The relationship, and indeed distinctions, between the arts and professions of landscape and architecture are explored, while topography is considered as a common focus for each.

Is landscape *architecture*?

David Leatherbarrow

I was not the first to pose this question; it was first asked in print by Garrett Eckbo, one of the most important landscape architects in America in the twentieth century.[1] One could equally reverse the question and ask: 'Is architecture landscape?'. In either formulation the question is about the relationship between two arts that are normally understood as separate professions these days. In fact, Eckbo was not the first to puzzle over this issue, even if his exact formulation had no antecedents. The question had already been posed in the nineteenth century, when landscape architecture emerged as a distinct discipline. The early theorists of the field, Humphry Repton and John Claudius Loudon in England, Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy in France, and Andrew Jackson Downing in the USA, all wondered about the relationships between these two practices – if indeed they were two.[2] The professional accrediting and licensing bodies that were formed subsequently tried to settle the matter and institutionalise the distinction. But the question may be older, for it is possible to say that the distinction between these disciplines, at least the suggestion of fundamental differences, was debated even earlier in the eighteenth century. The cases I have in mind include the Abbé Laugier and William Chambers; the first compared the routes through a forest to the streets of a town, while the second used landscape aesthetics to evaluate the merits of a building's facade. Despite this tradition and indeed maybe because of it, the questions these theorists asked have not disappeared in our time.

My aim, in the study that follows, is not to give a final answer but to introduce a term of comparison, topography, that will help us to see and describe what landscape and architecture have in common. Questions concerning technique and working materials will enter into the issue, as will matters of standing or rank. But a more important topic for me will be the historical and cultural content of land and building form; I believe and shall try to show that the conception of land and materials 'in themselves' is an unhelpful abstraction that abbreviates the real subject matter of design in landscape, architecture and cities, thereby reducing its relevance and risking its future.

Architecture and landscape: yesterday and today

Subordinate standing has often been conferred on landscape architecture because its professional history is much shorter than architecture's and its theory correspondingly slighter – three centuries of theorising landscape in the Western tradition, three to four times that for architecture. Recent writings and projects, however, show that the dependency suggested by this lineage is false. Today there is wide agreement that the traditional subordination of landscape architecture to architecture is no longer acceptable.[3] If, in the past, landscape and urban design turned to architecture for ideas and methods, in our time, concepts and techniques that were thought to be proper to large-scale landscape design have been appropriated by architecture: phenomena of process or temporal unfolding; 'registration' prompting articulation; 'mapping' as a survey technique, and so on. The strong impact of these ideas and methods on architecture cannot be denied, nor can it be explained as a result of ecological consciousness, to which it nevertheless relates. Recent arguments for urban ecology, landscape urbanism and ecological urbanism suggest that thinking about landscape (in its several senses) will enable architects and planners to re-conceive the nature and task of designing buildings and cities, as if the whole of which buildings are part is territorial, environmental or topographical, that is, not only architectural.

This realignment of the disciplines has given rise to much enthusiasm and exaggeration, among contemporary landscape theorists. Frequently we are told that the coupling of landscape design and city making – landscape urbanism – offers contemporary culture a coordination of previously unrelated disciplines. That this observation is patently false is apparent to anyone with a modicum of historical knowledge, as I have already suggested and will consider further below. Current practice presents not a coupling of previously unrelated arts but a new understanding of what binds them together. For centuries, landscape and architecture have been two interrelated ways of articulating culture, shaping and showing typical situations. In their expressivity,

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gardens and buildings resemble other forms of cultural production; poetry, philosophy, or politics, for example. The practice of these spatial arts, like that of the others, assumes criticism: creative thought proposes alternatives to existing arrangements once the latter have been judged to be inadequate (inadequately useful or expressive).

The topographical arts

I propose using the word topography to name the topic, theme or framework that architecture, urban design and landscape hold in common. It not only establishes their similarity but also provides them with the grounds for their contribution to contemporary culture. The task of landscape



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architecture, urban design and architecture as topographical arts is to provide the prosaic patterns of our lives with durable dimension and beautiful expression. Obviously, this sense of the word is wider than conventional usage, which equates topography with the land. Topography incorporates terrain, built and unbuilt, but more than that, for it also includes traces of practical affairs ranging from the typical to the extraordinary. Our English term derives from the ancient Greek: Τοπογραφεώ, which meant description or determination of a place. Nowadays we might say 'writing the site'. Strabo used the word in this sense in his *Geography*. So conceived, topography certainly refers to something that is physical, but accents its 'written' or legible aspects, by virtue of which the footprints on its shores invite, sustain and represent the performances of everyday life. Marks of this kind are not exactly vestiges, for that would suggest they only indicate something that occurred in the past. Were this all that topography made legible, both the present and the future would be foreclosed. Topographical inscriptions do, indeed, give evidence of previous enactments but they also indicate those that are still occurring and that may unfold in future. A topographical trace is an outline or proposal that is taken up in an act of making or inhabiting that has no obligation to its past, other than the preservation of a tension between its forms and those projected out of the present. Topography gives itself to perception, experience and knowledge as both a representation and an accommodation of prosaic and practical purposes, historically formed and re-formed.

When discussing a building and its site, or surrounding terrain, we typically oscillate between geometry and physical fact, shape and substance. No one believes, however, that a choice between these two makes sense. Doesn't that mean we should question their distinctness? Concern for topography cannot mean focus only on the profile, compass or configuration of a given plot or stretch of land, for the project's realisation and expression depend equally on the materiality, colour, thickness, temperature, luminosity and texture of physical things. Further, when considered in its temporal aspects, it is plain that land is not only soil but all that is hidden beneath it and emerges from it, as well as the several agencies that sustain that emergence. Yet, on the other hand, the turn toward terrain would lead nowhere if it meant interest solely in the physical aspects of land. Attention to the qualities of built landscape naturally leads to reflection on their associations and thus to their expressive power, even their potential for representation. Interest in the physical aspects of land can also lead to an awareness of its functional potentials, what the materials of a site can do, how they can act or perform in service of some purpose other than expression or representation. Attention to the performative aspects of topography – in addition to its pictorial qualities – also invites recognition of its expected and unexpected events, the latter revealing the limits of both foresight and design intelligence. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that the theme of 'programming' is so strong in current work. While land is obviously physical, it is also clearly spatial. There is no reason to deny or to neglect this, even if the perspectivity of the typical approach tends to

1 Weiss/Manfredi, Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle

2 Weiss/Manfredi, Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle



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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135511000753 Published online by Cambridge University Press



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favour frontality and pictorialism. Attention to the spatial aspects of a place – its enclosures, continuities and extent – can thus lead to interpretations of its potentials for occupation and use, which are not only, or not essentially pictorial but practical.

In addition to the material, spatial and practical aspects of the topography, there is a third characteristic to which I alluded earlier that is just as important as these first three: its temporal quality. Seen over time, the materials of landscape continually renew themselves. A site's metabolism is key to its capacity for continued relevance. Time is also the medium of one's experience of landscape, for terrain is known most fully in the duration of spatial passage or movement, its delayed or accelerated sequences, as well as it repetitions and inaugurations. Temporality opens an essential dimension of spatial sense.[4] In summary: topography is important to landscape, architecture and urban design due to its attention to the materiality, spatiality, practicality and temporality of terrain. It shows how alternatives to the pictorial or aesthetic approach can increase the cultural content of the building, landscape and city, as it (cultural sense) is assumed and renewed in the practice of everyday affairs; which is to say the ethical sense of praxis, as it has been examined in recent political philosophy (in the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty and Giorgio Agamben).[5] For my part (with these writers in the background), I would like to show that contemporary design work points to the decisive role played by the situations and institutions of practical life in the restructuring of urban, architectural and landscape topography.

Precedent

The expanded sense of topography I have elaborated may be new to current usage but it is not without precedent in the histories of architectural, landscape and urban design, as I suggested at the outset. Considering a couple of the exemplary projects of the past several years, such as the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle *[1, 2, 3]* (Weiss and Manfredi) or the Fresh Kills Lifescape in New York *[4, 5, 6, 7]* (Field Operations), it is plain that proposals that use landscape as the basis for urban transformation are not without precedent.

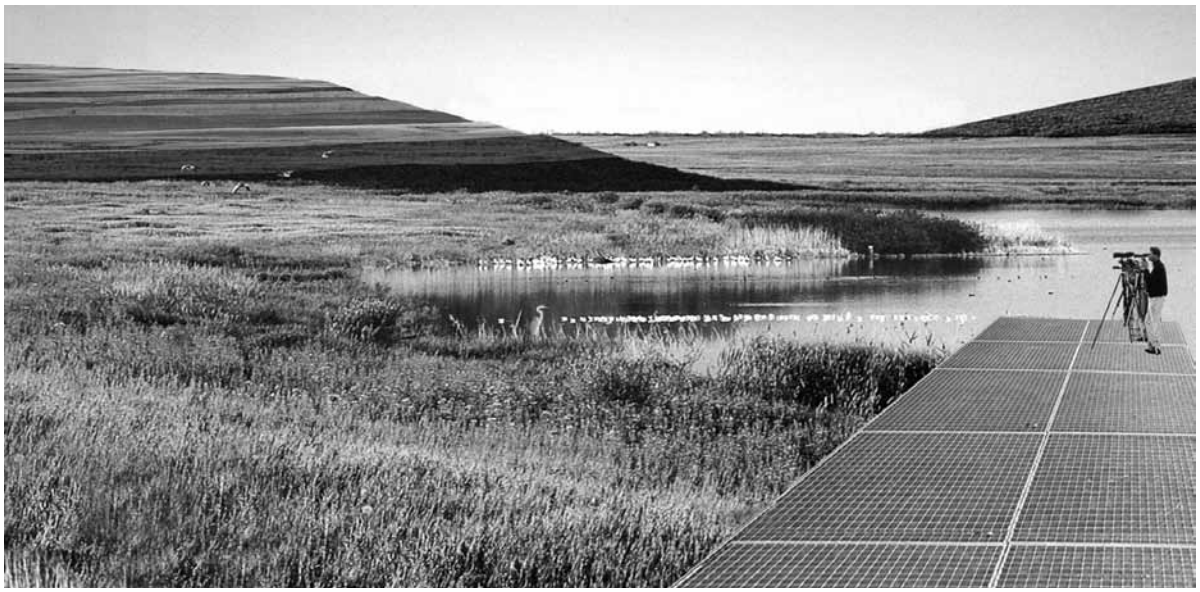
The most prominent example from the 1980s is Bernard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette, with its combination of programmes, involvements with the pre-existing urban (infrastructural) environment, phased development, and so on. But that project had its own antecedents. If one looks back another twenty years there are other well-known designs that combine landscape and architecture in new urban order. An obvious case is Le Corbusier's plan for the Venice Hospital (1965). That project's interwoven seascape and cityscape anticipated the 'mat buildings' of Peter and Alison Smithson, which were envisaged as horizontal 'ordering systems' that synchronised architectural structure with the flows of climate (as in the Kuwait project of 1969). The practice of folding architecture into the environment was not an innovation of 1965, however. The same style of working can be seen in Le Corbusier's designs from earlier decades (including Chandigarh, the Radiant Farm, the Cooperative Village).

Le Corbusier was not the only architect in the 1930s to integrate superstructure and substructure. Consider, for example, the Parkway project in Philadelphia by Jacques Gréber and Paul Cret. Although planned at exactly the same time as Le Corbusier's Cooperative Village, it demonstrates a very different understanding of urban terrain. Gréber's way of working was closer to the 'landscape urbanism' of Tony Garnier, whose Cité Industrielle (1917) elaborated a spread-out, horizontal landscape of buildings, public space and infrastructure, precisely what Le Corbusier rejected in some but not all of his urban designs. Before Garnier and throughout the nineteenth century there were many projects that coordinated landscape with city design, none more fascinating than Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's design for the saltworks and 'urban' settlement at Chaux. In that project, architecture, law and morals were proposed as outgrowths of the natural world, although Ledoux's hand is evident at all scales and in all parts of the buildings, programmes and representations of nature. Architects in the preceding century were equally sensitive to the potentials of landscape when envisaging urban form: a representative case could be Pierre Patte's plan for siting monuments in Paris (1765), for each public space was designed as if it occupied a clearing in a park or forest, as Laugier had recommended. So, too, for architects in the Baroque, Mannerist and Renaissance periods. Well-known cases include Versailles, the Rome of Pope Sixtus V, Raphael's Villa Madama and Rossetti's designs for Ferrara – not only the piazzi he planned, but the large public campo. That last term, meaning both square and field, shows that the interweaving of landscape and cityscape is longstanding in projects, techniques, concepts and vocabulary. The current agenda for 'landscape urbanism' or 'ecological urbanism' cannot be understood apart from this history, nor should it be seen as radically new. In fact, the uniqueness of current work only emerges in contrast with what preceded it.

One way to identify the singularity of today's projects for the urban landscape is to focus on their rejection of what can be called the two-world hypothesis, the notion that artificial and natural terrain are categorically distinct, that landscapes that have been made are radically dissimilar to those that generate themselves. Another way to view this opposition is to separate the two parts of the English word landscape; for the first half indicates material that is naturally given and the second indicates the look, appearance or image of what has been made – although we also see unaltered terrain as picture-like. In contemporary theory this apparently obvious

3 Weiss/Manfredi Olympic Sculpture Park, sunset view of 'Eagle' by Alexander Calder

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4 Wetland at Fresh Kills Lifescape New York, by Field Operations

5 Skiing at Fresh Kills Lifescape New York, by Field Operations

6 Fresh Kills looking towards Manhattan

7 Design Proposal for Fresh Kills, New York, by Field Operations

distinction is rendered problematic by questioning performance or operation of topography, putting issues of agency and meaning out of play, at least for a while. With respect to the issue of terrain as image – the 'scape' of landscape – no interpretation has come under more forceful criticism than the supposed pictorialism of past practices. Instead of images or pictures, contemporary landscapes are intended to offer *effects*, which are not matters of form, but the visible aspects of operations. With respect to the other contested term, land, the matter is more complicated; for giving it the same treatment as image, rejection, would deprive project making of its proper subject matter. Denied instead are several common conceptions of land: first, the notion that land is inert; second, that it is property. No longer still or static, soil, water, sky and vegetation are seen as vital processes, the decisive characteristic of which is their developmental nature, their metabolism. The common conception of land as property has also been denied in current theory, at least the idea that ownership requires the articulation of visible boundaries. In the minds of contemporary designers, landscape extends beyond the plot the client happens to own, approaching the horizon. Here, too, we have a new rendition of an old conceit, specifically the 'borrowed landscape', so often discussed and seen in Asian landscapes (*shakkei* in Japanese, *jiejing* in Chinese),[6] as well as the so-called 'informal' gardens of eighteenth-century Europe.[7] Nevertheless, landscape as image and property are rejected in current theory and practice because both envisage terrain as static, as if it were like a building, neglecting the fact that it is always and inescapably developmental, dynamic or metabolic in character.

Despite the centrality of the concept of change in current discourse, the realisation that landscape is subject to both growth and deterioration is hardly a recent discovery. It is likely impossible to find a single

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landscape theorist from any period that did not recognise this rather conspicuous fact. Nor is it new to observe that the norms and structures of society vary through time; as long as there have been histories, there has been awareness that the institutions, laws, morals and habits of cultures develop and disintegrate over time. The key question concerns the relationships between changes in each of these realms – nature and culture – or what is taken to be the order of both.

To document their design for the Olympic Sculpture Park, Weiss and Manfredi developed a number of renderings that visualised the spaces and schedules by which the project could meet its several programmatic requirements.[8] The slowest configuration appears to be the one that gave the project its name: the ensemble of artworks. Although the collection will grow over time, one can suppose that the works placed within the landscape will preserve their standing for decades, at least. Similarly slow will be the pace of change in the buildings and 'infrastructural networks', especially when contrasted with the movement organised by the several paths that cross the site. Faster still are the transport routes that cut or edge the terrain (a trucking route, rail line, waterfront trolley circuit, bicycle path, and ferry line). The schema for environmental remediation introduces still another chronology into the landscape, a very long one, ranging from the unrecorded prehistory of the land's misuse, to the time of 'capping', and then into the unending time of 'monitoring'. In addition to the site-times that are local to project, other temporalities serve as wider frames of reference: the schedules of business and leisure in the town that are structured by the workweek and the hours of the day, the seasons of the year that regulate the growth and deterioration of the plantings, and the slow and steady rhythm of the waves against the shore. Despite the fact that I have

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listed these places, events and schedules separately, their 'internal' workings require reciprocity. The same dependencies (eccentricities) can be seen in the other project I mentioned, the Fresh Kills Lifescape, as well as the more recent and impressively successful High Line project in New York City, also the work of James Corner and Field Operations. In these two and many others of our time the hackneyed distinction between natural and cultural history has been refused.

Conclusion

By virtue of their multiple and reciprocal temporalities, these projects allow us to see beyond the idea that the city as something 'for us' and the natural world is something 'in itself'. Presented instead is an ensemble of situations or institutions that give shape, schedule and orientation to the patterns of everyday life, constituting a world that is so successfully urban that it is taken to be natural, despite the contradiction this usage implies. I would like to describe this condition as cultural ecology, a topography in which human affairs are synchronised with natural processes: business over a breakfast table brightened by morning light, musical performance in the quiet of a cool evening, waterfront leisure on warm weekends, retaining walls resisting erosion while supporting a viewing terrace. Because the situations of urban life are enmeshed in both the histories of a culture and the processes of the natural world, cities are not the result of several architectural projects alone but also the legible face of the social practices they accommodate, when scheduled according to ecological processes, in acknowledgement of their several claims, anticipated and unforeseen.

Plato's last dialogue, *Laws* begins with three old thinkers climbing Mount Ida toward Zeus' birthplace. Both their pace and that of the dialogue follow the slow course of the sun on the day before the summer solstice. Four well-worn paths cross (and cross out their separateness) as they move toward the cave of beginnings: the philosopher's path; the dialogue's; the sun's and the year's. In this myth, as in the stories proposed by the better projects of our time, a new urbanity is to be synchronised with the cycles that both structure its rhythms and transcend them. Whether we call this architecture or landscape is a minor issue, as long as the topography we have in mind sustains the kind of culture we unthinkingly assume is natural.

Notes

1. Garrett Eckbo, 'Is Landscape *Architecture?*' *Landscape Architecture* 73, no. 3 (May 1983), 64–65.
2. Humphry Repton, *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: T. Bensley, 1803); John Claudius Loudon, *Observations on the Formation and Management of Useful and Ornamental Plantations* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co., 1804); A. C. Quatremère de Quincy, *An Essay on the Nature, the End, and the Means of Imitation in the Fine Arts*, J. C. Kent, trans. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1837); Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening adapted to North America* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1841); Judith Major, *To Live in the New World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1997).
3. Mohsen Mostafavi and Gareth Doherty (eds), *Ecological Urbanism* (Baden: Lars Müller, 2010); Charles Waldheim (ed.), *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).
4. Kevin Lynch, *What Time is This Place?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1973); John Dixon Hunt, '"Lordship of the Feet", Toward a Poetics of Movement in the Garden', in *Landscape Design and the Experience of Motion*, Michel Conan (ed.), (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003), 187–213; David Leatherbarrow, 'The Image and Its Setting', in *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 200–34.
5. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1989); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
6. Chen Cong-Zhou, *On Chinese Gardens* (Shanghai: Tongji University Press, nd.), 56ff. In Suzhou, for example, there are 'excellent examples of borrowing from out-of-city landscapes and distant temples and Buddhist pagodas'.
7. Here the famous line from Alexander Pope is once again entirely apposite: 'He gains all points who pleasingly confounds, Surprises, varies, and conceals the bounds,' from 'Epistle to Lord Burlington' (1731), in *Collected Poems* (London: Dent, 1975).
8. Marion Weiss and Michael Manfredi, *Surface Sub-Surface* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).

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arq gratefully acknowledges:
Soundview Aerial Photography and Weiss/Manfredi, 1
Benjamin Benschneider and Weiss/Manfredi, 2
Paul Warchol, 3
James Corner Field Operations, courtesy of the City of New York 4, 5, 6, 7

Biography

David Leatherbarrow is Associate Dean of the School of Design as well as a Professor of Architecture, Interim Chair of the Department of Architecture, Chair of the Graduate Group in Architecture at the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches courses in architectural theory and design studios in the graduate and undergraduate programmes, supervises research and directs the Ph.D. programme. He has published widely including *Architecture Oriented Otherwise*, *Topographical Stories*, *Surface Architecture* (with Mohsen Mostafavi), *Uncommon Ground*, *The Roots of Architectural Invention*, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time* (with Mohsen Mostafavi) and *Masterpieces of Architectural Drawing*. His research focuses on the history and theory of architecture and the city.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135511000753 Published online by Cambridge University Press