

SESSIONS

Science and Memory

There exists a schism between the way landscape is understood scientifically either as a functional normative network or an ecological system, and the way the same place exists cognitively, poetically and emotionally for people. The juxtaposition of science and memory sheds light on one of the major contradictions in society's attitude towards nature. Landscape mirrors a multitude of heterogeneous and often conflicting ideologies that attempt to define a contemporary understanding of the world we are continually reshaping. We live intellectually troubled times, where dialogue seldom takes place between different forms of nature governed, on the one hand by secular poetics and myths and on the other by science and normative dogma. Part of the awkwardness in such a juxtaposition, is not due to the threat of some imminent environmental degradation, but rather to the rapid degeneration of our own symbolic reading and understanding of nature. A critical discussion on the coexistence of science and memory could help reveal underlying contradictions between mythical constructs of nature referring more often than not on mnemonics of the past, and more scientifically determined systemic forms of nature referring to present and future projections. Guests invited to this session are asked to take position on the subject of a possible reconciliation of science and memory in contemporary culture. A new landscape "topos" could be defined that would sharpen the immanence of this question for thinkers and designers alike, while embracing within reason, society's conscious engagement towards nature. How can we lend more credibility to the re-founding of an intelligence of nature, and with what arguments? Critical attention to the way we actually conceive our environment, both mnemonically and scientifically, will most certainly help us reclaim a stronger vision of landscape for the future.

Power and Terrain

Topology in landscape architecture has often been associated with the expression of an absolute or relative power in the past. In this age of pluralism and multitude how does this notion translate into the terrain? What power gets expressed in a landscape and how congruent can it be with the multitude it represents? Great spatial disparity and dispersion prevail in today's landscape; this can be attributed to the multitude of actors and factors shaping of the land. A general lack of coherence on a terrain is always troubling and calls for an entirely different territorial understanding. Continuity can only be retrieved from the contemporary landscape through an implicit structuring and orchestration terrain. Can more pluralistic values be reflected while still enhancing unity and clarity? Environmental consciousness and civic responsibility can work hand in hand to express a more unified approach to landscape. But landscape has shifted its focus away from terrain and more specifically the "terroir" founded on the understanding of

local topologies and lore, towards a more general and disconnected discourse on globalisation. The intellectual uprooting of landscape away from local custom can be traced back to unresolved issues of power on the terrain. Considerations about the intrinsic meaning of a path and how it unfolds, a rock, a tree, or even a tomb have little to do with economic prerogatives per se, but rather with deeper cultural beliefs and habits that are specifically meaningful to a place. Guests invited to this session are asked to draw on examples and take position on the relevance of power and terrain in contemporary society. Weaving meaning back into a particular landscape by revealing continuity can be achieved by enhancing various features and surface conditions as they come to express the purpose of woman and man in their daily life and destiny, call this power if you will. Striving for a more meaningful landscape capable of expressing society's goals and ambitions is still possible, as long as we have the will to craft a terrain, entrusting the common good with a deeper sense of power and meaning.

Method and Design

Territorial challenges due to climate change should invite us to rethink our approach to landscape architecture. This implies amongst other things the precise definition of an operative approach to landscape terrain modelling that could be directly implemented in the broader territorial field. The tendency over the past century has been to work pragmatically through large-scale landscape analysis and design in separate layers of information without any particular regard to the question of physical substrate and terrain modelling. This methodological fragmentation into sets of deductive analytical layers has remained highly abstract and completely detached from the actual reality of a place. It has been supplemented by the use of evocative photomontages that convey a strong eidetic understanding of nature. This highly reductive two-dimensional layered approach combined to strong eidetic evocations has enabled the transfer of an idea of nature from one place to the next without particular regard for the cultural specificity of a place. Can landscape architecture keep-on being practiced and taught under such normative constraints, or can a new understanding of topology bring about a renewed intelligence of terrain encompassing more within its specific continuity and complexity? Are we prepared to open-up to new modes of thinking that are unique to any given place? If so what would the appropriate tools and methods be? Guests invited to this session are asked to express their position in terms of method and design.

The current challenge in landscape architecture is to integrate heterogeneous fields of action that are both, physical and philosophical, scientific and poetic integrating past present and future potentials into a single meaningful whole. Topology is a method of design with tools of modelling and visualisation combined capable of responding to a specific terrestrial situation, defining fields of action over time that can merge on the plinth of a larger territorial continuity. Landscape architecture will be considerably reinforced with such new methods of design while remaining open to other disciplines, but only if we pay attention to the deeper poetic and philosophical meaning of a terrain and grasp as much about its actual making as its inherent meaning.