

TRANSFORMATIVE PARKS

Introduction

This article is a collaborative work focused on the critical question of whether new types of contemporary public parks can emerge from designers' engagement with dynamic processes. Rather than giving prominence to the exclusive use of stable patterns of landform and vegetation that largely have characterized past parks, we are interested in the lessons learned from practices trying to conflate theories of aesthetic experience with ecosystem dynamics in order to influence urban trends and climate change. Our compilation of texts highlights questions and recognizes scenarios of conflict and opportunity. We describe places and sites where a temporal dimension accentuates or dramatizes socio-material sensitivities, and where a dynamic condition generates more or less informal commons and wildlands, or in other words, emergent parks taking into consideration the limits of human control.

EROSION, DEPOSITION, AND SEA LEVEL RISE: BEACH PARKS FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE

K. Hill

Beaches provide a kind of sand dial, a clock for climate change in our new era. They record the timing, direction and extent of erosion and deposition in their form and materiality. Beaches respond to disturbances at all scales, local, regional, and global. By learning to read the lapidary prose of the beach, we can learn lessons about adaptation and beauty that underpin what it means to be human in the Anthropocene.

To be human today is to know for certain that large sections of the world's current coasts will be submerged in the next century. We face enormous losses in our familiar landscapes. Design can create aesthetic experiences that allow us to feel and understand more than loss – feelings like courage, resourcefulness, compassion, and the thrill of gaining insights into a larger world of beauty and patterns that play over time. Ocean beaches in particular reveal the inter-relatedness of the human condition to our powerful global environment in unique ways, reinforced with every crashing wave and tide cycle.

Design can help people read these dynamic landscapes. The combination of poetic and functional elements that reveal the processes we might call "disturbances" has been under-explored in beach design. The Dutch Zandmotor was built on an enormous scale for functional reasons, to widen a sandy coast by letting waves carry the sand far to the north and south. Its beauty derives from its ephemerality. Other examples could include structures or materials that are alternately buried and exposed by erosion and accretion, like messages from the past sent to the future. Even small, ephemeral beach parks could function like the ancient marine sandglass that marked the passage of time on the seas for sailors, allowing us to understand changes in our own time and find the dynamics of those changes beautiful, even when they are bittersweet.

Beach parks can help us learn that change is beautiful, and that many structures that disappear will someday re-appear. Discovering the beauty of ephemerality may be the most important aesthetic experience that design with disturbances can provide to us, as humans living in the 21st century.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDGES. IMAGINARY AND FACTUAL PARKS IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF BARCELONA

Pepa Moran+Anna Zahonero

Since the recognition of the dynamic condition of landscapes as a complex of ecological and social processes, landscape architecture has sought to integrate this dynamism, not only in its imaginary but also in its materiality. This integrative challenge is particularly present in the case of public space, and especially in situations where the vegetation has already started to perform ecologically, despite orderly frames.¹ The metropolitan periphery of Barcelona, most notably the edges in contact with the Natural Park of Collserola², are zones of conflicts and complexities. In these landscapes, atypical for their lack of distinct appearance³ or control⁴, the material expresses the passage of time beyond form, the management of which does not always match the use. This situation is a consequence of the unequal relationship between the systems in contact. The city acts mechanically on the natural environment creating a space of imbalanced exchange, or, in ecological terms, an agitated border.

If we get closer, we can observe metabolic processes, which are the fruit of overlapping times. Due to the abandonment of agriculture the vegetation evolves through ecological succession. On both sides of this border the exchange relations are asymmetrical and often

¹ Nassauer, J.I., 1995. Messy ecosystems, orderly frames. *Landscape Journal*, vol14. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2:161-170

² <http://www.parcnaturalcollserola.cat/es>

³ Meyer, E.K./ Hellström Reimer, M.

⁴ Delgado, M., 2011. *El espacio público como ideología*. Barcelona: Ed. Catarata

exploitative. Historically, the city has pushed back the natural system. This has, however, created a set of relations, which can help us to the rethink the future.

The landscape project presents an opportunity to generate a variable rather than fixed image⁵, to enhance the capacity of the site to facilitate uses beyond experiences and to enable managers, potential users and proprietors to take part in a work of coalition. Public and factual, parks are already spaces of transformation and creative change, ecologically and socially speaking. What we propose is a strategy that recognizes these capabilities and supports the design of flexible relationships of balances and compensations.

PARK DERIVATIVES – THE FINANCIALISATION OF THE GREEN URBAN COMMON

Maria Hellström Reimer

“—It is a bit potty to claim that the Emporia Rooftop Park contributes to biological diversity [...]. The limited amount of greenery that one adds...it is a kind of bogus argument.”

Designer-in-charge, Wingårdh
Architects, in interview, 19 May 2014

The new shopping centre *Emporia* on the outskirts of Malmö, Sweden, is not only one of the most extravagant commercial destinations in Europe. It also sustains one of the most conspicuous green public spaces in this rapidly urbanizing region. Designed by Wingårdh Architects and environmentally certified according to BREEAM, the shopping complex has a pronounced eco-friendly profile, the highlight of which is the six-acres rooftop park. Its rolling sedum hills, its bio-diversity corner and its health garden perform important eco-systems services such as insulation, drainage and noise reduction, at the same time buffering the consuming activity taking place below.

While the function of the urban public park historically might have been that of mitigating the consequences of capitalism, the purpose of this environmentally certified rooftop is more advanced. In relation to local socio-ecological cycles, the environmental score of the rooftop park might be satisfactory. Yet, if we expand the systemic boundaries and consider its effect in a global system of material and financial flows, the result will be different. In relation to the emergent narrative of green growth, the role of rooftop is not primarily environmental but financial: a spectacular and paradoxical investment in climate debt. What happens to the idea of the non-proprietary common as it enters the circuits of monetized exchange? What does it mean for the park to serve as an ‘ecologizer’ of capital? What are the implications of environmental certification as a value-accumulating financial instrument? In between the blossoming slopes of the Emporia Rooftop, amongst bees, seagulls and consumers, all equally catching their breath, many questions arise, derivatives of an increasingly remote and exhausted nature.

WHY NOT WILD?

Julie Bargmann

Parks are not the answer. Not for impoverished cities plagued with socio-economic crises that are painfully embodied in immense tracts of land abandoned by defunct industries and antiquated infrastructure. The question is: what if reframing formerly urban fallow sites as fertile ground for regeneration constitutes a means for a city to reinvent itself? When traditional redevelopment under-delivers or fails to materialize, as it often does in times of fiscal distress, can landscape architects offer resourceful design strategies that require a new way of seeing and a fresh vocabulary?

The term ‘wildland’ posited here attempts to brand cultivated urban wilds along with other unconventional landscape-based tactics to fill the gaps and dispel the stigma of disinvestment. Can wildland assume a role as healthy urban fabric, no lesser an asset than parkland? For well over a decade, notable examples in Germany invented ‘urban nature parks’ promoted by progressive planning policies to convert fallow land into productive resources for the current and future city. Yet American municipalities default to mowed lawns to keep blight at bay, albeit at a great cost. The unfortunate urge to tame urban wilds denies the reality of urban entropy and sacrifices the socio-ecological benefits that citizens could harvest from a landscape with a savage tenacity.

⁵ Goula, M., 2007. Tesis doctoral: Los otros paisajes. Lecturas sobre la imagen variable

Cultivated urban wilds can encompass an ingenious range of prototypes. From cheap and cheerful fields of spontaneous vegetation gaining the prestige of 'cosmopolitan urban meadows,' as botanist Peter del Tredici coins them, to urban wild woodlands, pruned and planted trees that restore depleted urban canopy. Along with producing jobs for local civic gardeners, this wild repertoire responds responsibly to strained municipal budgets. Wildland demands another way of working, of looking. Designers must provide a new language: vacant = full; abandoned = available; fallow = fertile. Rendering interim and incremental form, design restraint may inspire a patience to see the beauty of a landscape that grows according to its own logic, not ours. The next landscape urbanism is a wild one. The post-settlement metropolitan landscape is a city in reverse; its regenerative disturbance regime we can set in motion, and then let it go.

STINGING BEAUTY— INTRODUCING THE WILD IN PUBLIC PARKS IN FINLAND

Christina Stadlbauer and Ulla Taipale

Melliferopolis

The risk management in public recreation areas, is getting very strict within the regulated European Union. In recent years, many parks for children were closed, as demands for risk-free environments could not be met. Any danger must be avoided in urban neighborhoods. According to bureaucracy, the fascination for spiky plants or stinging insects may bear a risk.

Opposed to this trend, the platform Melliferopolis -Bees in Urban Environments - has shaped up in Finland. The project intertwines honeybees and arts in urban contexts. Stepping out of a merely anthropocentric view in order to focus on an api-centric world the initiative investigates the role of bees in urban environments as well as the relation between mankind and these insects.

Melliferopolis has installed hives and semi-wild bees nests in visible and popular places in public parks. The installations are designed to invite city dwellers and the local community to engage with bees and explore the effects the hives have on them and their surroundings. The initiative has been welcomed at the Kaisaniemi Botanic Garden in Helsinki, visited by thousands of people, on the tiny island of Harakka, a nature reserve that offers environmental education for kids, as well as university campus at Otaniemi, Espoo. In 2015, Melliferopolis follows an invitation to place bees in the Kouvola Contemporary Art Museum park area.

These experiential installations at the border of the familiar and the uncertain invoke a certain suspense. In a city ambience, following man-made rules and obeying the laws of civilization and society, the belief in control and management of time, space and safety are essentials. In opposition, a beehive represents nature following its own rhythm, spatiality and laws, making control difficult if not impossible.

Melliferopolis' invitation to pause in the proximity of the hive allows one to see and hear the bees activity, and to marvel at one's emotional response to the beauty and potential peril. What happens if s/he gets stung?

Caption:

Hexa-Hive Village at Otaniemi Campus is being checked by urban beekeepers in summer 2013. Photo: Lilli Tölp

ON PARKS

Maria Goula

Today parks can only be many things. But what makes a site a park? Certainly the distinction between public and private is not useful anymore. Yet, it seems useful to recall the park's most valuable contribution looking back at its origins as J.B. Jackson⁶ reminds us: the versatility of the reserved "commons" openness and its enormous social role for recreation as well as for the emancipation of youth in the 19th century.

Since then, informal commons were converted to lawns or meadows integrated to complex and many times interesting park designs. Only recently our discipline became attracted to the sublime effect of these "third landscapes"⁷, understood as unique opportunities within our dense cities. John Berger's⁸ text on the prairie, deliciously describes the sensorial appeal of a grassy clearing effectively exposed to the hiker on a sunny day. The fragmented and isolated grasslands are not as dramatic as the *terrain vagues*⁹ of the early nineties but still photogenic, and in the south, are still icons of an illusion: that of the nostalgia for their architectural future. However, many young landscape architects

⁶ J. B. Jackson, 1979. "The origin of parks" in: J. B. Jackson, 1984. *Discovering the vernacular landscape*. New Haven / Londres: Yale University Press, pp. 125-130.

⁷ Clement Gilles, 2007. *Manifiesto del Tercer Paisaje*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili

⁸ Berger, John, 1980. "A prairie", in *About Looking*. New York: Pantheon. (1a ed. Española, 1987. Mirar. Madrid: Hermann Blume), p.175

⁹ Solà-Morales, Ignasi de, 1996. "Terrain vague". En *Quaderns d'Arquitectura i Urbanisme* n. 212, p. 34-43

integrate them into their projects, converting them into relevant community projects, providing opportunities for future green urban structures. They become areas for experimentation for a management driven design process or even, for the introduction of productive programs that complement and enrich recreation, as well as address equity and environmental racism.

Will this initiatives help reintroduce the park's versatile openness and reset programmatically the park as a surface defined by an inclusive humanism? Will this allow to, finally, address public space in terms of its performative capacities for creating landscape (soil, vegetation, shadow, comfort)? Will it help overcome traditions related to the representational affordances of venerated public space?