The first significant overview of Western landscape design to be published in over a generation.

The Course of Landscape Architecture

*The Course of Landscape Architecture: A History of our Designs on the Natural World, from Prehistory to the Present*  
Christophe Girot

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The Course of Landscape Architecture
MARKETING PLAN

Academic Promotion
• Email marketing to UK tutors and university librarians in the fields of Landscape Design and Architecture.

Additional promotion to:
• 728 Archaeology tutors (emphasizing the book’s comprehensive coverage of very early developments of land use)
• T&H lists database for Garden Design, Garden History, Horticulture. Environmental Design, Environmental Planning/Management and Human Geography
• Co-marketing with the Landscape Institute (6502 registered members)
Roots
On the Origins of Landscapes

“The bird of gardens sang unto the rose,
New blown in the clear dawn: “Bow down thy head!
As fair as thou within this garden close,
Many have bloomed and died.” She laughed and said,
“That I am born to fade grieves not my heart
But never was it a true lover’s part
To vex with bitter words his love’s repose.”

Hafez of Shiraz

Everywhere we look, we see nature only through the lens of the man-made. Intervention in the landscape has become a reference point, by which we distinguish and experience the natural world. Landscape architecture is concerned with places and environments that are continuously under the influence of human control. Whereas geological factors and the forces of weather, water and topography shaped the earth over the course of millions of years, humans have had a significant impact on the environment only over the last ten millennia. Yet in terms of human culture this duration is almost an eternity, extending back into the furthest regions of sedentary prehistory, at the confines of our collective memory.

The poetic and religious meanings of early landscapes conferred a sense of sanctity on individual places, each uniquely crafted for a particular purpose. Whether these environments were used for providing sustenance, as dwelling places or to mark the rites of life and death, the art of landscape has symbolically set them apart. They are an intrinsic part of our culture and continue to evolve through time [1.1]. Any given landscape is evidence of accrued intelligence through topological transformation and an ongoing exchange of techniques, beliefs and interventions. For example, the location of a particular terrain, its specific arrangement within borders and the manner in which permanent and seasonal vegetation is handled touch not only on the constructed materiality and pragmatics of an individual culture, but also on the aesthetic and symbolic role of landscape as a source that nourishes beauty and reverence for nature [1.2].

Landscapes are the result of repeated spatial and conceptual interventions that bring about meaningful change.
The Bagh-i Fin, Iran

The oldest surviving example of a walled garden in Iran, the Bagh-i Fin, near Kashan, reaches as far back as 5000 BCE (1.31, 1.32a, 1.32b). Although the present garden is more recent, probably dating to the late 16th century, it sits on some of the oldest garden foundations known to humankind. Cradled in the foothills of the Zagros mountain range at an altitude of 1,600 metres (5,740 feet), and served by spring linked to an underground irrigation system, the garden faces the vast, wind-swept expanses of the Dasht-e Kavir, the Great Salt Desert. Bagh-i Fin follows the archetype perfectly in both its location and its form, while the highly structured space embodies the geometry of the chahar bagh or ‘four-plot’ garden, whose four rivers of life converge at a pool at its centre (1.33).

The numerous exquisite water channels of the Bagh-i Fin are fed by gravity from a bountiful source called the Suleyman Spring (1.35). Surging from the hillside behind the garden, this water has been channelled and stored in a pool ever since Tepe Sialk was settled nearly 8,000 years
‘Persephone was picking flowers – roses, crocus, violets – up and down the soft meadow … And the narcissus, which was grown as a lure for the flower-faced girl by Gaia … a wonderful thing in its splendour … Persephone was filled with a sense of awe, and she reached out with both hands to take hold of the pretty plaything. And the earth, full of roads leading every which way, opened up beneath her.’

Homer, Hymn to Demeter

Myth and the belief in sacred places inform our understanding of ancient landscapes. Natural sites that are breathtaking or otherwise unusual are imbued with special meaning: they need awe and respect, or are deemed to be holy [3.1]. At the dawn of sedentary civilization, even amid the early trappings of clans and settlements, humankind was united in worshipping these powerful places, brought together by fear of the unknown. Natural phenomena were attributed to gods [3.2]. The intertwining of nature and myth as the cornerstones of an ancient civilization is perhaps nowhere more clearly visible than in the landscapes of Greece. Historical records and archaeological artifacts, as well as a landscape almost unchanged since ancient times, reveal how earlier chthonic cults – such as the worship of fertility goddesses (fig. 3) – were gradually supplanted by Olympian deities such as Apollo, prompting humankind to become aware of its own condition and to take control of its own destiny.

The Minoan civilization

In the Neolithic period, when the forest cultures of Europe were creating their first semi-sedentary camps, settlements practising early forms of agriculture began to spread across Europe along the old merchant routes of the Mediterranean coast and the Danube [3.4]. The Minoan civilization – Europe’s first palatial culture – that arose on the island of Crete around 3500 BCE provides an interesting example of the arrival and gradual transformation of Mesopotamian and Egyptian influences in and around south-eastern Europe. The fertile Messara Plain, in the south of the island, is probably
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6.1, above

Ipsam eius nihilatur? Quibus, seorsum iure
renisra ni dolupta esequo volenis illande necum
faceprore plictiatatis perio. Ipsam eius nihilatur
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 faceprore plictiatatis perio. Ipsam eius nihicatur volenis illande?

Landscapes of the future will be influenced by the tools at our disposal. The digital revolution has enabled us to produce three-dimensional models of complex environments with unprecedented precision. Advanced spatial surveying technologies, such as geo-positioning and laser-scanning, have revolutionized our ability to quantity and analyse terrain, changing the way we see, record and interact with the world. This has been particularly useful in the management of large-scale projects, where the modelling of terrain with a high degree of altimetric precision is required. [12.17]

The artificial mound at Sigirino in Ticino, undertaken in collaboration with the AlpTransit railway company of Switzerland, was a highly challenging technical project that pushed the limits of environmental design. It was constructed using pioneering techniques of topology, modelling and morphing that allow precise topographic modelling and also combine advanced visualizing techniques in time-referenced
unique opportunity for the city that turned its back on its river in the past century, to return to a healthier, more natural relationship with the environment. This grassroots initiative promoting the L.A. River as a vital green thread running through the city is gathering momentum, and could serve as an example for countless other rivers in America. Private foundations have started to fund new footbridges, and even the Hollywood industry is pitching-in to a stretch of rehabilitated river. What used to be a place of utter dejection could gradually be transformed and become one of the most important leisure parks in Los Angeles. The natural topology of the river has become the partition upon which the city can recover its dream of a closer contact to the natural rhythms of its environment. [12.31b]

The Plateau de Saclay Campus project under the leadership of French landscape architect Michel Desvigne shows another facet of large-scale landscape thinking and planning. The site of Saclay, to the southwest of Paris, was rationally structured and drained in Baroque times to provide water for the neighbouring park at Versailles [12.32a]. The precision with which this piece of territory was drawn up and maintained over the past four centuries is consciously inscribed in the topological design of the new campus. The site which is over 7,000 ha (17,300 acres) is intended to become the new "silicon valley" of France, welcoming the most prestigious engineering and science schools as well as enterprises on a site provided with public amenities and an advanced mass transit system. The designer has taken great care to respect the long standing grid of the territory in his scheme [12.32b]. This is a top-down project in the best French centralized tradition and it will be interesting to see how this landscape mix of tradition and innovation will develop in years to come.

These examples clearly illustrate how designed natural landscapes can be developed to such a degree that they become a part of a new natural reality. To transform such severely threatened environments through topological methods requires an act of faith and strong political will. Without long-term support, it will not be possible to sustain the scale of this new approach to landscape design. Emphasis must be placed on the establishment of landscapes that can function as living frameworks. In a wider context, landscape reflects the values of respect and hope that make up the spirit of a place [12.33a, b]. Exemplary landscape projects on this scale are few and far between, and mostly still in the making, but they do raise hopes of a new dawn in landscape architecture.

Shaping terrain

In its search for a new vision, landscape architecture should focus once more on the time-honoured bonds between people and the land, thus reaffirming a sense of purpose in the face of devastating ecological concerns. The Tiete River in Sào
Paola is a perfect example of a natural environment that has become degraded through the dumping of rubbish and the local traffic infrastructure. It is precisely in cases like this that investigations should be made and proposals drawn up. A new bicycle path has now been laid out along its banks, and, although it requires some motivation to enjoy a ride in the present context, it is the first tangible sign of a significant change in mentality. Indeed, the Tiete River could become backbone of a comprehensive park system and provide a new landscape identity for the city. There is no such thing as environmental fatalism – just a lack of political will. We need to achieve meaning in the landscape, just we did in the very beginnings of human settlement, generating opposing elements and not merely establishing a new balance sheet between people and nature. Landscape must become a source of hope, strength and inspiration for whole regions and their inhabitants [12.34].

Since they pertain to landscape, the cultural questions thrown up by topological methods are truly fundamental. They relate to the ground itself, in all its complexity and contradiction. Through topology, landscape architecture may yet again become a force in society, capable of acting as a plinth for successive cultures, for the benefit of humankind. When it comes to actually ‘reading’ the ground conditions of a site, topology draws a clear distinction between design work on a physical model and the dream represented by an idealized plan. It marks a return to basic archetypal traditions where new forms of landscape can emerge, alongside an awareness of the pre-eminent importance of site, regardless of its condition. Through sensitivity to topology, landscape architecture will create new expressions of nature that place human concerns at their heart, bringing (one hopes) a sense of scale and dignity back to overpopulated cities and to wastelands. Only in this way will landscape architects be in a position to fulfill the basic human need to create beauty out of what is ugly, and to install meaningful forms of nature, rather than abandonment and oblivion, in the landscapes where we belong [12.35].

The hand of man makes a difference to our appreciation of landscapes, for it is only the craft of the gardener, the skill of the builder and the power of the douser that can contribute to a work’s significance and subtlety [12.36]. The reduction of our globalized landscapes to amorphous wetlands or scrub has led to an absence of poetry, craft, sensitivity and expertise in the secular language of landscape parks and gardens. Technological and scientific advances may help on a wider scale and when it comes to issues of ecology, but we can restore a landscape only once it is fully appreciated, recognized and ‘felt’ on a communal level. In the present climate the possible meaning that attaches to parks and gardens may have changed, but not their ultimate necessity. Imagine a city that could offer the luxury of peaceful gardens instead of stretches of wasteland to each of its inhabitants – a place of human comfort and exchange instead of desolation and disgust. Notions of grounding and rootedness can be reaffirmed topologically and encourage a sense that something is permanently in the making. It is this faith in design on a human scale, in all its complexity and contradiction, that will inspire the landscapes of the future [12.37].
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