

Editorial: unpacking landscape baggage

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AS A PROFESSION, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE has been inclined to promote practice over theory. Walker and Simo, for example, believe that 'landscape architects tend to be doers rather than critics or philosophers [and] they have tended to focus on the practical work at hand' (Walker and Simo 1994, p.4). The lack of a theoretical perspective has meant that much of the practice of landscape architecture is taken for granted, rarely challenged, and a number of myths and legends have evolved. However, the emergence of a discipline of landscape architecture is accompanied by a ruffling of the smooth surface of practice.

In this issue of *Landscape Review*, papers by Vernon and Field reflect this trend towards self-criticism in the discipline of landscape architecture. Whether examining the historical roots of design, in the case of Vernon, or questioning the way we approach landscape, as in Field's paper, it is evident that landscape architecture has reached a significant threshold. Through addressing the taken-for-granted history and practice of landscape architecture there is a sense that we have reached a critical point in a journey, and it is now time to unpack.

Vernon's focus is on the practice of one particular landscape architect, Walter Burley Griffin. Through an exposition of Griffin's ideals and endeavours, Vernon identifies significant aspects of the foundation of landscape practice in Australia and New Zealand. The connection with nature is integral in the work of Griffin and his wife Marion Mahony but, as Vernon emphasises, it was not pristine nature that was expressed in design, but an idealised, cultivated nature. Despite the Griffins' clear interest in native flora, ultimately the concern was not ecological, but aesthetic. Vernon's observation that the Griffins identified the native flora and indigenous landscape as central to Australia's national identity contextualises contemporary debates on regional identity.

It is the myth of 'reading the landscape' that is unpacked in Field's paper. Fully naturalised as landscape-speak, the connotations of the phrase are rarely questioned. Field asks, 'Are "language" and "text" appropriate metaphors for interpreting landscape?'. In seeking to answer the question he compares semiotics with an example of landscape assessment, revealing the presence of the former in the latter.

In both papers the meticulous unpacking allows an examination and appraisal of landscape baggage, a challenge to the way myths and legends are unwittingly perpetuated in education and practice. This process of unpacking is, however, not destructive. Once the baggage is exposed and aired we have a better idea of the origins and legacies of landscape architectural practice and history. Both Vernon and Field repack their material in a way that leaves us refreshed, informed, and ready to continue the journey.

REFERENCE

Walker, Peter; Simo, Melanie (1994) *Invisible Gardens: The Search for Modernism in the American Landscape*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press

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