

# *Gardens without meaning*

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IN A NUMBER OF RECENT TEXTS devoted to history and theory in landscape architecture the assertion has appeared that modernist landscape architects emphasised form over content in their work. This is reflected in the widely held and more general claim that landscape architecture of the modern period was not interested in meaning. This paper counters this claim in two ways. First, it attempts to show that modernist landscape architects were indeed interested in meaning, but that their interest was expressed in ways which have not been appreciated in critical commentary. Secondly, it argues that the essentialist model of landscape meaning which has been deployed in the justification of the above claim is inadequate both for the purpose to which it has been put, and as a theoretical foundation for contemporary practice in general. An alternative model of landscape meaning is proposed. This model is derived in the first instance from contemporary readings of related disciplines in the social sciences (sociology, cultural geography, anthropology) and in particular from the interpretative methodology known as hermeneutics.

## KEY WORDS

*Modernist landscape architecture  
Landscape meaning  
Hermeneutics  
Representation*

SINCE VERY EARLY TIMES, writing about gardens has been characterised by an interest in meanings. An ideology of signification has developed not only in texts, however, but also around the practice of garden-making. In recent years this interest in landscape meaning has led to a widespread belief that the landscape architecture of the modern period actually ignored meaning, and that modernist landscape architects were more interested in other aspects of practice, such as form-making and the delivery of functional efficiency. It is also widely noted that this 'meaningless' period is finished: late twentieth century landscape architecture is once again characterised by an interest in meanings. But, how accurate is this interpretation? Nowhere, I believe, has it been satisfactorily established that modern landscape architecture ignored meaning. This conclusion seems to be the result of a number of assumptions shared by current writers about modernism, art, interpretation and meaning itself. In examining the claim that landscape modernism ignored meaning I wish to argue for two counter-proposals. The first is that many landscapes of modernism in fact had a profound semantic dimension, and the second is that contemporary landscape architecture critics seem on the whole to be committed to a model of landscape architectural meaning which is based on a vestigial essentialism. I will argue that the claim that modernist landscape architects abandoned meaning is actually the product of a transcendental conception of meaning as eternal, universal and abstract. This lingering essentialist model of meaning is invoked in discourse as 'tradition', and by the use of depth metaphors which characterise as 'empty formalism' and 'rhetorical gesturing', any designs which 'simply' reflect the 'superficial, banal and misinformed' beliefs of 'ambient culture' rather than those of a perceptive and educated elite.

Confusion as to what is meant by landscape meaning permeates the discipline of landscape architecture. While issues to do with the social construction of environmental meaning have been debated widely in other social science disciplines,<sup>1</sup> critical discussion of how, for instance, meaning is

## REFLECTIONS

constructed in private gardens is seldom encountered in landscape architectural theory. Properly speaking, study of the definition of meaning is the first step in an analysis of meaning in landscape architecture. A reluctance to take this step has caused a number of problems in the critical evaluation of both academic and professional landscape architectural production. That the discipline embraces an extremely wide range of significative events and practices underlines the need for attention to be paid to how different peoples construct meaning in the landscape. For instance, how can we begin to find the common ground between the plant preferences of male gardeners in Palmerston North and a grand survey of symbol migration in the gardens of Eastern Europe if the deeper issues which tie these themes together have not been theorised? That mimesis, constituted as the natural mode of representation by Plato (and the most powerful mode in landscape), for example, has in most disciplines now largely been abandoned as an explanatory model, is not acknowledged. An underlying thesis of this paper is that representations of landscape, whether of the city, suburb, countryside or wilderness, are not mimetic. Rather, they are a product of the discourse in which they are written. It is not my intention to argue that gardens do not have meaning. On the contrary, I hope to contribute to the discussion of meaning in gardens. What I have to say is not new—but it has to be said.

### *Modernism*

My impulse is to avoid attempting to define modernism, for there is no single 'modernism', the meanings of this word being plural, relative and often contradictory. It will be useful nevertheless to trace briefly some outlines so that readers may locate their own understanding of the term in relation to the way it is used here. Following Harvey (1990) I situate the locus of modernism within Baudelaire's statement that 'modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable'.<sup>2</sup> It will be my contention that modern landscape architects attempted to discover, by means of a commitment to the eternal and immutable, the meaning of the ephemeral and the ambivalent which surrounded them in the fast, disorienting decades that encompassed the world wars of this century.

The desire to snatch intensity and meaning from the flux should be seen against the background of interlinked ideas and beliefs that had conditioned Western culture and society for 200 years. The Enlightenment assumption that there was only one possible answer to any question implied that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if only we could picture and represent it correctly. The philosophers of the seventeenth century (Descartes, Locke, Leibniz) and their contemporary scientists (Galileo, Kepler, Newton) were responsible for new ways of thinking about nature and society, compared to Renaissance understanding (Toulmin 1990). Their work, which generated the so-called 'Enlightenment project', had consequences which were still driving both the arts and the sciences, and which underlay modern assumptions about family, society, nation, race, gender, law, culture and religion.

The Enlightenment project, and the modern world view that it characterised, took it as axiomatic that 'there existed a single correct mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this is what scientific and mathematical endeavours were all about), would provide the means to Enlightenment ends' (Harvey 1990, p.27). These ends were such things as liberty, equality and fraternity.

The modernism of the twentieth century, while underwritten by faith in instrumental reason and scientific progress, in reality had to contend with the complexities and ambiguities of life that the new technology and mass market conditions introduced. New conditions of production (the machine, the factory, urbanisation), circulation (the new systems of transport and communications) and consumption (the rise of mass markets, advertising, mass fashion) required that artists, writers, architects, composers, poets, thinkers, philosophers and, eventually, landscape architects had to make strategic choices regarding this, the material basis of modern life. They had to position themselves politically as to whether the artist embraced, dominated or swam with the socio-political processes of the day. This positioning affected both the way these 'cultural producers' thought about the flux and change that surrounded them, and the political terms in which they represented the eternal and immutable (Harvey 1990, p.20).

These are the important threads for this paper. Modern landscape architects, despite cubism's shattering of perspective, Eliot's literary collage of relativity in space and time and the horrors of World War I, continued, like architects and artists throughout Europe and the United States, to affirm a universal and eternal substrata to consciousness and existence.

I focus on the United States, where most of the authors I discuss are based. Just as modernist architecture came to prominence in the United States and was/is more visible there, some American landscape architects developed a more distinctive modernist idiom than those practising in other English-speaking countries. This does not mean that the discussion is not pertinent for the discipline in a global sense. My argument, however, locates a future for landscape architecture in the Asia-Pacific region; it is therefore to this region that my Conclusion is addressed.

### *Meaning in gardens*

Ever since the gardens of China became known to the Hellenistic Greeks, landscapes have served as, among other things, allegorical settings (the Garden of Eden, the Roman de la Rose), symbols (of the universe, political power, order, nature), metaphors (the harmony of opposites, nature/culture relations), utopias (the Garden of the Hesperides, the City Beautiful) and heterotopias (cemeteries, theme parks). Gardens have always been more than their functional dimension. Countless statements in both popular garden literature and scholarly texts attest to the garden as a locus of cultural, metaphysical and spiritual meaning. While meaning in gardens has received some recent critical attention, contemporary landscape discourse seems either not to be cognisant of advances in theoretical discussions of meaning, or else has rejected these. Late twentieth century garden analyses mostly work within a paradigm of meaning in which signification is constructed as a transcendental order that is true for all people through all time (the essentialist model). This is the framework I seek to reject. In its place is the urgent call for attention to be paid to what is arguably the one major insight that underlies recent thought in the humanities and the social sciences: that the meaningfulness of an item is not determined by direct unmediated correspondence between concept and object (Crowther 1995, p.9). 'Rather the relation between these elements is unstable, and determined by its position within an overall field of signification. This field itself, however, is not

an enclosed totality. It is open and subject to constant refiguration' (Crowther 1995). My proposal is that theory, instead of establishing the meaning of an artefact (such as a garden) by means of analysis based on methodological rigour, should join with the ordinary everyday users of environments in constructing meaning in order to understand or elucidate, rather than to find the truth. The landscape will be read differently according to who the reader is, and the theorist will simply make the standpoint from which they are interpreting any particular landscape as transparent as possible. Neutrality and certainty will not be possible within this framework, and the interpretations will not have a truth-value. Meaning will be contested and relative.

When recent texts (eg Krog 1991; Hunt 1992; Treib 1995) claim that modernist landscape architects ignored meaning they seem implicitly to be referring to a field of signification that has emerged in landscape only relatively recently, in what has come to be called place theory. Although the literature on place has traversed the social sciences, the environmental sciences, the humanities and architectural theory, place is seen through it all as a function of the human-environment relationship. Meaning is intertwined with a specific, identifiable landscape and the patterns of social and cultural activities that are adapted to it. Many landscape architects of the modernist era, like many of their counterparts in painting, sculpture, dance and architecture *weren't* terribly interested in this kind of meaning. For modernism in its purest forms, signification was not a matter of expressing the kind of meaning that is culture- or place-specific so much as opening up passages to an understanding of the very ground of being. It was thought that this could be achieved by stripping away everything that would obscure direct apprehension of ultimate reality (the 'transcendental signified'). Although both socio-cultural signification operations and those concerned with the expression of the infinite have been regarded as proper to the making of gardens, it is nevertheless a utopian humanism that runs through most garden writing: 'Two kinds of garden evolved (in the earliest days of civilization)—the truly utilitarian one of fruits and vegetables meant to provide food for a man's family, and the restful pleasure garden designed to nourish a man's soul' (Berrall 1966, p.7). Gardens have often been regarded as visible maps of that which is beyond human experience: 'The most overtly metaphysical Japanese garden, Ryoan-Ji at Kyoto, of all the world's landscapes most like a philosophical text, takes a strictly controlled number of elements and arranges them in a stultifyingly clear pattern like a map ...' (Harbison 1991, p.26). Even architecture (itself supposedly divinely ordered) is overwhelmed by landscape meaning: 'Vignola lifted landscape design into the sublime at the Villa Lante, subordinating architecture to an ancient and universal idea of cosmology' (Jellicoe and Jellicoe 1987, p.133). A rapturous tone exemplifies the intensity of meaning often felt: 'If there be a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here' (inscription in Shalamar Bagh, Kashmir). It takes the pragmatism of the professional to bring us back to earth: 'One of the melancholy appendages observable in the pleasure grounds of the past century is a long lawn without cattle' (Repton 1803 in Church 1983, p.16).

At the end of all gardening lies the philosopher's stone: connection with nature and with oneself and immersion of object with subject. A clear spiritual motivation permeates much of the writing about meaning in gardens. Since the 1970s, however, landscape architectural practice has been required to provide

validation through a construction of meaning that is derived from a practical identification with the physical environment. Place-making based on a site-specific model of meaning legitimised by regionalism and codified in the use of terms such as *legibility* and *contextualism* has come to the fore, disclosing an ambivalence to the transcendental potential of garden-making. The paradox (acute in New Zealand since the advent of the Resource Management Act 1991) of trying to define terms such as 'amenity values', 'aesthetic coherence' and even 'landscape' itself without reference to transcendental meaning, and yet without a theory of meaning to replace it is, surfacing increasingly in articles by practising landscape architects who have no foundation for their operational definitions.<sup>3</sup>

Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe's popular *The Landscape of Man* (1987) serves as a bridge from the transcendental to the socio-cultural. Driven by a totalising narrative of progress in the arts, sciences and moral philosophy, it describes the evolution of landscape design as a movement through finer and finer modes of expression to a final apotheosis not so much in aesthetic and spiritual joy as in self knowledge. Rerouted Hegel and Jung are found not only in the popular literature, however, but also in texts composed by landscape architects for landscape architects. The humanist impulse exemplified by some English work (Jellicoe, Colvin, Crowe) has led to the garden being seen as a medium of expression of the self and the humanity in which it participates. This is a far cry from the pure modernism of Dan Kiley, for whom the garden serves as a way in which his clients can make a connection with the cosmological order that underwrites human experience (Riley 1997).

Another text which addresses itself to the semantic values of landscapes, *The Meaning of Gardens* (Francis and Hester 1990), was drawn in part from papers at a conference of the same name. Its 29 chapters were written by 'a broad spectrum of people involved in garden studies and design' (Francis and Hester 1990, p.viii), including landscape architects, architects, historians, psychologists, horticulturalists, artists and journalists. It can be regarded as a representative sample of writing about landscape signification in the late twentieth century, and a clear example of the humanism that lingers within non-post-structuralist strands of postmodernism. For Francis and Hester, and most of the contributors to their book, a wide range of signifiatory modes cohere around the notion of the garden. Their chapter headings demonstrate the socio-cultural concerns characteristic of the humanist project. The various contributions are organised under the following rubrics: Faith, Power, Ordering, Cultural Expression, Personal Expression, Healing. This project is couched in a kind of anthropological discourse which attempts to uncover the categories which define all of the fields of possible human-environment experience. These categories are grounded in the constituting activity of a transcendental subject. They are predicated upon notions of deep and hidden meaning which are considered to be accessible through this framework of ideologically conditioned categories. Throughout *The Meaning of Gardens* there is an acceptance of notions such as privileged access to the truth, universal mental structures (Jungian archetypes) and binary oppositions (sacred/profane, science/intuition, high art/folk art, constancy/change etc). The use of these notions and the framework of categories is contingent upon a conception of truth or 'fidelity to reality' which sets up 'a way things are in themselves' (an ultimate essence) and

against this promulgates a 'way of being' (daily life) which is not characterised by truthfulness or authenticity and requires (among other things) the garden as a medium of access to the real. The fundamental idea here is that meaning is put into the garden, sometimes by the gardener, sometimes by the designer, sometimes by the passage of time ('Like a patina, significance is acquired with time. And, like a patina, it emerges only if the conditions are right'. (Treib 1995)), like a beetle in a box, and can be understood through a correct interpretation of the garden (the removal of the beetle). In this conception, meaning is encoded in the garden, and if the observer/visitor cracks the code the true or fundamental significance of the work is revealed. This conception of meaning has led to a misinterpretation of modernist landscapes and continues to bog landscape architecture down in a muddle of sentiment and appeals to a human essence.

### *Has modern landscape architecture ignored meaning—a review of the claims*

A number of recent texts embody the argument that an interest in meanings is not apparent in the works (either practical or theoretical) of professional landscape architects practising in the middle of this century. It is only recently, Treib claims, that the profession has 'returned' to signification. 'A renewed concern for meaning in landscape architecture—and the ways by which meaning can be achieved—resurfaced during the early 1980s after an absence in professional publications of almost half a century' (Treib 1995, p.47). It is not at all clear, however, that meaning was absent from practice as well as from the writing of landscape architects, although again there are claims to this effect: 'With the best of intentions, landscape architecture has appropriated the images of modern art and oriental gardens but ... failed to comprehend the ideas that generated those images' (Krog 1991, p.96). Is it possible that what Krog calls an appropriation was actually an interrogation? At the same time another commentator, Walker (Walker and Simo 1994, preface), asks with reference to modernist landscapes 'Why is such satisfying, or beautiful, or critically important work not better known?'. How is Walker's query to be reconciled with Hunt's assertion that '... because it did not address the issue of what meanings were possible within garden space modern landscape architecture got sidetracked into coveting the formal effects of other arts rather than considering what its own medium could achieve' (Hunt 1992, p.290), and Riley's that 'Gardens have been a locus of meaning in many cultures, but not in modern America' (Riley 1988)?

John Dixon Hunt contrasts the so-called hiatus in modern landscape architecture with garden history and tradition: '... it cannot be beyond the wit of man to establish a new agenda of meanings for the garden ... As far as I know, none of the modernist writing about garden design in the 1930s and 40s bothered to confront this aspect of their subject and some even tried to eliminate long-standing gardenist experience' (Hunt 1992, p.292). 'Perhaps', he continues, 'the most striking and depressing feature of modernist landscape architecture writing' is 'a concentration once again upon formal elements [which] ignores a whole chapter of previous garden history in which style was informed by content or meaning' (Hunt 1992, p.295).

In Marc Treib's *Axioms for a Modern Landscape* (1993), conspicuous by their absence are any axioms relating to the intellectual, emotional or spiritual condition of the human users of landscapes (which is not to imply that meaning is inherent in these things only—I will make the point that meaning is constructed out of practices). Late twentieth century landscape architecture, however, is once again characterised by an interest in meanings. There is consensus amongst critics that the kinds of ideas that make up Francis and Hester's list of signifiatory modes, which were largely ignored during 'the modern period', are being reinstated by a new generation of landscape architects. If these modes are not actually being reinstated, then this is (or should be) their project: 'Landscape architecture needs to recover a desire and a capability of addressing experience ... We need to recover a sense of gardens as expressions or representations of a culture's position vis a vis nature' (Hunt 1992, p.299).

Many of the problems with these analyses are summed up in this last statement. So much is assumed: that there is something to recover; that it is (was) good; that it is possible and desirable to return; that meaning is a matter either of expression or representation (as opposed to something that is constructed culturally through the practices and operations of everyday life); that culture is a monological thing, as opposed to a network of practices; and that it can have clear and unambiguous relations with something called nature.

### *Has modern landscape architecture ignored meaning—a critique of the claims*

What is behind this interest in meaning? What brought about the appearance of a form of evaluative writing about mid century design which was not interrogative but accusatory in various late twentieth century landscape texts? Meyer (1994, p.13) convincingly demonstrates that landscape and nature have been relegated to the status of a 'minor, repressed or misrepresented other' in the discourses of modern art and architectural history. Major architectural texts (by Le Corbusier 1924; Giedion 1941; and Hitchcock 1937, all cited in Meyer 1994) situate landscape out beyond the 'reasonable Enlightenment ordering practices' of the modern architectural project. This constitutes landscape as the neutral, unformed backdrop to a vital architecture whose presence is required in order to provide structure and give meaning. Recent texts continue to designate landscape as 'distorted', 'discontinuous' and 'awkward', a circumstantial obstacle to be overcome by enlightened planning (Lennertz, Plater-Zyberk and Duany 1990, cited in Meyer 1994). Meyer finds the reasons for the construction of landscape as messy 'other' in the deployment of 'binary thinking as a tool of power'. Her paper is an attempt to 'articulate a language which eschews binaries and operates in the spaces between the boundaries of culture and nature, man and woman, architecture and landscape' and to 'reconstruct the unheard languages of the modern landscape as a means to reinvigorate contemporary practice' (Meyer 1994, p.31).

Meyer's analysis of landscape architecture as having been sited outside the dominant normative discourses of twentieth century critical writing is part of a rehabilitation project participated in by others (Barnett 1987; Edquist and Bird 1994; Walker and Simo 1994; Hertz and Burton 1996). Meyer is one of the few critics thinking beyond the essentialist paradigm of meaning. Meyer sees the problems associated with the invisibility or repression of landscape as a function

of the gendered, object-oriented discourses of modern art and architectural historiography. Landscape architecture, like architecture and art history, has been dominated by the male voice, with its concern for the formal attributes of the site, for spatiality rather than plant life, for the biography of the designer rather than the history of the site and for objectivity rather than intimacy. Historians and theorists of landscape architecture have tended to adopt the assumptions of architecture and art history in their eagerness to give accreditation to landscape and have therefore, presumably unwittingly, perpetuated some of the problems they have been trying to resolve.

It is said that until quite recently the theory and practice of landscape architecture during the first half of the twentieth century was relatively unknown to those practising in the second half. In a number of texts that have appeared since the 1980s the question has been asked how we can expect a self-critical, vital and relevant landscape architecture if its practitioners are blind to its history, in particular its recent, modernist, history. Meyer's work suggests that landscape theory itself has colluded with the disciplines of architecture and art history to entrench the invisibility of landscape architecture in contemporary life. When the editors of a Museum of Modern Art publication dedicated to landscape design, *Denatured Visions*, write that in the twentieth century 'a vital, modern landscape tradition never emerged' (Wrede and Adams 1991), we begin to see how firmly embedded the problematic is in the infrastructure of twentieth century theory.

Now that writers are glancing 'backwards' at modernism and seeking to relate landscape developments in mid century to those in the fine arts and architecture it is easier to see, genealogically, how an obsession with deep and hidden meaning is still organising landscape theory and preventing landscape from speaking, in Meyer's words (1994, p.34), 'in its own rich, multi-valent voice'.

Since 1990 there have been a number of publications dedicated to critical discussions of modernist landscape architecture.<sup>4</sup> However, these texts are characterised by a relatively unexamined adumbration of modernism. In fact, more than one publication makes it clear that a definition and analysis of the term 'modernism' in landscape architecture is still awaited. As a result, modernism is generally regarded as referring to a period which began at the earliest in the late 1800s and which ended sometime in the 1970s. In these texts the word 'modern' does not refer to a mode of thought, a series of social strategies or a congeries of cultural practices. 'Modernism' emerges in landscape as an art/architecture moment rather than a comprehensive social and cultural development; a twentieth century phenomenon rather than a groundswell of Enlightenment responses to humanism that has yet to reach its culmination. John Dixon Hunt alone amongst those writing about twentieth century landscape traces modernism to the eighteenth century.

Treib, for instance, associates the 'modernist sensibility' in United States landscape architecture with 'smaller lots'. He argues that the vocabulary of modernist landscape architecture had its origins in 'other artistic fields' (architecture and cubist and surrealist art), and that the major factors that distinguished landscape architecture from these other arts were 'the human presence, and with it, use' and 'planning with living vegetation' (Treib 1993, p.36). The influence that architecture had on landscape architecture was, in



Treib's view, exemplified by 1930s Harvard Graduate School of Design graduate James Rose who advocated 'a continuous sense of space ... space without the restrictive coercion of the singular axis'. Studying under Walter Gropius had led Rose (and some of his Harvard student colleagues such as Dan Kiley and Garrett Eckbo) to believe that landscape is 'outdoor sculpture'. Treib writes that 'It appears obvious that James Rose ... borrowed at least two of the characteristics of modern landscape design from architectural: the concern for space and the vituperative rejection of symmetry and the classical axis' (Treib 1993, p.44). Landscape architectural modernism was and is an interest in space and form.

The influence that art had on landscape architecture is, according to Treib, able to be reduced to 'a vocabulary of shapes adapted from cubism' and the biomorphic shapes of Miro and Arp which 'could be applied to landscape architecture without ideological baggage'. Although cubist space offered 'multiple focii from a single vantage point', 'radically conflated space and time' and 'the replication of four dimensions in two', 'these were only of marginal interest to landscape architects'. Where did their main interests lie if not in these areas? Of the so-called surrealist 'bridge' between the plastic arts and landscape architecture Treib comments: 'Conceptually the amoeba seemed to have a particular appropriateness for landscape because as a formal motif it looked "natural", far more natural than the axis or the topiary bush of traditional gardens' (Treib 1993, p.50). Treib regards six principles as being axiomatic in landscape design during the modern period. These are:

- A denial of historical styles
- A concern for space rather than pattern
- The destruction of the axis
- Landscapes are for people
- Integration of house and garden, not house-and-then-a-garden
- Plants used for individual qualities as botanical entities and sculpture.

Treib acknowledges that condensing a complex range of practices into a set of axioms is misleading, and that 'a modern landscape architecture in the United States was neither as simply defined nor as easily created' as his text implies. What his list does do, however, is highlight the signficatory modes of a discourse that has invented modern landscape architecture as the pursuit of certain formalist, object-oriented goals at the expense of 'meaning'. (It is interesting that the fourth axiom, in extending designer Thomas Church's 'gardens are for people' into the wider discipline, introduces Church's warmth and humility into a field otherwise occupied by a seeming disregard for emotion, propinquity and intimacy). Writers working within this discourse will reflect the axioms on which it is founded. Coming at the discursive field from without, however, and from outside the paternal, gendered discourses of architecture and art history which share its assumptions, it is possible to construct alternative readings. Meyer draws on feminist interpretations of recent art and literary criticism to offer a reading which 'some may call revisionist' (Meyer 1994, p.34). The disciplines of philosophy, literary theory, art theory and cultural studies have all been repositioning themselves in the light of the influence of hermeneutic, critical theorist and post structural accounts of the modern 'moment'. This repositioning has led to new insights and new formulations of modernism. For instance, Treib's axioms cannot distinguish between two vital dimensions of the

modern: the social (often characterised as modernity) and the cultural (more generally characterised as modernism). The socio-economic realities of the modern capitalist project served as the matrix for professional landscape architectural practice. The advent of the suburb provided the 'smaller lots' and sophisticated plant propagation techniques, and new modes of distribution provided an energetic and varied plant stock, while the post World War II boom generated the surplus capital for middle class garden development. These advents were the social conditions of production for landscape architects. Conversely, the Enlightenment project had, through two centuries of cultural production devoted to the enrichment of everyday life, formed the framework for innovations in art, science and morality. Landscape architects, like everyone else, drew on a highly specialised and separated cultural domain in an attempt to reconcile the imperatives of capitalist society with the humanist potential of individual creative endeavour. The above list does not reveal a set of axioms so much as a set of symptoms, the visible traces of the heroic pragmatism that threads disquietingly through the modern age.

The sense within nineteenth century modernism that opposites could be reconciled, that the aesthetic and the social were commensurable, persisted in landscape architecture past the titanic efforts of Olmsted and Vaux, the creators of New York's Central Park. Their social programme remained in place, but the modes of cultural production changed. Because epistemology had remained unaltered since Kant (the world could still reliably be represented to a stable centred subject) and art and science had become the means of deliverance, the landscape architect whose body of knowledge ranged across both the arts and the sciences felt ideally situated to develop a comprehensive synthesis of the universal and the particular on that very threshold 'where culture meets nature'—in the private garden, the public landscape and the industrial park. This programme is under-represented in Treib's list of axioms, a misprision symptomatic of the historicising approach which has determined that modernist landscape architects emphasised form over content and which has led to the current fixation on meaning.

Treib's reductionism, which is modernist in itself, is reflected in another list of axioms. Pregill and Volkman (1993, p.689) have also set out an inventory of 'common characteristics of Modern design':

- use of strong geometric lines in composition
- free use of a variety of forms
- use of plants as one possible garden material, rather than as the principle purpose of the garden
- use of plants for their natural form, rather than controlling them to create artificial forms
- complete integration of spaces through the use of flowing forms rather than through sight lines
- emphasis on economy of scale and flexible use of space
- preference for asymmetrical compositions
- emphasis on human-scale outdoor rooms
- use of non-traditional materials.

This catalogue corroborates the view that modernist landscape architects emphasised form over content, and that, according to Hunt, modern landscape architecture concerned itself with 'matters of style' and 'merely formal

obsessions', a 'depressing feature' which led them to 'bypass the whole matter of garden experience in the fullest sensual-emotional-imaginative-intellectual range' (Hunt 1992, p.298). Treib reinforces this view when he notes that landscape architects took the shapes but not the ideology of surrealism (Treib 1993, p.50). Within the discourse that engendered the above lists the case is seen very clearly: landscape architects sacrificed meaning for form-and-function in the first half of the twentieth century.

The search for meaning in the modernist landscape will founder if a sense of modernity as an *ethos* is not taken into account. What Raymond Williams calls a 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1984, p.64), a complete way of understanding the world, cannot possibly be served reductively. Foucault refers to this sense of complete experience when he wonders '... whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. And by "attitude", I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task' (Foucault 1984, p.39). This 'attitude' flows into landscape design through ideas, symbols and beliefs which connect with the rhetoric and rituals of a whole society. It is a '... deliberate, difficult attitude [which] consists in recapturing something eternal that is not beyond the present instant, nor behind it, but within it ... modernity is the attitude that makes it possible to grasp the "heroic" aspect of the present moment' (Foucault 1984, p.39). Amongst landscape architects this attitude is discerned not only in what they have said but also in what they have managed to create in the field, viewed within the problem of their own artistic struggle—the struggle they shared with all artists of their time—the struggle with representation and with the questions of truth and the relation of the eternal to the fleeting moment. It seems not to have occurred to critics to ask how these issues were dealt with.

There is an implicit assumption that because references to, say, metaphysics, cultural values, epistemology or affective design do not appear in the written works of Rose, Tunnard, Eckbo and Kiley (the Harvard school) they did not interest themselves in 'the sensual-emotional-imaginative-intellectual range'—a symptom of the intellectual poverty of the profession. But a search through the writings of contemporaneous sculptors and painters reveals a similar aloofness from issues to do with content and a comparable concern with problems of form. The modern painter is the exemplification of significant distance. Are we to regard this as symptomatic of the intellectual poverty of modern painting? The answer of course is that rather than draining their respective fields of meaning, many modern artists were concerned with formulating the search for meaning in new ways. Modern landscape architects—and this is certainly not true of all modern artists—did not repress meaning, but through the exploration and spread of new discourses on environmental design (including the roles of gardens and of corporate landscapes) new forms of signification were created. In the field of landscape architecture the dominant Beaux-Arts tradition, which continued right through the 1920s, 30s and 40s, was itself the cause of a crisis in signification and condemned by some landscape practitioners as empty and meaningless. The 1930s articles by Eckbo and Rose in *Pencil Points*, the attempts by Fletcher Steele to translate the work he had seen at the Paris

exposition into an American idiom, the large scale landscapes of Dan Kiley and the intimate backyard experiments of Thomas Church were all part of a search for meaning in a discourse which was being reconfigured, a culture-conversation which was turning from one expression of the Absolute to another.

The modern project was literally a search for a kind of meaning which was construed as an end point or goal. Picasso's imperious 'I do not seek—I find' only makes sense against such a background. To see this whole endeavour as an emphasis on form over content is to misinterpret the parameters of the project. That the Absolute could not be rendered into words did not mean that it did not exist. This was Bertrand Russell's misreading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. The latter's 'whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent' (Wittgenstein 1974, p.74) should be regarded as underlying the artistic programme of the modernist ethos. Far from being uninterested in signification, artists and landscape architects could only leave matters of interpretation to the critic and the 'everyday expert'. They were concerned with larger issues. Being a modern artist meant a commitment to the autonomous production of highly specialised aesthetic programmes. Being a bourgeois lay art 'lover' meant behaving as 'a competent consumer who uses art and relates aesthetic experiences to his own life problems' (Habermas 1983, p.12). Being modern meant disavowing *shared* content. The aesthetic experience was essentially private. Meanwhile, the everyday world in which modernist landscape architects actually worked (the 1920s to the 1950s) was besotted with scientific method and committed to the proposition that one day the universe could be described through a logical language. Everything beyond the range of the empirical sciences (Kant's noumena) was ineffable and therefore the subject matter of artists. Rather than abandoning meaning for medium, landscape designers like Barragan and Kiley attempted to find a purity and a serenity in their media which would announce the presence of the Absolute.

So we have a problem of interpretation of the meaning of gardens. It is not that modern designers 'circled without daring to grasp the whole business of meaning in gardens' (Hunt 1992, p.291), so much as that 'meaning in gardens' is a contested field open to a wide range of interpretive approaches. To a formalist, medium was exactly what modern art should concern itself with. New York painting, for instance, became the purest of formalisms and abstracted to the point at which all ornamentation and representation disappear. Champion of formalism, Clement Greenberg, found the essence of modern art in 'the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline itself' in order to 'entrench it more firmly in its area of competence' (Greenberg 1961, p.37). For the Colour Field painters the 'authentic' work (the holy grail of modernism) excised the signifiers of ornamentation and representation in order to allow the signified of pure form to appear transparently. The ineffable truth, the transcendental signified, could be disclosed only through the process of abstraction—it could not be discussed. The Colour Field painters and Ludwig Wittgenstein were congruent on this point. It was altogether 'logical' that contemporary landscape writing 'tended to describe landscape design factually ... with little theoretical embellishment' (Treib 1993, p.51). As Barnett Newman famously said, aesthetics is to the artist as ornithology is to birds. Mark Rothko's work shares a distinctly modernist interest in the sublime with Mies van der Rohe and Dan Kiley. Rothko was interested in what

he called 'transcendental experience'; his purpose was not to illustrate specific anecdotes but to suggest the 'tragic and timeless'. There is, he said, no such thing as a good work about nothing (Tate Gallery 1983, p.10).

To criticise modernist landscape architects for their purification of form rather than providing an artist's statement about content, for their 'suburbanism' and their functionalism, is to criticise modernism itself for seeking to build the cultural foundations of a secular society on the possibility of representation and the autonomy of the subject. God was dead, but truth was still possible. 'Man's natural desire in the arts is to express his relation to the Absolute'. (Barnett Newman, quoted in Taylor 1994, p.13). The aesthetic could sanctify the social, even though societal modernisation had penetrated deeper and deeper into human existence. Cultural modernism did not cause societal modernity, it wanted to save us from it.

### *The crisis in representation*

By way of a general query regarding what appropriate aesthetic practice might be in landscape architecture, Stephen Krog, in his 1991 text 'Whither the Garden?', quotes neo-conservative critic Hilton Kramer: '... we can be reasonably certain that every aesthetic crisis in art involves some sort of crisis of belief, and aesthetic solutions ... are likely to be unavailing as long as this deeper crisis persists. It is a problem that 'aesthetics alone is unequipped to deal with'. Krog himself then comments, 'Today's crisis of belief may perhaps be stated simply as follows: In an age of infinite pluralism, how are standards of quality to be set for art?' (Krog 1991, p.97). If this is a crisis of belief, then it is in the form of an epistemological crisis. It is a call for criteria through which to make evaluative statements, and also for an answer to the question: How can we know? The crisis Krog refers to is the well-known crisis of representation (or legitimation), which has haunted modern Western culture, crystallising in Nietzsche's God-death and in the deconstruction of the sign as a guarantee of meaning.<sup>5</sup>

It is *this* crisis of representation which infuses the landscape texts reviewed in this paper. Is it possible to agree on aesthetic evaluation within a culture informed by the general dissolution of the transcendental signified? Indeed the debate across the disciplines of philosophy, literary criticism, film criticism and architectural theory (to name the most conspicuous) has been widened and deepened by having to come to grips with the complete reversal of significative direction that characterises contemporary cultural life. Representation is at the heart of issues to do with meaning. '... the problem of representation is in fact a problem of what and who constructs meaning' (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993, p.36). Foucault's linking of power with representation, much-debated in the discipline of human geography, clandestinely scripts into public realm environmental design an extreme self-consciousness, a fatal (for landscape) concern with the making and representing of meaning in space and human landscapes. Landscape architects are far too worried about how to get the beetle into the box.

Although the step is yet to be taken in landscape architecture, some human geographers have problematised the production of interpretations in geographical discourse,<sup>6</sup> '... metaphors do more than serve as heuristic devices that disappear as soon as the new theory they were used to elucidate becomes

accepted: they are instrumental to knowledge creation and in fact may become the theory or idea they are intended to explain. Nature itself becomes a system rather than simply being represented as such. And metaphors are not randomly chosen. They reflect the struggle for dominance via social and cultural norms; they actively shape a world view' (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993, p.31).

In this view, landscapes are readings of texts on the part of vested interest groups and individuals. They 'inscribe those readings into their transformations of the natural world and then naturalise such reading-writings through ideological hegemony' (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993, p.31). Thus the crisis of representation, which presupposes certain ontological, epistemological and scientific paradigms, is a crisis of authority, and therefore of power (what and who constructs meaning). This debate is part of a broader attack on mimesis and the 'natural attitude' which underlies it. This 'natural attitude' is itself a product of the Enlightenment project which eventually produced the works of Kiley, Eckbo and Rose. Landscape architects have been slow to question the supposed perfectibility and transparency of the language and imagery by means of which it was assumed reality could be represented. Krog's question, *pace* Kramer, is assuredly a question for philosophers, but philosophers who are addressing the issue of relativity in all things are returning to the everyday 'lifeworld' in order to answer it. They are, for instance, examining what is being made, who it is being made for, and how it is being used. Discussions of meaning are turning into discussions of cultural production and social action, where the first thing we should ask is who is speaking, who are they speaking for? Most landscape texts will continue to testify to a neutral, univocal world 'out there', a visible world to match their perorations. But 'there is no vision without purpose ... the innocent eye is blind', for the world is already clothed in our systems of representation (Duncan and Ley 1993, p.3).

An uncritical allegiance to modernist theorems of how works mean (gardens and landscapes as works rather than texts), combined with a conceptualisation of modernism as a period which has ended (in order for a new period to start) has revealed a paradox. The commitment to modernist modes of thought highlights an issue which is critical to attempts to consider modernism from outside of modernism. Landscape texts often treat the site from which the modern is to be reviewed as a temporal 'post'. The persistence of modernist theories of truth in these texts reveals that the site is not outside or neutral, however; it is a spatiality located within the project of modernism. This has determined the unexamined acceptance of realist theories of truth which persists in recent texts. Current geographical thinking on representation is in the form of a negotiation with realism. It politicises discourse and subjects landscape to a critique which goes to the very heart of the so-called culture/nature interface.

It is misleading to attempt to dismantle the problematics of modernist landscape architecture by means of a differently acculturated critique without understanding the terms of this acculturation. To have 'objectivity' without understanding the conditions that underwrite it is like not having objectivity at all. Surely no one would claim that the conditions of landscape creation and interpretation have not changed since the 1930s and 40s? Under 'late capitalism', it is argued, all cultural production occurs according to socio-economic conditions controlled by the forces of global capital (Jameson 1983). Society and culture have collapsed, or 'imploded', into each other, and the social is given to

us as culture (Baudrillard 1988. See Malor 1996 for a discussion of how landscape perception is constructed by television). There is also no doubt that nature and culture have become seamlessly merged. In this light the 'storefront design religions' (Krog 1991, p.97) of the 1980s can be seen as experimental, but critical, efforts to negotiate both the cultural and the social sites of the idea of nature. Steven Krog (1991, p.102) rightly complains that these landscapes have been 'subject to minimal critical examination by their designers or anyone else'. However, it is wrong to imply that there is nothing there to examine—it depends on the methodology that is being applied in the examination. Rather than lamely following innovations in art and architecture, landscape theory has the potential to assume a central position in hermeneutics—an entry point into the discussion of the 'postmodern condition'. Where in landscape architectural writing is there recognition of, let alone a response to, this new moment? How are we to understand the claim that modernist landscape architecture eschewed meaning for formal and social imperatives? What interests are vested in this claim? Can the model of landscape architectural meaning that is being put to work in justification of this claim itself be justified? Reproaching modern landscape architecture for its inattention to signification and content only makes sense within an essentialist paradigm of meaning.

### *An alternative model of meaning*

A typical example of how essentialism persists in landscape discourse is to be found in Krog's 'Whither the Garden?' Following a disapproving reference to the 'now popular invocation of mythology' he says: 'To place much importance on the reading of garden design as text ... seems problematic. A strong case could probably be made that almost every garden embodies some story, literary or otherwise, but can the plot or the moral be deciphered in the absence of an accompanying text ... must we be able to ferret out the clues, as if engaged in some intellectual or horticultural scavenger hunt?' (Krog 1991, p.98).

Krog confuses 'mythological narrative' with the hermeneutic proposition that landscapes can be read as texts. Reading gardens as texts has nothing to do with the writing of stories or construction of plots, but has everything to do with the autonomy of interpretation. Krog's analysis constructs the garden as a bearer of univalent meaning, insisting on one theme which dominates its interpretation. His analysis assumes that the decoding of the garden is a replication of the encoding. An alternative, hermeneutic, critical practice rejects the possibility of talking about the 'truth' of an interpretation: the garden is not an artefact about which something true is to be said. Interpretation can be faithful to the formal and syntactical programme of the garden and can be coherent/consistent, but it cannot be true/verifiable. The critical task is not to be limited to recreating the original horizon of the garden's design, nor to uncovering the designer's intentions. An 'accompanying text' (the artist's statement) is only one reading among many, no more or less valid than the visitor's as Krog later affirms.

A hermeneutic model of landscape meaning will require that landscape architects are constantly alert to the diverse ways different people interpret their world, and should be wary of the idea of generalisable human character. Human behaviour has shown itself not to be assimilable to the model of the physical sciences, based on causal explanation. The *human* sciences, indeed, have long

recognised that irrefutable propositions about a universal human essence that might underpin general laws seem not to be possible.

In recent years hermeneutics has become a useful tool for research where notions of 'fact' and 'truth' are inappropriate. Hermeneutics is a research methodology based on the notion of interpretation. It is not, therefore, a truth-based model of research, for each interpretation of an action or an artefact can itself be the subject of further interpretation. After 200 years of being treated as an empirical 'thing', landscape is now widely regarded as a language or a text. It is the reconceptualising of the cultural landscape as text that makes hermeneutics such an appropriate theoretical tool (it derives from the interpretation of biblical texts). A hermeneutic strategy approaches landscapes not as empirical objects but as cultural symbols, images, 'maps of meaning'—texts that can be 'read'. Working within a hermeneutic framework helps to reveal the otherwise often invisible socio-political dimension of human environment construction. Although the last 25 years have seen the analytical tradition (variations on the correspondence theory of truth) and continental hermeneutics come closer together, a hermeneutic conception of truth and method that lies beyond attacks of relativity and scepticism has proved to be elusive. Not everyone is convinced that analytical rigour should be given up for the simple pursuit of edification. And yet understanding or illumination, with regards to the practice of environmental transformation on behalf of others, is an undeniably desirable goal. The full 'structure of feeling' of a minority culture-group may be impossible to apprehend or comprehend, but an open attitude of empathic interpretation provides a more satisfactory form of investigation because it permits dialogue between researcher and subject, and allows for the simultaneous presentation of multiple points of view.

Although some recent landscape texts pay lip service to postmodern structures of theory, meaning is invariably presented as if it actually exists somewhere, either 'out there' (transcendentally), the goal of garden connotation, or 'in here', an (again transcendental) aspect of subjectivity. Nevermind that a committed post-structuralist reading of the sign finds a black hole where meaning used to be. There are difficulties enough in a discipline which is used to regarding cultural meaning, metaphysical vision and spiritual enrichment at the semantic centre of its object. The notion that these categories are universal has little credibility in a world in which the very possibility of communication has been put into question. '... beneath the hankerings for the transcendental ... can be sensed the profound disillusionment—and unease—of a foundationalist tradition that has been confronted with the impossibility of what it has all along been seeking to do' (Wernick 1992, p.59).

The deep, expressive aesthetic of modernism has given way, as Treib, Krog and Hunt all recognise, to plurality and collage. What they do not accept is that 'the secret of theory is that truth doesn't exist' (Baudrillard 1988, p.130). I believe it is the dogged adherence to humanist truth-values in landscape architecture that holds the discipline back. If, as Krog laments, landscape architecture is failing its public and not performing its cultural duty, it is because our cultures and their productions have moved beyond the reach of a modernist critical ordinance. If landscape architecture wants to meet the challenges of post-industrial society and the diversification of cultures, landscape architectural



discourse will change. It will find a way to incorporate within its traditional allegiances a semantic framework that generates on-the-ground, flesh-and-blood landscapes that do not require a reality—metaphysical, historical or psychobiological—to be measured against for faithfulness. The trail of signs in the garden leads only to further signs. There is nothing that cannot be reinterpreted. How much longer can landscape criticism continue to impose what Hal Foster calls ‘the lost traditions of modernism’ upon ‘a present which, in its own contradictions, is far beyond such humanist pieties?’ (Foster 1985, p.124).

Krog sees landscape architecture as having ‘commenced its re-entry into the modernist period’, and cites as evidence for this claim its recent redefinition by ‘avant-garde’ practitioners as an art form, and its ‘self-conscious’ taking of *itself* as a subject for practice, ‘gardens about gardens’. He sees this as dangerous since there are no intellectual or theoretical foundations for such claims, ‘the nature of its artfulness is indefinable’, while the challenges of modernism are philosophical. This suggests that in landscape architecture ‘their resolution is not immediately at hand’. Krog asks landscape architecture to take itself more seriously and less self-consciously. He evokes modernist exemplars—Rilke, Cezanne, Barragan—and cites Robert Irwin (a land artist) and Terence Harkness as creators of good contemporary works, both of whom he says ‘remind us that the landscape *is* capable of revealing some sense of what this life is all about. They function in the arena of ideas, not that of technique or cleverness’ (Krog 1991, p.104).

While there is little to quarrel with here—good landscape architecture *is* thin on the ground, largely because good landscape architectural ideas are thin on the ground—there *are* intellectual foundations for intertextuality (landscape architecture’s taking of itself as a subject for practice). The hermeneutic tradition in fact emphasises intertextuality, as well as extratextuality (fields of reference outside the text). The very flamboyant ‘trickery’, ‘contextualism’ and ‘symbology’ that Krog inveighs against is evidence of a cultural praxis rich in strategies of disclosure, secrecy, transgression, sensuality, figurality, displacement and incommensurability. Basically, the ideas are different now. The distinction between landscape and garden has also collapsed. Now there is neither, but rather a network of mobile signs. What wilderness meant—unfamiliarity—is now familiar, and what the garden meant—secrecy—is now on television. Everything is intimate and nothing is intimate. The ‘user’ is a switching centre who clicks endlessly from ‘nature’ to nature and back again.

What was the impetus behind the freewheeling North American gardens of the 1980s? Was it an escape from the emotional predictability generally required of New World gardens, from the ‘brilliant, mobile, superficial neutrality’ of the colonial way of life instantiated in clones of English and European gardens on the one hand and in representations of ecological systems on the other? Perhaps gardens of the 1980s fulfilled a need for a *celebration* of the flatness, neutrality and artificiality of the post-colonial fin-de-siecle. Were these gardens, in their mind-numbing references to the local past, another attempt to eradicate it? Finally, after the tabula rasa of modernism, these gardens may have found, in their sleek mindless appropriation of the sacred and the profane together, a ‘power of unculture’ which attempted to elude the grand narrative of Western thought. At first feted and then vilified, the landscapes of postmodernism were

a kind of vernacularisation of landscape architecture, in which the implosion of the social and the cultural was, as in advertising and music, the perfect reification of an important moment. They were like *trompe l'oeil*, in which 'we are bewitched by the spell of the missing dimension' (Baudrillard 1990, p.67).

Is it not the case, however, that the gardens of the 1980s were ultimately transitional? They brought landscape architecture to the point where it could begin to frame the kinds of questions which the next decade of doing and writing could negotiate. In a context of socio-cultural practices which assume slippage, transgression and disappearance of meaning some of these questions might be:

- How can the common goals of human purpose and the warmth and intimacy of community be served under new codes which recognise the unresolved contradictions of our era?
- How can landscape discourse manage the transition from essentialist categories of meaning to modes of description, interpretation and discussion which acknowledge the dance of signification?
- How is landscape architecture to position itself within a difficult, contested space which is neither completely inside the modern nor completely outside it?
- How should landscape designers move from disguising the complex and contradictory attitudes towards cultural existence that characterise our era, to reflecting them, or even resolving them?

### *Conclusion*

In the countries of the Asia-Pacific region the mood of contemporary cultural production is not exclusionary, but synthetic/syncretic. There is a movement towards the free appropriation of a full range of conditions, experiences and knowledges. The time of the single, complete experience is over. Each experience is only one among many, and the same site is liable to a different interpretational strategy on each visit by the same agent of interpretation: there is always more to be added in. A level-headed understanding of this critical moment is required. There is steadily creeping into public discussion an awareness of the political conditions of landscape production, and of the way the landscape transmits dominant cultural values through all aspects of socio-cultural life. Much current public landscape architecture can too easily be theorised as advertising or propaganda for the usual repressive systems of power. If there are to be landscape architects who are artists, they will not be uneasy with this. Resisting and negotiating it will be part of their job. Landscape architectural discourse will develop a volatile critical edge and face up to the failure of representation, and will thus pave the way for practitioners to come to new and diverse knowledges. After all, the garden itself is a simulation. There is no representation of nature, only references to codes, narratives and other gardens. The garden can now be conceived as a presentation/demonstration of incommensurable spaces of representations and temporalities. The signifiatory systems of ecology and nature clash and blend with the hyper-reality of the media, the aesthetic, the commodity and the void. Change and stasis rise together.

In the gardens of the *new* New World the discourses of nature and society are not diametrically opposed, but simultaneously and often incommensurably present. The struggle of these discourses for power and dominance in the

landscape can be influenced by the designer, who naturalises, suppresses or legitimises, different discourses. Unevenness and discontinuity appear sometimes as the quality of a single garden, and at other times as the quality of a series of gardens. The interpretations that we make of this process are not based on the possibility of either empirical or transcendental truth, but on the idea of the struggle—for a stake in the continuing reconstitution of both the social and the metaphysical in the production of the cultural. The modes of representation employed constitute our knowledge of the interaction between self and world, identity and difference, community and individual.

The countries of the Asia-Pacific region provide ideal conditions for the reception of a landscape architecture based on the social construction of environmental meaning. The peoples of these countries inhabit diverse and conflicting lifeworlds, and their form-building and planting traditions are equally diverse. A multiplicity of subcultures has its way with place and space. The landscape architecture of this region, then, will be a negotiation of conflicting and contested appropriations of the environment. In the Asia-Pacific landscape, designers need to be aware of how new socio-economic practices, such as novel lifestyles, new forms of work and patterns of consumption, have ruptured traditional meanings of place and radically reconstituted individual identity within the lived environment.

These countries, more than ever, are in a state of flux. New Zealand and Australia are re-examining their influences, and the landscape is at the centre of national debate. Questions concerning who owns the land, how it should be managed, the cultural value of landscape and the stewardship of natural resources are all debated regularly and prominently in the media. People are beginning to understand that landscape is both a product and way of constructing cultures, and that landscape and culture support and construct each other through time. Clients want the landscape architects they employ to arrange and rearrange spaces in distinctive ways. The public swimming pools, beach resorts, front yards, farmscapes, school grounds, cemeteries, National Parks, temple gardens, urban precincts and subdivisions of the Asia-Pacific will encourage diversity of interpretation. Users will have their way with them. Because there is no fixed armature of meaning, the elements can be rearranged at will. A shifting, centreless geography will emphasise the contingency of experience and the radical, unique, nature of the moment of viewing. Perception, the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, will be galvanised as signification itself, a construction of an individual's interaction with the garden's surficial processes which include rocks, soil, water, plants, shadows and light.

Finally, of course, if all discussion of landscape meaning were to be dropped, nothing would be lost. There would still be affect, memory, familiarity, the wind in the trees, the sound of running water, shadows on the wall ...

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Such as sociology (eg Baudrillard), anthropology (eg Clifford), cultural studies (eg Williams), history (eg Greenblatt).

<sup>2</sup> Baudelaire's famous characterisation of modernity appears in his article 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863). Many of his poems demonstrate clearly the nature of what Berman (1982, p.148) calls 'primal modern scenes', in which human experiences arise from concrete everyday life in nineteenth century Paris but carry with them 'a mythic resonance and depth that propel them beyond their place and time and transform them into archetypes of modern life'.

<sup>3</sup> Phenomenological theories of place have as yet proved to be unhelpful in this area, since the social, cultural and political dimensions of place have been insufficiently dealt with (see my *The Politics of Place*, in preparation).

<sup>4</sup> Including *Modern Landscape Architecture: Redefining the Garden* (Sutherland 1991), *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review* (Treib 1993), *Invisible Gardens: The Search for Modernism in the American Landscape* (Walker and Simo 1995). There have been articles as well: 'Axioms For a Modern Landscape' (Treib 1993), 'Whither the Garden?' (Krog 1991), 'The Picturesque Legacy to Modernist Landscape Architecture' (Hunt 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Sandler provides a useful definition of representation. It consists, he says, 'of our ideological assumptions about family, society, nation, race, gender, law, culture and religion, which we simply accept without question. The public is conditioned to accept a certain kind of representation, which is reinforced by the schools, the churches, the courts and other social agencies as well as by the mass media' (Sandler 1996, p.340).

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of the role and status of representation in human geography see, for instance, Cosgrove and Daniels (1988), Barnes and Duncan (1992), Duncan and Ley (1993) and Jackson (1994).

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