomed and perfect,” highlighting community gardens as spaces with a wide range of aesthetic character, roles in the community, and management structures. The final chapter, “Visions of Urban Community Gardens,” provides specific suggestions for those people who desire to promote community gardens and urban agriculture in their communities.

Greening Cities, Growing Communities is an excellent collection of information and insights on community gardens, presented in a way that makes the information accessible to a wide range of readers, and applicable to many projects across the country. It is an excellent addition to the literature on community gardens, as well as an effective example of the case study approach to research for both students and professionals.

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Lee-Anne Milburn is an Associate Professor and Program Coordinator at University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Aridscapes: Designing in Harsh and Fragile Lands

by Shlomo Aronson. 2008. Barcelona, Spain: Gustavo Gili Land & Scape Series. 213 pages. In Spanish and English. \$34, paperback.

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Reviewed by Elissa Rosenberg

The desert has always played a complex role in Israeli culture. It is more than a geographical region—it is a mythical place. The desert operates as a symbolic space in the Israeli psyche, filled with contradictions and ambivalence. To the Eastern and Central European immigrants who settled the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the desert represented the exotic Orient, uncivilized, alien, and other. It was perceived as

a hostile environment to be conquered, a “void” to be settled. But its “otherness” was also part of its romantic allure—the site of untouched, primal nature, an ancient landscape that evoked the biblical past. David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, drew on these seemingly contradictory themes in his call to settle the “big and empty” Negev desert and “make the desert bloom,”¹ transforming the desert into a stage on which to enact the national narrative.

Shlomo Aronson’s recent book *Aridscapes*, offers a compelling corrective. This book represents a cultural shift that has occurred as a result of growing environmental awareness in Israel. Although Aronson does not directly situate himself within this debate, his book reads as a response to the Israeli ethos of “making the desert bloom.” Instead of conquering the desert, this book is about living with the desert. It is intended to advance our understanding of living “comfortably and sustainably in an arid climate while doing minimal harm,” based on lessons from contemporary projects as well as vernacular practices. As the author notes in the book’s introduction, the impact of global warming will make this knowledge essential.

Aronson is a distinguished Israeli landscape architect whose work has had a major impact on the Israeli landscape over the span of his 40-year career.² This book, introduced with a foreword by Lawrence Halprin, draws from examples of desert landscapes around the world, addressing issues such as desert gardens, oases, desert agriculture, and water management from the scale of the cistern to regional water engineering projects. The chapters are divided by a series of folio inserts devoted to Israeli works of desert landscape architecture. While the text addresses global themes illustrated by examples from around the world, the visual documentation in the folios focuses on Israel as a case study and includes many of Aronson’s own works.

The book opens with a general description of the physical attributes of the desert landscape, based on its geology, qualities of light, presence of water, and its unique vegetation. Aronson offers practical considerations for dealing with the desert’s extreme conditions that have to do with specific materials, techniques, and planning strategies. Water, the most precious and critical element is discussed at length. In addition to reviewing contemporary sustainable technologies, such as the use of drip irrigation and grey water, Aronson looks back to ancient practices of irrigation and water collection for the lessons they can offer us today. Of particular interest are the underground “chain of wells”, or qanat system developed by

the ancient Sumerians in Mesopotamia, the Inca agricultural water channel system, and the sophisticated Nabatean techniques of rainwater collection based on terrace systems, cisterns, channels, and small dams.

The originality of the book’s contribution lies in its rare integration of the pragmatic with the poetic. This is the essence of the desert garden; in this extreme environment its design, by definition, must be pragmatic. Its fragile beauty is based on an aesthetic of necessity and accommodation. Ancient desert gardens were typically enclosed within high walls and were organized around water. Plants were carefully chosen for their utility and frequently included fruit trees, such as citrus, olive, grapevines, and pomegranate. “The wisdom in these gardens relates to their limits,” writes Aronson. Various gardens are discussed, from ancient Herodion, Herod’s palace in the Judean Desert to Muslim gardens such as Bagh-e Fin in central Iran. Contemporary work such as Dani Karavan’s Negev Monument outside of Be’er Sheva and Isamu Noguchi’s Billy Rose Garden at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem provide examples of the qualities of austerity and frugality that fit their arid settings. In describing the aesthetic power of the arid landscape Aronson writes: “This landscape was not the product of any striving for an ideal world. Instead, it was the result of steadfastly reaching for what could be accomplished with conditions as they are.”

The pragmatic poetics that Aronson describes here is reflected in the impressive collection of his own work, along with the work of others that is featured in the folio sections. Although the projects relate to the individual chapter themes, these sections are graphically distinct and have a standalone quality. This format is common to many of the volumes in the “Land & Scapes” series, where images are used to create a parallel visual text, set off from the written text on colored pages (in this volume the background color is an unfortunate desert brown). The folios document an extensive collection of works of Israeli landscape architecture that brings the book to life. Projects include iconic Israeli landscapes such as the tomb of Ben Gurion by Lippa Yahalom and Dan Zur; as well as their national park, Gan HaShlosha; the “oasis” kibbutz Ein Gedi; and Aronson’s work at Ben Gurion University in Be’er Sheva; the Sherover Promenade in Jerusalem and others. Perhaps the most interesting section relates to the chapter “Altering the Landscape,” which includes a collection of large scale projects by Aronson such as afforestation strategies, erosion control of desert wadis, rehabilitation of the Negev phosphate

mines, and the Sha'ar Hagai Highway interchange on the way to Jerusalem. This group of projects demonstrates Aronson's design sensibility applied to complex environmental and engineering problems. The solutions are ingeniously simple and modest in spirit, despite their large infrastructural scale; they reflect a broad understanding of the complexity of landscape from multiple perspectives.

Aridscapes gathers together a wealth of material from diverse fields, presented in a readable, conversational text with extensive images of designed and vernacular projects. It is both a valuable source book for designers and a timely collection for a general audience. Most important, the book offers an alternative model to desert planning and design based on a new aesthetic. Instead of "making the desert bloom," Aronson gently urges a different vision: "perhaps our universal idealization of Paradise is no longer necessarily green. Perhaps

mankind can conceive of another vision for an ideal land, a vision of balance and beauty maintained through expertise and understanding, without trying to turn every ecosystem into a temperate-zone utopia." The beauty of the landscapes presented here affirms the power of this vision.

NOTES

1. David Ben Gurion, "Daroma" (Southward), 1955.
2. Aronson's work was published in *Making Peace with the Land*, a 1998 monograph published by Spacemaker Press.

Elissa Rosenberg is an Associate Professor in Landscape Architecture at the University of Virginia. She is currently on leave and living in Israel, where she holds a visiting appointment in Landscape Architecture at the Technion Institute.