Editorial: Language, metaphor, and the creative imagination

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The articles in this issue of *Landscape Review* explore the power of language and metaphor to create meaning in design. Several are based upon papers presented to the *Languages of Landscape Architecture: De(sign) Applications conference (LOLA2)*, held at Lincoln University, New Zealand on July 10–12 1998.

What is significant about all the articles is the way they seek to use the metaphor of design language to open up creative possibilities for new interpretations of landscape, whilst also grounding the creation of meaning in specific landscape contexts. As Lavoie puts it, authenticity and truth in design are achieved by steering a path between the aridity of functional modernism, and the relativistic musings of postmodernism. For her, meaning in design is the product of imaginative perception, as we project collective cultural memories onto archetypal landscape phenomena such as walls and ruins. Berger, however, uses the creative power of metaphor in a subtly different way: as a means to encourage students to grasp the potential for meaningful narratives in urban landscapes.

Pottteiger and Purinton also focus upon the metaphor of narrative, using the Crosby Arboretum in Southern Mississippi as a case study to explore the notion of landscape as text. They argue for design strategies that create landscapes which offer open ecological and cultural narratives, rather than the closed ‘scripted’ spaces of theme parks. The idea of ecological form and process as a language is also developed by Alington in a case study of fire modified forests. She concludes by emphasising the importance of scale and context in interpreting the ecological languages of patch and mosaic. Jørgensen explores the significance of context in a different way, drawing upon semiotic theory to emphasise the need to ground interpretations of landscape meaning in the particular. He links this to creative imagination, arguing that we need to understand our perceptual horizons precisely in order to realise the potential for other possible landscapes. Finally, Weller describes the process and rationale behind the development of a competition entry for the Future Generations University. The concepts presented are rich in metaphor, whilst being firmly grounded in the particularity of the regional landscape in which the proposed university would be located.

The articles all share a belief that language metaphors can be a creative tool for design, but that when they are introduced into design strategies they must relate to their biophysical and cultural context. Several authors roundly criticise the empty use of metaphor and text that has characterised some recent architectural discourse. This reminds us that whilst metaphor is a form of imaginative projection, its role is to help understand the new and unfamiliar by reference to the simple and familiar. Landscape is a living, material phenomenon as well as a cultural ideal and, as Richard Weller argues, we currently face the...
ultimate challenge of ensuring the material sustainability of life. This cannot be achieved by retreat into Derridaian games of endlessly shifting signs. The underlying message of the articles in this issue is that the power of language and metaphor can be used to enrich our understanding and design of the phenomena of landscape, but that such use must be firmly grounded in the particularity of place and time.