

Think Global, Think Local: Critical Regionalism and Landscape Architecture

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THIS ISSUE OF *Landscape Review* is one of four volumes of the proceedings of “CELA 2004 Here or There? The Global and the Local”, the annual conference of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture held at Lincoln University, Canterbury New Zealand, 25–29 June 2004. The issue comprises the eight plenary papers presented at the conference, six of which are published as full double-blind peer review articles, and the remaining two as reports. This editorial summarises the main arguments from the opening presentation, which set the agenda for the conference, and establishes the context within which the plenary papers were selected and presented. We have also taken the opportunity to make some observations about contemporary pressures on the discipline of landscape architecture, and to offer some suggestions about directions in which the discipline might move in addressing the interrelationship between the global and the local.

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE: GLOBALISATION AND CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPES

Although the setting for this discussion is framed by traditional protocols of scholarship, awareness of the effects of globalisation now extends from the pages of academic journals into the mainstream of contemporary culture. The dramatic rate of innovation and use of information technology over the past two decades has transformed the sense of space, place and identity for hundreds of millions of people worldwide, as the ‘Information Superhighway’ has bypassed the ‘Global Village’ and headed straight for the ‘World City’, a parallel digital world of virtual supermarkets, Amazon.com, virtual cemeteries and memorials. Everything appears to be out there in cyberspace. The realm of ‘total flow’ engulfs the individual, the locale and the region, and people often find themselves more ‘connected’ to other people in other places on the globe than they are to their neighbours and local environment. As the theorist Manuel Castells has put it: “Space and time, the material foundations of human experience, have been transformed, as the space of flows dominate the space of places, and timeless time supersedes the clock time of the industrial era” (Castells, 2000).

Computer technologies not only form the shape of contemporary culture in a pragmatic sense, particularly through the digital media, but they also shape our vision metaphorically. Just as the metaphor of the machine once informed western cultural understanding of the world, so today computer analogies are becoming naturalised as models for design, planning, and indeed life itself. MVRDV’s

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Datascares are a potent example of this adoption of an electronic metaphor in design, or, as Frampton put it, one of “relative impotence” (Frampton, 2003). However, the aesthetic that has come to be associated with computer-generated or visualised design has also been criticised for its generic, over-perfected quality. In the fashion industry, for example, there has been a reaction against this pervasive smoothness, with so-called deconstructed design, which is deliberately poorly finished, with rips and tears to counter the sleek tailoring made possible by computer-generated pattern making. A roughly finished version of landscape architecture is seen, for example, in Peter Latz’s work at Emscher Park in Duisberg, Germany, where industrial and ecological chaos are an antidote to the frequent subjugation of such elements in much contemporary design.

Architects Peter Zumthor and Steven Holl are bellwethers for this countering of the dominance of the virtual, with Zumthor recently proclaiming: “We walk on floors, goddamnit, we don’t walk on images! You cannot live in a TV box. We are here physically on earth, not virtually”. He adds: “There are signs that the body is in danger, it wants to come back! You can see this in the last 20 years in the arts. We’re living in a world of images. Substance – real stuff – has to be emphasised” (Lane, 2004).

On one hand, therefore, the desire for the global is consuming, in all senses of the word. The rapid dissemination of news and fashion via media networks implodes spatial differentials and alters, forever, the nature of ‘connection’. The yearning for the global is seen in places like Singapore, where Orchard Road, the main shopping street, is the second most vivid place for most Singaporeans (after their homes) (Yeung and Savage, 1995: 85). They find aesthetic delight in its symbolising of modernisation, westernisation and consumerism. Resorts throughout South East Asia reflect the homogenising influence of “Bali Style”, applied uniformly in design, despite regional differences, while the global market in fast food sees familiar brands turning up on every street corner in every country ... Starbucks, McDonalds, Burger King

On the other hand, for many, globalisation remains a threatening spectre. The increasing power of multinational corporations has affected the economic and social foundations in many countries. Anger against so called free trade and the spread of global brands is apparent in anti-globalisation campaigns around the world. Resistance is expressed in a number of ways – including direct action protests, campaigns for local food, and public policy recognition of local character and heritage. According to Giddens, it is precisely a resistance to globalisation that “is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world” (1999: 13). One profound irony is the way in which ‘the local’ has acquired economic value within the global economy, as consumers seek products, locations for their homes, and recreation activities that embody, at least symbolically, the qualities of community and authentic experience that are frequently destroyed through globalisation (Zimmerman, 2001).

These polarised responses to globalisation present a challenge for landscape architecture. Globalisation is expressed and experienced in a range of areas of

relevance to landscape architecture professionals and educators, for example, with the ongoing push for trade liberalisation and the globalisation of products and professional services. The education market is also a considerable area of globalisation, or as it is perhaps more euphemistically termed, “internationalisation”. More fundamentally, the acceleration of the development of the built environment and the changing nature of “cities” questions the currency of landscape architecture as a profession, with the emergence of landscape urbanism as some kind of hybrid discipline that seeks to deal with the contemporary urban condition.

Yet, while landscape urbanism might be the ‘sexy’ face of the dissolution of architecture and landscape, the flipside is the ‘nowhere’ of suburbia, and the dislocated and dysfunctional juxtaposition of activity and abandonment, investment and disinvestment, place and space that characterises contemporary “splintering urbanism” (Graham and Marvin, 2001).

The city is everywhere; therefore there is no longer any city ... We no longer live in cities, but territories (territory from *terreo*, to be afraid, to feel terror?!). The very possibility of establishing the confines of the city seems inconceivable today, or, at least reduced to a purely technical administrative exercise (Cacciari, 2002: 106).

Sprawling conurbations are not limited to the ‘scapes’ or ‘territories’ of central Europe, or the vast tracts of (sub)urbanised land in the United States. In Australia, Brisbane is being termed the “200 km City”, and in New Zealand the proliferation of “lifestyle” blocks, or “hobby farms” is becoming known as “rural sprawl”. Dolores Hayden has a new book called *A Field Guide to Sprawl* in which, in the manner of a natural history guidebook, she identifies the manifestations of the contemporary suburban condition. She offers acronyms such as TOAD (temporary, obsolete, abandoned or derelict site), and neologisms such as Zoomburb, which is a suburb growing faster than a Boomburb. Other memorable terms, such as “litter on a stick” for a billboard, all help to create a nomenclature for this type of landscape (Hayden, 2004).

The quality of these vast sprawling suburbs is a real concern for landscape architecture. As Kenneth Frampton comments in his recent piece, “Critical Regionalism Revisited”:

Notwithstanding the occasional bucolic suburb, it is overwhelmingly evident that our suburbanized dystopia is fast becoming a universal late-modern condition. The chances are that little of this will ever be rebuilt or even reformulated in a culturally significant way. Urban sprawl seems to be here to stay, and apart from the possibility of modifying it on a piecemeal basis through earthwork interventions of various kinds, one can only envisage its eventual long-term ruin and abandonment. Given what has happened to the ‘Brownfield’ legacy of the last century – those lands left derelict by the ravages of industrialization – one can hardly be sanguine about the future demolition or restoration of sprawl (Frampton, 2003).

SIGNS OF RESISTANCE

The conflation of time and space in contemporary culture and the ever-widening networks of global power and investment, together with the paradox of increasing

mobility to, and enhanced visibility of, places that look and feel increasingly the same (Relph's "instant environment machine", 1976) have stimulated resistance at a number of levels within the design disciplines. Philosophically, the growth of interest in phenomenology emerged as a response to the overwhelming influence of technocratic modernity. It continues as a reaction to the relativism and apparent nihilism of post-modernity. Aligned with this has been the stubborn advocacy of 'place'. Despite the materialist critique of the notion of 'sense of place' as socially exclusive romanticism, communities and designers repeatedly rebuild the barricades of their physical and conceptual enclaves against the waves of global change.

A related consequence of the conceptual collapse of geographical space and time has been a shift of focus towards the deepening of a sense of time at particular points in space – excavating, revealing, and reinventing memory of past events and possibilities (Lassus, 1998; Girot, 2000). As a result, there is on the one hand a rapidly homogenising world of "universal technique" (Frampton, 1983), while on the other, scattered but stubborn places and points of resistance.

The tension between the global and the local in landscape architecture, between here or there, is the central problematique for the CELA 2004 conference. But whilst the opposition of the global and the local is a conceptually appealing and easily grasped approach to the analysis of landscape change in late modernity (Swaffield and Primdahl, forthcoming), it falls short as a creative design or planning strategy. As Carl Steinitz notes in his paper, the different demands and imperatives of macro- and micro-scale change are practically and conceptually difficult to reconcile. A simple duality between these two poles, between the macro-scale, global space of flows and the micro-scale, local space of places (Castells, 2000) provides an insufficient framework for the consideration of intentional landscape change. Many educators therefore turn to another stubborn concept, that of the region, to provide a framework for investigation, understanding and design.

HERE AND NOW: THE REGION IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Regionalism has a long academic history, dating back to the geography of Strabo. Tzonis and Lefaivre (1996, 2003) trace its modern expression, in the sense of self-consciously identifying with an area, to the writings of Goethe, Ruskin and Proust. While historically appealing as a description of distinctive areas on the surface of the earth, however, regions have a number of limitations in the current climate of pluralistic, multiple connections and dis-connections, where not only the nature of cities, but the nature of nature is forever changed. As Chambers puts it, contemporary "habitats" suffer from a problem of "leakiness" (as cited in Pratt, 1999: 154). The notion of 'difference' is no longer an adequate gauge to determine a notion of region, when, as Clifford suggests, "difference is encountered in adjoining neighbourhoods; and the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth" (as cited in Pratt, 1999: 154).

Furthermore, whilst regions might arguably reflect a sense of belonging to a cultural or language group, they can also be a deliberate political creation. Region and nation can become synonymous, and regionalism has been tainted during

the twentieth century with its adoption by fascism, most acutely expressed in the “blood and soil” philosophy of the Nazi Heimat and parallel totalitarian regimes of the 1930s (Tzonis and Lefaivre, 1996).

This very desire to feel a sense of belonging to a place can also fall victim to the capitalist forces that drive the processes of globalisation, with the contemporary notion of region becoming appropriated as a commodity. While this sometimes occurs in a “bottom-up” situation, with small towns creating ‘icons’ of identity – the syndrome of Big Things (Australia’s Big Pineapple and Big Banana, New Zealand’s Salmon and Kiwifruit, and the numerous giant figures of the mythical lumberjack, John Bunyan, scattered across America) – there is also a “top-down” shaping of regional symbols. As Frederic Jameson wrote in his critique of Frampton’s critical regionalism, one of the frailties of regionalism in the era of late capitalism is the prospect of “post-Fordism”. Fordism and classical imperialism created a sense of homogeneity via the centralisation and subsequent imposition of design products. Post-Fordism, however, uses computer technology to customise products for individual markets. Such marketing is intended to suggest that the companies “‘respect’ the values and cultures of the local population by adapting its various goods to suit those vernacular languages and practices” (Jameson, 1994: 255). In New Zealand we can cynically view McDonalds’s offering of the “Kiwiburger” as a deft commercial move of condescending to a region’s desire for identity. Jameson explains that what happens is “corporations are inserted into the very heart of local and regional culture, about which it becomes difficult to decide whether it is authentic any longer (and indeed whether that term still means anything)” (1994: 255).

What Jameson is describing could perhaps be termed “cynical regionalism”, the pandering to local desires for identity. While we might suspect that such a process would be confined to commodities such as hamburgers and cars, we can also look to this in the context of landscape architecture, and landscape architectural education. Richard Weller observes:

Landscape architecture has, as everyone knows, tapped into a profitable trade in feigning intimacy with local contexts. Sometimes this business of symbolising place might encapsulate the pride and resilience of local identity, but more often than not it smacks of insecurity, ideology and asphyxiated imagination (Weller, 2001: 12).

Multinational firms practising in a range of cultural settings can be particularly guilty of a landscape post-Fordism when working in varying local situations – the “Main Street” syndrome in which the same underlying formula is represented in local guise. Cynical regionalism is also a reminder to educators of the need to be self-critical in terms of internationalising education.

HERE AND THERE: CRITICAL REGIONALISM

It is against this background of regionalism as a romantic or cynical manipulation of symbols that the idea of critical regionalism has emerged. While originating in the field of architectural theory, critical regionalism is strongly related to landscape, providing prospects and opportunity for a truly reflective and critical response

to the interconnections between landscape and architecture, between the global and the local, between 'nature' and 'culture', between here and there.

Tzonis states that the "critical" in critical regionalism was derived from the Kantian concept of critical, or a "barring, exposing and evaluation of the implicit presuppositions of an argument, or a way of thinking" (Tzonis and Lefaivre, 2003: 21). For Frampton, the connection is more with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. In both cases, it implies a self-conscious reflection upon not only the explicit relationships within a landscape, but also the underlying relationships, and the possibility of alternatives.

CRITICAL REGIONALISM AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Much of the discourse on critical regionalism has been focused on architecture, reflecting the disciplinary focus of the lead theorists. Yet the potential of the role of landscape in the inflection of the regional is becoming recognised even within this discourse. In his *Seven Points for the Millennium: An Untimely Manifesto*, Frampton identified "landscape form as a redemptive strategy" and said he is convinced that "architectural and planning schools throughout the world should give much greater emphasis to the cultivation of landscape as an overarching system rather than concentrating exclusively, as they have tended to do up to now, on the design of buildings as aesthetic objects" (Frampton, 2000: 78). The significance of landscape was reiterated in Frampton's recent piece, "Critical Regionalism Revisited", where he identifies it as the "sole remaining agent capable of mediating the chaos of the megalopolis" (2003). Tzonis and Lefaivre's recent book, *Critical Regionalism* (2003), is notable for its inclusion of several landscape designs and a number of architecture/landscape hybrids.

Our selection of the theme for CELA 2004, "Here or There: The Global and the Local", was an explicit attempt to generate a critical discourse on the issues of globalism and regionalism from a landscape architectural perspective. The selection of the topic was also an acknowledgement that CELA 2004 was CELA's first conference offshore, the first hosted outside North America. The elision of the USA and 'global' is not uncommon in contemporary discourse in a range of arenas, and, for many who aspire to be part of a *global* culture, it is frequently a desire to buy into (literally) *American* culture. Here or There? is therefore a question particularly for American educators, to prompt a critical reflection on cultural horizons.

Although landscape is increasingly recognised within the critical regionalist discourse, one of the challenges for pursuing a critically regionalist response in landscape architecture has been the baggage that critical regionalism has in the architectural context. As a buzzword in architecture schools in the 1980s it became connected with a particular group of architects (for example, Aalto, Utzon, Botta), and developed connotations of a romantic regionalism, however much the intent was to avoid this. Frampton has been criticised for using "starchitects" as his exemplars, that is to say, architects who have a high profile on the world stage, and are just as likely to work outside their own region as within it.

Beyond the baggage of the name, however, there remains currency in the continued exploration of the mediation of the global and local in design, and for our purposes, within landscape architecture. In an earlier presentation (Swaffield and Bowring, 1999), we reviewed a number of the dimensions and strategies identified by critical regional theorists for their relevance to landscape architecture. Here we summarise briefly five key features of particular relevance to the conference theme: a phenomenological stance, concern for the tactile and the tectonic, a focus on memory, and a design strategy of de-familiarisation and indirect borrowing.

Sensing of place: phenomenology

Phenomenology is an underlying concern of critical regionalism, highlighting the importance of direct and reflective experience in capturing the particularity of a place and region. This, according to Frampton, is one of the means by which design can be inflected more precisely in terms of 'place', resisting the imposition of universal culture. A focus upon qualities that cannot be transferred through digital hyperspace both requires and enables designers and communities to celebrate and reassert the heterogeneity of landscape. This is well illustrated in New Zealand by the 'problem' of ecological aesthetics, where the hegemony of the visual and ingrained ideas of picturesque 'beauty' that came with a colonial culture has resulted in the destruction or compromising of many ecological sites. The picturesque still creates powerful resistance to design strategies that seek greater indigenous ecological integrity, and a phenomenological framework that embraces and accentuates dimensions other than the purely visual may provide some underlying rationale of how to move beyond the dominance of 'pidgin picturesque' aesthetics (Bowring, 1997).

Emphasising the tactile

The dominance of virtual media has reduced the sense of the tactile, in an even more pronounced fashion than was anticipated in early writings on critical regionalism. However, reaction or resistance to this is occurring in a range of situations. The Venice Architecture Biennale of 2002 exemplified a shift towards a concern with reconnecting with materiality. Architectural critic and curator Deyan Sudjic, director for the biennale, "Next", made the following commentary:

Architecture recently has often been presented as if it were a form of installation art, or dominated by cyber space or video. This biennale will concentrate instead on the physical, the material and the tactile (Sudjic, 2002).

In landscape architecture, work by designers such as Shlomo Aronson illustrates the potential of landscape materiality as a driver of a critical regionalist response, shown, for example, through the use of stone and water to evoke the experience of the desert wadi within a courtyard on the Ben-Gurion University campus.

Shaped by the tectonic

A closely related feature of recent landscape architecture has been the growing understanding and celebration of deep form in landscape, illustrated well in the "Eco-Revelatory Design: Nature Constructed/Nature Revealed" exhibit and

catalogue that was featured at the 1999 ASLA/CELA meeting. In particular, advocates for a shift from passive 'scenic' aesthetics to dynamic 'ecological' aesthetics (Gobster, 1999) emphasise the need to create landscape patterns that express and respond to underlying ecological and hydrological processes with elegance and inspiration. But it is important to recognise that deep landscape forms may be both inherited from nature (for example, valley systems, floodways) and actively shaped from an understanding of process (The Emerald Necklace, for example).

Furthermore, in the modern metropolis, resilient deep form can also be created through cultural interventions – the Copenhagen Finger Plan both directed development and created space for new forests in the interstices. One of the more innovative recent projects in New Zealand has been the way that the Wetlands and Waterways Unit in Christchurch City Council has utilised a city-wide Asset Management Strategy to promote the ecological restoration of formerly piped and channelled watercourses as new linking elements within an expanding city (see Swaffield and Primdahl, forthcoming).

Borrowing indirectly

Tzonis and Lefaivre (2003) refer to indirect borrowing. A New Zealand example of what this might mean, which is also of relevance in its reference to a synthesis of architecture and landscape, is Andrew Patterson's Summer House in Auckland, which turns away from the superficial indicators of indigenous architecture (such as carving and materials), towards the *concept* of the marae. A marae is a meeting ground, and is central to Maori and Polynesian cultures as a place of peace, debate, reconciliation and cultural creativity. In designing this inner-city house, Patterson used the model of the marae to create a sense of inward space within the hostile surroundings of the city. The materials and aesthetic are part of an international *vocabulary*, while the cultural *syntax* is of the region. Ypma describes how from the outside the house "when closed has the appearance of an impervious 'shed' with no doors, windows or openings of any description ... a fortress in aluminium planking" (Ypma, 1996: 144–145). But this unwelcoming façade gives way to a courtyard open to the sky, including a swimming pool, and "a series of monolithic structures, also very much part of Polynesian tradition, standing guard around this 'modern marae'" (Ypma, 1996: 149).

Here and then: issues of memory and nostalgia

The desire for a deepening of memory in place was noted earlier as a characteristic act of resistance to globalisation, but, as demonstrated, it can be fraught with pitfalls. One of the antithetical poles of Frampton's critical regionalism was the nostalgic, for its connotations of a sentimental, romantic regionalism. This is a difficult area to traverse, yet it remains of significance when speaking of connecting with place. Nigel Thrift (1999) discusses the phenomenological experience of place, and refers to the notion of "competencies", which are the source of the hauntings that give a place feeling. With reference to memory he relates Derrida's concept of the "cinder", something that testifies to the fire, but is there as a remainder.

Sébastien Marot's recent book, *Sub-urbanism and the Art of Memory*, emphasises a concern with memory as a source of identity in contemporary design. Marot asserts:

The century of expanding cities has passed. Ours is now the time of deepening territories. Modern nomadism will be no more successful than the simulacra of literal memory in making bearable the flattening-out of places and their increasing conformity. The earth has become too small for us even to dream of not exploring, everywhere, its fourth dimension (Marot, 2003: 86).

This is perhaps a sense of reconnecting to the sense of occupation in a region (Olwig, 2002), a return to the concerns of *landschaft*, or the occupied milieu, rather than a concern with *landskip*, the visual landscape. *Landschaft* signals a means of overcoming the "lite regionalism" that is produced by a reliance on icons of regionalism, rather than those more indirect aspects of a place. As Corner notes: "The emphasis shifts from object appearances to processes of formulation, dynamics of occupancy, and the poetics of becoming" (1999: 159). This shift is very evident in many of the papers presented at CELA 2004.

THE PUBLISHED PAPERS

The papers are published in order of presentation, as the sequence reflects the structure and progress of the conference itself. The first three offer diverse responses to the challenge set by the conference theme. Robert Thayer argues for a radical resistance to globalisation. In "Sustainable City Regions: Re-localising Landscapes in a Globalising World", he presents a series of different, possible scenarios of the future and argues for the bioregional approach, in which regions become self-organising systems defined by their ecological function as well as their human history. Thayer's arguments are illustrated largely by reference to his adopted home of Northern California.

In contrast, Rod Barnett aligns his philosophical position with the paradigm of landscape urbanism. In "Artweb: A Nonlinear Model for Urban Development" he advocates a synthesis of architecture and landscape – a cyborg perhaps born of digital technology and ecology – that celebrates the transient and contingent nature of contemporary cities. Nonetheless, the particular project reported by Barnett (in Auckland, New Zealand) is based upon real interventions into the urban fabric, and in the telling, at least, retains a sense of groundedness.

Mira Engler tackles the (im)morality of global technology head on, with a detailed examination of the challenges and potentials in dealing with the aftermath of military technology that is literally global in its reach, and potentially global in its effects. "Post-nuclear Monuments, Museums and Gardens" offers a form of redemption through engagement with the redundant landscapes of nuclear testing in the United States Midwest. By analogy, the argument states that it is not possible to resist globalisation by withdrawal into an enclave: it must be directly confronted.

Joan Woodward deals with 'waste' landscapes of a different scale and with very different dynamics. Working in Southern California, she reports on analyses

of the way in which abandoned urban landscapes – including parks and gardens – act as sites in which introduced species can adapt and establish new hybrid ecologies. “Letting Los Angeles Go: Lessons from Feral Landscapes” celebrates the exotic, rather than the indigenous, and at the conference clearly challenged many long-held positions. But, as Woodward points out, the human ecology of Southern California is profoundly ‘exotic’ and already dominates the landscape. Recognition of the potential of exotic flora that has come with the human colonists is long overdue.

The next two papers focus on education. In “Rhetoric and Reality: The Internationalisation of Education as Experienced in the Cross-cultural and Cross-disciplinary Studio”, Catherin Bull reports and reflects upon the programme operated by Melbourne University in conjunction with partners in Thailand and France, through which graduate students and faculty exchange and work collaboratively across three continents. A key lesson here is the need for very carefully refined objectives and teaching strategies. Amy Archambeau and Pat Taylor explore a different dimension of globalisation. In “The Future of Academic Statistics: Boon or Bane?” they analyse some implications of the seemingly relentless drive by university administrators for comparative metrics of staff and student performance. This aspect of globalisation has received little attention, but in effect it represents the application of universal management and accounting techniques across different cultures and countries, and Archambeau and Taylor offer guidance on how landscape educators can use these comparisons constructively.

The final two papers illustrate the key point made by Carl Steinitz that there cannot be single solutions for all scales. Linda Jewell offers an inspiring account of the way in which landscape architects, who were working well before either ‘globalisation’ or ‘critical regionalism’ had been conceptualised, developed methods of working that highlighted the tactile qualities of site. The examples shown in “On-site Insight: The Merits of Facilitating Incremental Design Decisions in the Field” resonate powerfully with contemporary theoretical directions, but pose major challenges in terms of current contract and employment practice.

In the final plenary, Carl Steinitz illustrated why he is one of the leading educators in CELA. Drawing upon several previous papers and presentations, he crafts a compelling case for design and planning strategies that are sensitive to the possibilities for intervention, with differing emphases at different scales. “From Project to Global: On Landscape Planning and Scale” is an important reminder that the global and the local constitutes not only a relationship of space and time, but also of levels of control and flexibility.

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