Editorial: Discourse, dialogue, system, and substance: uses of 'language' in landscape architecture

JACKY BOWRING

Jacky Bowring is Lecturer in Design, Landscape Architecture Group, Environmental Management and Design Division, P.O. Box 84, Lincoln University, Aotearoa New Zealand.
Telephone: (03) 325 3804
Fax: (03) 325 3854
Email: bowringj@kea.lincoln.ac.nz

Juxtaposing the terms 'language' and 'landscape architecture' evokes a wealth of possible relationships between the two. At the two LOLA conferences held at Lincoln University in 1995 and 1998, 'language' and 'landscape architecture' were connected through the preposition 'of'. The choice of this seemingly benign preposition has served to inspire a broad range of perspectives on the topic. As the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* explains, 'of' expresses 'a wide range of relationships', and the papers presented at the LOLA conferences have explored many of the connections that 'of' suggests. In this issue of *Landscape Review*, the final five invited papers from the second Languages of Landscape Architecture conference (LOLA2), held at Lincoln University on July 9–12 1998, illustrate the diversity of perspectives that exist on language and landscape.

In Rolley's paper the connection between language and landscape architecture is proprietorial. One definition of 'of' is 'belonging, connection, or possession', which in a language context could be viewed as discourse. Language is a defining factor in the context of professional discourse, and Rolley's caution over the use of 'plan' and 'design' highlights the way in which our choice of professional language defines our practices.

Whilst discourse defines language through its exclusiveness, language can also been seen as a way of communicating. Simon suggests in her paper that not only is there a language *of* landscape architecture—that is, a characteristic way of talking or writing about landscape—but that the terminology which is used is also language based. Rather than the one-sided version of a language found in the notion of 'landscape as text', Simon identifies the prevalence of an implied two-way communication, or dialogue. The notion of communicating with the landscape through a dialogue is also one of the premises of Helphand's paper. He identifies the ways in which a language of landscape architecture has emerged in Israel in parallel with the revival of the Hebrew language. Through interpreting and trying to read the landscape, he argues it is then possible to use this language to construct, or re-construct, a landscape narrative.

In order to communicate, language must have a known structure and set of rules, as reflected in both writing and speaking, and in synthesised languages such as those of computers. Ward Thompson uses this notion of language as a system, as a metaphor for understanding spatial ordering preferences in landscape. By using a template to elicit responses to images of playgrounds, Ward Thompson begins to build up a body-centred 'language' for understanding landscape. She notes that the results should not be interpreted over-simplistically, but they do show that the template incorporates 'a spatial design language familiar to landscape architects' indicating its value for design.

In the final paper by McGirr and Palmer, language becomes a substance for design. Beyond being a model or metaphor, it provides the very materials for the

design exercise described in the paper. In an effort to encourage students to do more than just solve problems in design, McGirr and Palmer draw on a connection between poetry and landscape that dates back to the genesis of the English landscape garden in the eighteenth century. As well as identifying the need to teach a design 'language', the authors asked the students to use poetry to inform the site—'a written text to be read in the landscape'.

The breadth of papers reveal a fusion of language and landscape architecture, operating on a number of levels from the metaphorical to the literal. While Burgess (1996) suggests that the 'linguistic turn' in landscape research is simply following trends in the social sciences and humanities, the relationship between landscape architecture and language has a much longer legacy. What is not apparent, however, is the future of the relationship. At what point does the language-landscape connection become bankrupt? Are new metaphors or models already ascendant? Will there be a LOLA3?

REFERENCE

Burgess, J (1996) The Future for Landscape Research, *Landscape Research* 21(1), pp.5–12.