

Editorial: languages of landscape architecture

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THE PAST DECADE HAS BEEN CHARACTERISED by what Ward (1995) has described as 'The revenge of the humanities'. For three centuries, much of our 'modern' understanding of the world, and of the way we act within and upon it, had been structured by metaphors drawn from our experience of mechanical devices, cartography, financial ledgers and, more recently, electrical circuits and computers. Such metaphors continue to dominate political rhetoric and action in late modern societies. Contemporary theories of postmodernity, on the other hand, are distinguished by different models of understanding, based upon the arts and humanities. Language and text, for example, are now commonly used as metaphors for a widening range of phenomena, even for knowledge itself.

Landscape architecture has been grounded for much of its professional history in modernism. Our teaching programmes have been technocratic in form and content, and our understanding of the subjects and process of design have been characterised by the sort of models noted above: of system, plan and overlay. Despite theoretical upheaval in allied design disciplines, particularly architecture, both practice and education continue to be largely modernist in approach today. There are, however, increasing calls for landscape architecture to embrace the challenge of postmodernism as an artistic movement, and, less frequently, to confront postmodernity as a condition of life. With that challenge, linguistic concepts of 'text', 'narrative', 'poetics' and 'representation' become the new metaphors of understanding and action.

The articles in this and the next issue of *Landscape Review* are drawn from papers presented at a recent conference held at Lincoln University with the theme 'Languages of Landscape Architecture'. The aim of the conference was to explore the implications of the metaphor of language as a way of conceptualising the form, content and processes of landscape architecture. The papers fell into two broad categories: those that focused upon the use of linguistic metaphors in describing landscape as the subject of design, and those that focused upon the design process. This issue contains five articles that apply linguistic metaphors to landscape, with a particular emphasis upon the processes of naming and framing.

Our opening article is by George Seddon, who argues for a greater critical awareness of the inevitably anthropocentric language of landscape. Such awareness is essential, he believes, because naming strategies contain within them implicit values and prescriptions for action. The language of description is also the language of control.

The articles by Michèle Dominy and John Stuart-Murray provide complementary examples of naming strategies from Scotland and New Zealand. Dominy illustrates the way that runholders in the South Island high country of New Zealand use diminutive terms and family names to provide a sense of containment to the potentially overwhelming space of the mountainlands in

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which they live and work. In contrast, Stuart-Murray argues that in northern Europe, contemporary naming strategies reveal an increasing alienation of urban populations from the land which, as a consequence, becomes 'unnameable'.

Our other two articles apply linguistic metaphors to landscape representation. Heath Schenker compares the picturesque traditions of landscape painting in nineteenth century California and New Zealand, arguing that they reveal a common language that was underpinned by a shared ideology of bourgeois culture. Jacky Bowring also examines the picturesque, but draws it into the present with the concept of 'pidgin picturesque'. Using the example of the Lincoln University campus, she argues that picturesque 'language' has been transformed from an imported convention to a simplified 'pidgin' language of design. However, Bowring prefigures the emergence of a mature 'creole' design language, in which the imported picturesque conventions are reconciled with indigenous ecology and environment. She thus provides a bridge to the articles that will be featured in the next issue of *Landscape Review*, which focus upon applications of linguistic metaphors to design and management.

Editor's note: We are delighted to announce that Jacky Bowring has accepted an honorary position as editorial assistant to *Landscape Review*, and welcome her to the team.

REFERENCE

Ward S (1995) The revenge of the humanities: reality, rhetoric, and the politics of postmodernism. *Sociological Perspectives* 38(2):109–128.
