

# *Between hermeneutics and datascapes: a critical appreciation of emergent landscape design theory and praxis through the writings of James Corner 1990–2000 (Part One)*

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THIS TWO-PART ESSAY examines the theoretical work of James Corner across the 1990s. Part one begins with a polemical analysis of Corner's originating notion of a hermeneutic practice of design as published in *Landscape Journal* in 1991. The essay necessarily broaches themes of ecology, critical regionalism and the broader panoramas of landscape planning as they are encountered in Corner's writings. Part one identifies an emergent dialectic between landscape architecture as scenography or infrastructure in his writings. In order to appreciate Corner's work, part one establishes and discusses the philosophical grounding of his position. Part one is concerned with theory, part two with praxis.

Part two, following Corner's lead, summarises and comments upon some emerging design methods and specific design projects so as to situate the issues raised in part one. Part two begins with the unbuilt Parc de la Villette of 1982 by Rem Koolhaas and discusses its ramifications. Part two revolves around arguments put forward by Corner in the late 1990s for the agency of landscape design as structuring development rather than symbolising culture and nature, arguments for what landscape design *does* not only what it *means*. To facilitate this, the writings of Bart Lootsma and Alex Wall who, along with Corner, presented the most pertinent and provocative themes in Corner's latest book *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, are considered in some detail. Part two concludes with thoughts on datascaping – a new design methodology synonymous with current trends in Dutch urbanism and one that impresses Corner with its capacity to manage and manipulate complex design programmes.

Taken as a whole the essay offers neither a set of findings nor feigns conclusion; rather, it goes to the co-ordinates Corner has set out and explores the field they demarcate. The essay does, however, seek to qualify the claim that James Corner is articulating a middle ground between the deleteriously exclusive categories of landscape planning and landscape design and that this middle ground is crucial for landscape architecture's future as a 'synthetic and strategic art form'.

## INTRODUCTION

THIS TWO-PART ESSAY is an interpretation of, and extrapolation from, James Corner's intellectual endeavours of the past decade.<sup>1</sup> Over this time span, Corner has covered a diverse subject matter, ranging from philosophical musings under the rubric of hermeneutics in the early 1990s, to a recent concern for how data and design processes can be more creatively and critically interwoven and

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## KEY WORDS

*Hermeneutics  
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Programme  
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Modernity*

## REFLECTION

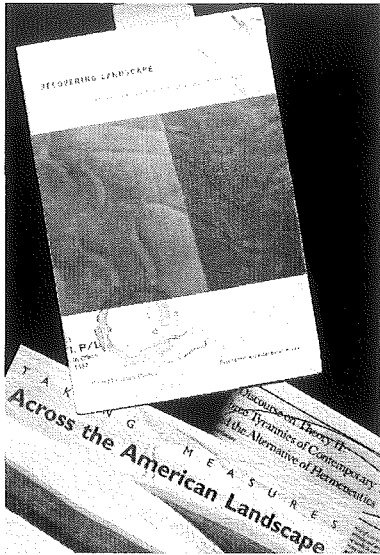


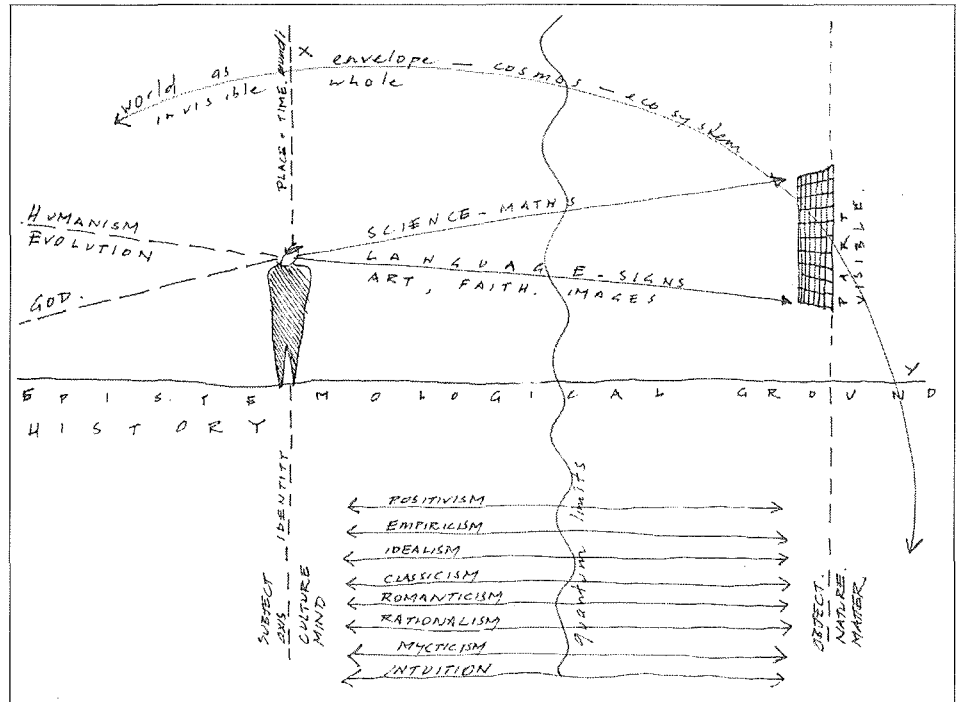
Figure 1: Various cover sheets from James Corner's writings, (1990–2000) relevant to this essay.

represented in landscape architecture. The essay traces and discusses this philosophical shift so as to identify and reflect upon key areas of landscape architectural discourse at the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.<sup>2</sup>

Forsaking academic austerity, Corner's writing is animated by a familiar sense of urgency as he scans the breadth of what significant contemporary landscape architecture should be and what it may become.<sup>3</sup> If at times Corner's theoretical cartography has too many lines heading off in too many directions, his central and ongoing project seems to be one of charting the rift between design and planning.<sup>4</sup> This essay does not account for the rift in later twentieth-century landscape architecture, although that is work that should probably be done, it does, however, attempt to distinguish between typical landscape architectural grandiloquence and real moments of potential synthesis in Corner's work.

Following fashions to good end, Corner ventures regularly into a larger aesthetic, historical and theoretical milieu. Sojourns out of the discipline are not uncommon amongst landscape designers and theorists typically frustrated by an institutionalised and professional malaise, but Corner's significance is that he can always plot a path back to the core concerns of landscape architecture. Corner is not lost to art, architecture or ecology. Most importantly, the actual act of designing is never forgotten and his theorising is accordingly tempered by its relevance to praxis. Evidence of this is in his latest book *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, an unruly collection of essays that Corner dedicates to "greater experimentation and daring in design ... more sophisticated forms of representation ... critical foresight and cultural knowledge".<sup>5</sup>

Figure 2: Diagram by Richard Weller, 2002, mapping some aspects of the hermeneutic and historical location of the western subject in its fraught relation to external reality. The diagram summarises modes and methods of bridging the gap between subject and object and the narratives by which this is authorised and limited. Although the diagram does not explicitly account for the inner life of the subject it does mean to imply that the subject is situated in culturally specific circumstances and that any way of knowing the world is filtered and shaped by these circumstances.



## HERMENEUTICS

Corner's intellectual impact began in the early 1990s with two essays in *Landscape Journal*. 'Discourse on Theory I: Sounding the Depths – Origins, Theory and Representation' provided a useful cursory history of the philosophy of science as a way of contextualising landscape architecture's own narratives.<sup>6</sup> 'Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics' went on to sketch a contemporary philosophy of landscape design based on, and borrowing from, hermeneutics, the study of textual interpretation.

Hermeneutics, unlike scientific claims to objectivity, is concerned with the subjective and situated construction of meaning.<sup>7</sup> Corner explains that, in its application to the arts, hermeneutics "relates to textual exegesis (interpretation and explanation) and to the more general problems of meaning and language. Hermeneutics necessarily involves reflection and cannot be reduced to rule-governed technique or method. Interpreters are not passive observers but bring with themselves certain ideas and knowledge that necessarily enter into the interpretation (i.e., an inevitable prejudice or bias)".<sup>8</sup> That is to say, that what a scientist might consider bias, a hermeneutician would identify as an inescapable part of the formation of knowledge, a key post-structural tenet. In so far as both science and art are modes of interpretation leading to the construction of meaning, the scientist and the artist are both engaged in hermeneutic processes but, unlike science, hermeneutics accepts and begins with the truism that knowledge is only ever partial and relative. Engaged in poetic interpretation, hermeneutics opens itself to speculation, oscillating between subject and object, mapping the intrigues of ephemeral understandings and illuminations.

Because a landscape architect is responsible for the act of embodying interpretations of life and world, attention to hermeneutic structures and processes is well advised. Indeed, the garden (landscape architecture's home) is a richly hermeneutical site, structured as it is by metaphor that, in turn, embodies profound interpretations of space, place and time. Taking into account, or trying to trace, the multifarious interpretations involved in the creation, location and subsequent interpretation of a design is then to register the work's hermeneutic valency. Hermeneutics finds a corollary in landscape architecture because both seek to understand and account for the distance between the subject/object, a divide that characterises western scientific, philosophical and environmental traditions. However, unlike late modern landscape design and planning rationales that over-determined design with positivistic methodologies, Corner's hermeneutic landscape approach is metaphorical and rhetorical, one in which the subjectivities of the author are implicated reflexively.

Obviously closer to the ambit of hermeneutics than methodological planning, is landscape architecture's traditional concern for site-specific poetics. Such poetics found a postmodern incarnation in the phenomenology of Norberg Schulz and his resurrection of *genius loci*. Coupled powerfully, and yet problematically, with Martin Heidegger's notion of dwelling profoundly, Schulz turned away from a modernist

utopia and alternatively advocated a renewed sense of the everyday and the corporeal.<sup>9</sup> This embodied yet somewhat mystical *spirit of place* became the more rational notion of the *sense of place* as eminently sensible advocates of landscape architecture, such as George Seddon, moved to temper the inherently unpredictable existentialism of art with the reason of science.<sup>10</sup> As I read it, Seddon sought, understandably, to guide the mass production of landscape architecture (that loomed toward the end of the 1970s) with a method based on natural science.

Although no enemy to art, Seddon's emphasis on method and biophysical characteristics sidelined the designer's speculative free will that Corner's hermeneutics not only accepts but foregrounds in the design process. Respect for site conditions and techniques of mapping them, remain fundamental to the act of landscape architecture but, as a design method that marginalises the necessarily hermeneutic intrigues of creation and experience, Seddon's positivism was destined for reduction in rote learning, as peddled throughout design schools in the early 1980s, and for trivialisation in commercial practices that found that it not only concealed but also authenticated the otherwise capricious nature of development.

It is too simplistic to polarise positivism and hermeneutics. Nonetheless, it helps to appreciate that Corner's inclinations toward the poetic are invoked against this backdrop where, by the 1990s, landscape design methodologies, determined by environmental psychology and natural science, were widely acknowledged as aesthetically and intellectually reductive. Accordingly, by emphasising that the design and designer are both culturally situated and constructed, Corner's hermeneutics, following Roland Barthes, opens up the world as a textual field – it writes us and we write it. To become self-conscious of this reciprocity between subject and object implies a resurgence of that which has been largely repressed or at least oversimplified in twentieth-century landscape architectural design methodologies.

A vague and malleable cluster of ideas, hermeneutics, in Corner's estimation, is not only attentive to the fact that an author and an interpreter are situated in, and contingent upon, their time and place but, also, it means any particular mode of cultural production is to be interpreted as situated within its disciplinary traditions – its historiography. Prefiguring the theme of his latest book, "recovery", as early as 1991, Corner explains that, contrary to the apparent originality of the avant garde, which exhausted itself in the tangents of twentieth-century art history, a hermeneutic landscape architecture is conscientiously "placed in space-time and tradition, and is equally about resurgence or renewal as it is about invention". For Corner, the intersection of tradition and the contemporary can forge "new joints of meaning".<sup>11</sup>

The idea of tradition and progress intertwining happily around the fulcrum of the landscape architectural project is by no means a new ideal, so what is of interest throughout this essay is not new ideas per se so much as new approaches to old ones. The notion of the landscape as the locus of reconciliation between change and stasis implies a pastoral modernity but, it is actually a theme that reaches back to the role of the first symbolic landscape designs in the first cities. Therein the garden begins playing *paradise lost* to architecture's utopian imperatives, assuaging settled society for having broken with nomadic rhythms. Thus, designed landscapes

begin their complicity with the receding reality of that which they represent, and the garden assumes its profound role as a *memento-mori*. Corner, however, hopes to take his landscape architecture well beyond the symbolic compensations of the garden, and, once over the garden fence, his challenge will be to connect hermeneutics to planning.

In considering the broader spectrum of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century landscape architecture, there is a temptation, albeit a crudely dichotomous one, to suggest that Corner is returning landscape architecture from the sciences to the arts. Late twentieth- and early twenty-first century landscape architecture is moving from Ian McHarg's planning to Corner's poetics.<sup>12</sup> But, if this historical sketch seems linear and dualistic and thus betrays landscape architecture's greatest potential to be art grounded in science, bear in mind that, as the 1990s unfolded, Corner increasingly (re)turned his art toward more instrumental concerns. Indeed, the rhythm of aesthetic and intellectual change in any field is not linear but pendulous, that is, circuitous yet never quite returning to the same. Before we trace this pattern we should first ask: what is the general philosophy of history upon which Corner is constructing his landscape architecture?

## RE-ORIENTATION

Not surprisingly, Corner believes in a culture that values meaning over materialism, quality not quantity, landscape as culture rather than real estate and resource. The tectonic of his early work is that design is potentially a reconciliatory agent of metaphysical import between human and natural history. Accordingly, in the early

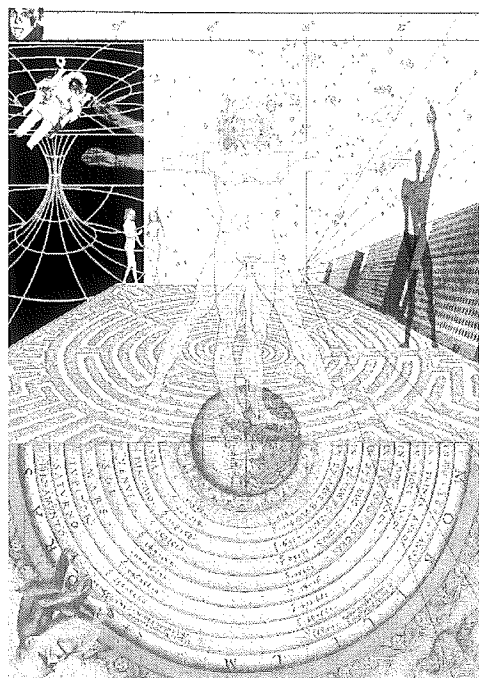


Figure 3: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002, including icons of physical and metaphysical orientation within which histories and discourses of landscape architecture take place. References are made to Aristotelian, Christian and contemporary cosmology, to Darwinian evolution and Eden, to Platonic geometries and renaissance harmonies, to modernist utopias and the labyrinth.

1990s Corner positioned his postmodern hermeneutics against the “hardness” of a world that was, as he felt, losing its mystery and enigma, a symptom typically sourced to the Enlightenment and its production of a divided euro-centric culture of romanticism and reason.<sup>13</sup> In this mechanical, empty or godless universe, Corner thinks humanity cannot “figure” itself.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, Corner asks whether landscape theory and, by extension, praxis could “rebuild an existential ground, a topography of critical continuity, of memory and invention, orientation and direction?”<sup>15</sup> In 1991, Corner confesses to a desire for a “greater sense of wholeness, continuity and meaning to our lived relations with the landscape”,<sup>16</sup> and in 1999, strikingly at odds with postmodern placelessness, he could not be unaware of the nostalgia involved in rendering landscape as the basis for, as he puts it, “rootedness and connection, for home and belonging”.<sup>17</sup> Such a disposition is not uncommon to those who love landscape, and not just since the Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment wrenched us from the soil, but it remains an essentially romantic and ambivalent relationship to (post) modernity – ambivalence perhaps best kept in creative and critical tension rather than reconciled. Indeed, Corner supports this when he qualifies his use of terms such as “wholeness” by suggesting “difference, contamination, collision and diversity may in fact be maintained, celebrated, or embodied. Indeed such tension may be the very foundation of cultural wholeness and continuity”.<sup>18</sup>

In his early work, Corner essentially (re-)places the onus on landscape architecture to reconcile creatively the quintessentially modern tensions between liberation and grounding, between *gesellschaft* (society) and *gemeinschaft* (community).<sup>19</sup> Corner’s commitment derives from Paul Ricoeur, who famously asked “how to become modern and to return to sources?” but it is a continuous theme in modern Western culture, at least since Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>20</sup> This question represents a conundrum that, in turn, underpins the influential design theory of Kenneth Frampton, to whom Corner seems heavily indebted. Whilst it is theoretically fitting to place landscape architecture as a reconciliatory agent between the relentless displacements of global modernity and our apparent need for earthbound emplacement, such a profoundly oriented practice of landscape design, like the clarion of stewardship, seems not only unlikely, but also grandiloquent.

In deference to Martin Heidegger, Corner desires “significant places for dwelling”, which, he says, would embody “alternative forms of relationship between people, place and cosmos”.<sup>21</sup> If this is an ecological trinity it also contains metaphysical nostalgia resounding with deeper loss. In terms of landscape history, this registers overwhelmingly as the loss of the world as a garden in both paradisiacal and pagan conceptions, but it is also an ongoing sense of loss because everything now becomes, to some extent, de-natured. However, Corner takes this bereavement and turns it toward the contemporary global garden without the sort of polemical and aesthetic closure one expects from an environmentalist or landscape planner. As evidenced across Corner’s polemics, the nostalgic impulse need not be sentimental or conservative, and is, in many ways, a long-established, still legitimate and critical landscape architectural subject and point of departure. That

notwithstanding, for Corner, to renege on what can yet be created, and to turn back on the imagination, is to suffer a greater loss, the loss of hope.<sup>22</sup>

The philosophical footing of Corner's early writing is finally made clear by the somewhat fervent exhortation that "to forge a landscape as a hermeneutic locus of both divination and restoration, prophecy and memory, is to help figure and orient the collective consciousness of a modern culture still caught in transition".<sup>23</sup> Whether landscape architecture can do this or not and whether, if it doesn't, it is free to be something else or just lost are questions shaping the ontological rite of passage Corner moves through. This labyrinthine route is one wherein a real danger lies in whether such profound desire for the role of landscape architecture is a point of departure toward opening out, or closing down the potential diversity of design's meanings and agencies. One of Corner's more memorable quips is "to remain forever open to the world", and he should be held to it.<sup>24</sup>

Any opening out of the meanings of landscape design might be incited, but is not sustained, by romantic abandon; rather, one must chip away at the monumental edifices of 'culture' and 'nature'. If, as we are often told, landscape architecture is a hybridised and idealised construction of culture and nature, then Corner's hermeneutic middle ground does not proselytise an easy and, therefore, phoney harmony of such opposites. Corner appreciates the creative tension that oscillates in the space forged between a humanity that knows itself to be both within, and yet different to, its surroundings. In Corner's worldview we are caught between recognising ourselves as part of nature and yet separate, tantamount to "the liminal space between signifier and signified, mind and matter, intellect and body".<sup>25</sup>

## RE-CONSTRUCTION

As it affects landscape architecture, whilst remaining in a dialectical position, this creative relationship is not one of culture *to* nature, rather it is of humanity inextricably woven into the synthetic environment of its own conceptual creation. In the face of this de-naturing, debate has polarised along an axis from those who seek to reconstruct, and those who would further deconstruct, once stable semiotic entities. Corner's preferred prefix for key words is 're', not 'de', a fact borne out in his latest book, which foregrounds the idea of *recovering* landscape, and it is an expression he rightly struggles to distance from its inherent conservatism.<sup>26</sup>

Even though deconstruction and hermeneutics intersect, back in 1991, Corner made a point of distancing himself from deconstruction. As Corner read it, deconstruction represented a "massive assault on the bases of meaning and stability in the world seeking instead to maintain the irreconcilable contradiction of our times".<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, the faith Corner wants to share is that landscape design can secure increasingly tremulous relations between signifier and signified, between culture and nature, self and world, future and past. The bridge across these divides is metaphor. Corner explains that, through the agency of metaphor "meanings once considered disparate or antithetical can be joined to find commonality-connections between art and science, theory and practice, humans and nature, for

example. In addition to joining, metaphors also extrapolate new meaning and usage to old figures thereby disclosing hidden and latent relationships. The deployment of metaphor is both reconciliatory and innovative practice".<sup>28</sup>

Unconcerned by the theoretical problem that to build such bridges is also to confirm the dualism one seeks to efface in the first place, Corner's hermeneutics seek to bind the rend between culture and its world. Alternatively, deconstruction, as I understand it, travels to either end of any bipolar axis and shows how each pole is unstable in the first place. If one can demonstrate that, for example, nature and culture are linguistic constructions with unstable foundations, then one finds oneself building bridges over shifting ground and toward mirages. The figure of deconstruction then is not a bridged divide but a labyrinthine marshland, where all is in between. Certainly, deconstruction would seem to operate by unravelling meaning and hermeneutics by shoring it up, but both share the impossibility of absolute truth as a datum. Deconstruction opens to hermeneutics by setting in motion an endless chain of signification, multiplying interpretative potential, denying essential origins. However, if this achieves a resounding refutation of monolithic truth and its attendant authority, it also collapses into relativism; a charge also levelled at hermeneutics, and a central paradox of the postmodern condition in general.

Corner's hermeneutics and deconstruction both share a critique of Western intellectual frameworks and have the re-direction of modernity in mind. Arguably though, the (architectural) work, which was (rightly or wrongly) corralled under the rubric of deconstruction, did more to open the hermeneutic scope of design than that of its detractors who were more overtly concerned with matters of regional identity, ecological salvation or symbolism. For example, Daniel Libeskind's complex and ultimately personal intersections of site, history, poetics and mathematics, and Peter Eisenman's layered site-specific "texts", both of which are discussed in part two of this essay, are commonly associated with deconstruction, but are also the result of the hermeneutic design processes that Corner advocates. Not surprisingly, over the course of the 1990s, Corner warms to Libeskind and Eisenman's type of innovative work and, in 1999, writes that "there are more creative reasons to reclaim sites than the merely nostalgic and compensatory - reasons that see invention as an essential ingredient of reclamation, engendering new kinds of landscape ...".<sup>29</sup>

Unlike the threatening slippage of meaning that Corner associated with deconstruction in 1991, writing in 1998, he finds a liberation of meaning through an opening of signification made possible by the loss of a firm origin, in this case the de-stabilisation of landscape architecture's grounding in the once seemingly stable referent of 'nature'. He notes that: "While contemporary scholars have begun to demonstrate how even the most objective descriptions of reality are culturally 'situated' and that 'nature' is perhaps the most situated yet shifting construction of all, few have dared to develop and practise techniques for realising the potential offered by such an emancipated (even playful and promiscuous) world of



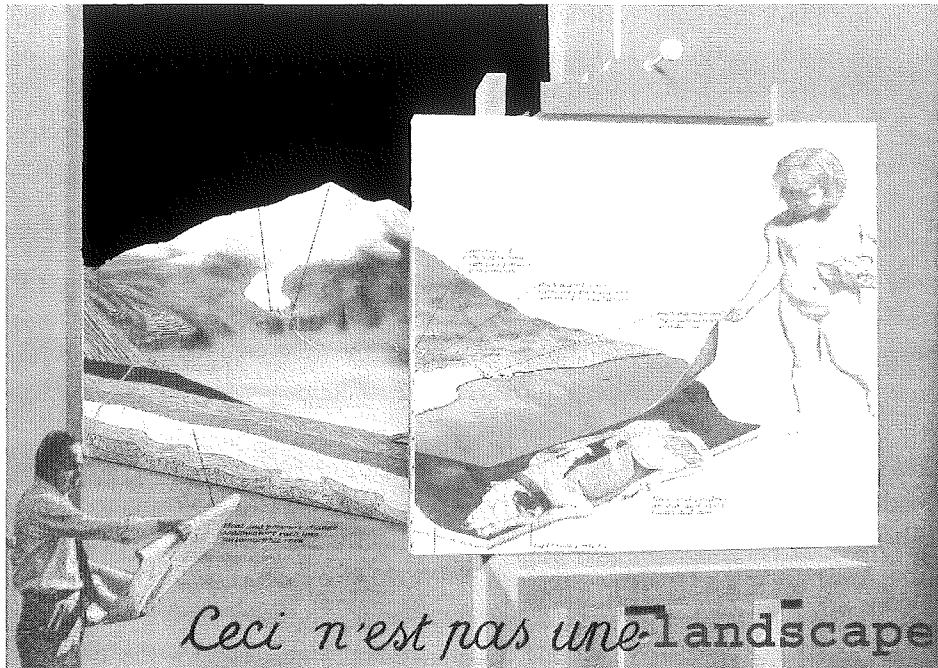


Figure 4: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002, including a painting by Salvador Dalí, which Corner cites as emblematic of the imagination's ability to reveal hidden aspects of reality. Dalí's surreal revelation is spliced into a rational geomorphological diagram that in turn is montaged into the frame of René Magritte's icon of the problem of representation, entitled 'The Human Condition'. Additionally, Magritte's famous semiotic deconstruction "This is not a pipe" from 'The Treason of Pictures' is altered to read "This is not a landscape". All this makes problematic the ways in which the stereotypical landscape architect in the bottom left, interprets, creates and represents design.

constructions".<sup>30</sup> Here, Corner's deconstruction opens the door to creation and construction. This is not to say that the world is a mere playground of signification, but that we come to realise there are many *natures*. Instead of claiming direct access to an authentic nature, out there, beyond language and by inference, designing the setting of a singularly authentic culture, a hermeneutic landscape architecture is one concerned with, and even troubled by, its own representations. Surely this is the first step of a critical disposition.

## CRITICAL?

Corner's notion of a hermeneutic landscape can be located between the two poles of urban design discourse in the early 1990s; neo-conservative postmodernity at one end of the spectrum and deconstruction at the other. In 1991, concurrent with his celebration of hermeneutics, Corner writes himself in to the frame of the middle ground, the frame of Critical Regionalism.<sup>31</sup>

Citing Kenneth Frampton, who seminaly defined Critical Regionalism as resistance toward, and mediation of, the global through the local, Corner elaborates his critical disposition through three other areas of theory and praxis. The first, 'Critical Resistance', involves one's cognisance of, and activism within the political orders that generally determine our collective landscape. In theory, as Corner targets it, the main focus of resistance is directed at "techno-scientific reasoning", whatever that really is. The second is 'Critical Continuity', the rather cautious creative practice of innovation through tradition. For Corner, as we have seen, such a practice is defined by a rejection of both sentimental nostalgia as one exclusive arrow of time, and avant-garde utopianism the other. Thirdly, Corner's notion of 'Critical Making'

rejects the mass production of landscape architecture as a relatively mindless, apolitical, service industry and advances a self-consciousness of the processes of conceiving, representing and building design.

To try and place Corner's idea of a critical landscape architecture it is worth recalling and questioning that, in 1986, Frampton, goes only so far as to say that a critical culture of (landscape) architecture would be promulgated by "an express opposition to the cultural domination of hegemonic power".<sup>32</sup> This 'hegemonic power' is almost invariably associated with the ubiquitous condition of political and economic globalism on the one hand and aesthetic modernism on the other. For the critical regionalist, both are thought to be synonymous with homogenisation. As it takes shape in the twenty-first century it is arguable whether globalism is the agent of homogeneity. Equally, it is doubtful if Frampton's oppositional geography is an axis along which a politics of resistance can be effectively played out. Additionally, consider that a critical disposition, as encouraged by Frampton, could just as well be turned against the local condition and its traditionally parochial trappings.

In the case of landscape architecture as a service industry eagerly delivering an easy sense of place as a panacea for the trauma of globalism, the spirit of critical regionalism to which Corner and Frampton allude, has, in my view, been dissipated and reduced to user friendly, politically saccharine, commercially expeditious design that only cries crocodile tears for the nature and neighbourhoods of yesteryear. That is to say, as critical regionalism slackens its connection to whatever is meant by 'critical', it drifts toward neo-conservative postmodernity. Landscape architecture has, as everyone knows, tapped into a profitable trade in feigning intimacy with local contexts. Sometimes this business of symbolising place, might encapsulate the pride and resilience of local identity, but more often than not it smacks of insecurity, ideology and asphyxiated imagination. To avoid the jingoism that arises as regionalism becomes parochialism, Corner emphasises the 'critical' instead of the 'regional'. Indeed, he eventually abandons the aesthetics of a sense of place almost entirely. Alternatively, Corner shifts attention to the more fundamental structural matrices of places, seeking to apply influential ingenuity at that level. Be that as it may, the highly wrought artifice of designing specific sites cannot be avoided by the practising landscape architect and they should be exploited for their critical representational potential within the surrounding city's empire of signs.

If landscape architecture can be easily criticised for the disingenuous mass production of a 'sense of place', then so too we find in some essays in Corner's 'Recovering Landscape' the persistence of romanticism, the quest for authenticity and profundity. Through design, landscape architects often see themselves as providing cultural continuity by bringing site history to the surface, in spite of or to even correct, the delusional and self-destructive global city. Whilst they all reject sentimentality, this tendency to essentialise design in the mnemonic strata of a site can be found in the writings of respected latter-day augurs such as Sebastien Marot, Georges Descombes, Steen Høyer and Christophe Girot.

Laying out their methods and ideals in Corner's *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* under the heading of 'Recovering Place and Time', these European sensualists all claim to reveal the hidden forces in a given site via their own heightened intuition, as well as careful observance of empirical and archival research. Having uncovered the depths of a site's biomorphic and cultural essence, Marot, Descombes, Høyer and Girot all explain how they proceed to stake out the mnemonic geomancy of a site as if design were a form of acupuncture, seemingly unconcerned that the truth they claim to find *in situ* might, in fact, not even exist nor translate as such. Proudly, Girot explains how he can extract a certain "je ne sais quoi" from a site, and although this was distilled after arduous empirical analysis he says it is usually the same thing as was revealed to him by his first impressions and intuitions of a place.<sup>33</sup> There is something shamanic and therefore dubious at the heart of this explanation. Whilst clearly conforming to the prerequisites of a hermeneutic practice by being situated in place and time, such work, or at least writing about such work, contains pretences that go beyond Corner's insistence that fundamental to hermeneutic multivalence, is an acceptance of the partiality of our knowledge.

Explaining his position a little further, Girot suggests that art and science, the split hemispheres of modernity's quest for absolute knowledge, are synthesised in the creative act of landscape architecture.<sup>34</sup> Theoretically correct and attractive on one level, there is also an overly simplistic didacticism at work in such ideals of synthesis and, surely, there is much in our science and art that would not lead to a landscape architecture of restitution and reconciliation. We should also consider whether the role of landscape architecture in the larger cultural milieu should be that of the city's psychiatrist as is implied by prioritising the recovery of site memory. Additionally, it might be fruitful to question to what degree cultural continuity is really manifested in the palimpsests that landscape architects extrude, and, also ask why it is not enough that the landscape architect is a raconteur, as much concerned with inventive fictions as with pathological recollection.

Landscape architecture's *raison d'être* of intimacy with place is quite correctly a profound re-orientation of twentieth century design culture, however, this initial intimacy seems to tend toward either essentialism or tokenism. I argue that both extremes ensue because landscape design practice continues to cut itself off from the criticality and diversity of both contemporary and twentieth century aesthetic practice. For example, writing about current design techniques and some of her own work, Jacky Bowring reminds us, the aesthetic revelations of twentieth century art practice have been more to do with conditions of sur-reality than reality.<sup>35</sup> We find generally in art practice (in particular, literature and cinema) that memory is not neat and layered but, rather, distorted, fragmentary and subjective. The fundamental lesson of surrealist aesthetics is also that many things are best placed *out of place*, a shock tactic perhaps, but also a reminder that landscape architecture has acquiesced in simply reasserting the comforts of the familiar.<sup>36</sup> Although Corner rejects the avant-garde impulse of revolution for revolution's sake, it is

important to note that he emphatically believes in radical experimentation from within a canon. He, too, draws frequently on the diversity of aesthetic practices in early and mid-twentieth century art because, in contradistinction to the landscape architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, landscape architecture in the twentieth has become disconnected from its muses.

Even if landscape architecture had translated the visual revelations of twentieth century art practice into designed environments with more rigour, it would still not have arrived at a compelling ecological vision and, if anything, landscape architecture is increasingly an art of ecology. For an ecological vision, landscape architecture turned to science, which, whilst all seeing is aesthetically blind. Landscape architecture aped the scientific method and stacked up verifiable biophysical information to reach logical conclusions. Useful as this remains, science is only ever part of the story. Philosophically, science is no longer able to offer objective knowledge exactly. Consequently, with that dream of the West exhausted, science has had to face its own post-quantum, hermeneutic intrigues. In this sense, science can no longer be opposed to the arts. From here, there is no way Corner's belief in landscape architecture as the topos of culture's existential orientation could develop any further without becoming intertwined in the ecological paradox of contemporary culture and, in the mid-1990s that is precisely what he turns his mind to.

## ECO-LOGIC

Corner, in a 1997 essay entitled 'Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity', asks "how might landscape architectural creativity (informed through its representational traditions) enrich and inform the ecological idea in the imagination and material practices of a people?".<sup>37</sup> Embedded in this question is the framework of the ensuing discourse, namely that ecology is as much mind as it is matter. Collapsing the nature/culture divide by intellectualising 'nature' and naturalising intellect, Corner claims that human creativity and ecosystems share the same tendency toward the increased "differentiation, freedom, and richness of a diversely interacting whole".<sup>38</sup>

If a little spooked by hard science and too quick to scapegoat the scientific method for modernity's calamitous conditions and existential abyss, Corner's necessarily complex thinking on ecology is redolent with the creative potential of contemporary scientific metaphors. Diversification, instability, indeterminacy and self-organisation become liberating and fecund ecological metaphors for creative design processes. He goes on to suggest that "similarities between ecology and creative transmutation are indicative of an alternative kind of landscape architecture, one in which calcified conventions of how people live and relate to land, nature and place are challenged and the multivariate wonders of life are once again released through invention".<sup>39</sup> Toward that end, landscape architecture is urged to develop a creative relationship with ecology in order to exploit a "potential that might inform more meaningful and imaginative cultural practices than the merely ameliorative, compensatory, aesthetic, or commodity oriented".<sup>40</sup> Corner then identifies the problem that creativity in landscape architecture has "all too

frequently been reduced to dimensions of environmental problem solving (know how) and aesthetic appearance”.<sup>41</sup> The association of ecology with creativity and, in turn, creativity with degrees of instrumentality is long overdue.

As I have intimated previously in this journal, within the rubric of ecology we necessarily see the rational and the lyrical merge. Ecology as a science primarily concerns the logical extension of instrumental reason – a development from analysis of mechanical objects to modelling of non-linear systems. Ecological awareness as

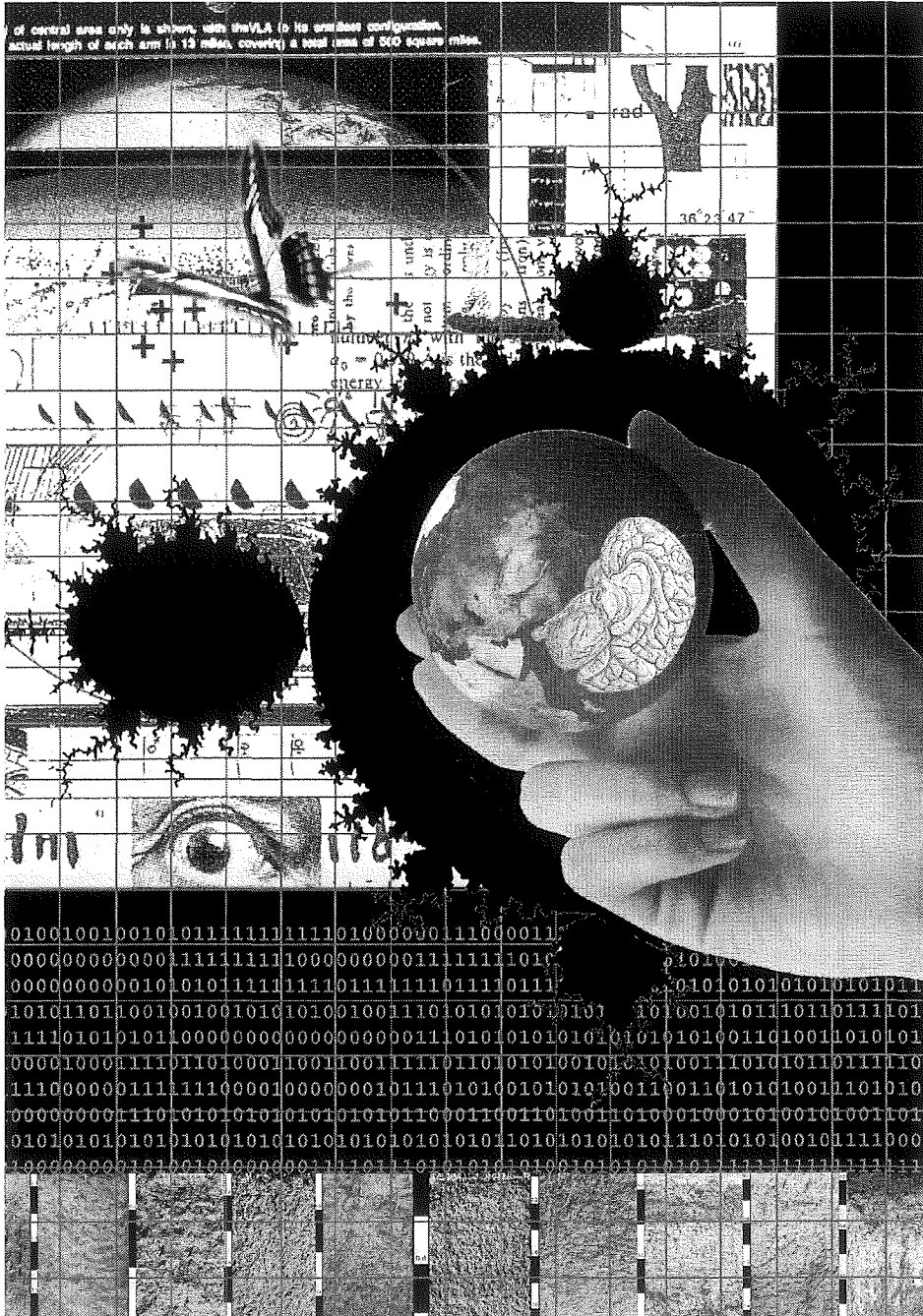


Figure 5: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002.

Mandelbrot's fractal dimensions and the butterfly effect are but two popular representations of new understandings of nature's self-organising, non-linear order and complexity. Nature's inherent creativity, unpredictability and interconnectedness as revealed by Chaos theory and Complexity science seems rife with ecological metaphors. In the background are some of James Corner's own graphic mappings. As a whole, the montage assembles an ecology of information, suggesting a confluence of mind and matter, albeit through the matrix of the Cartesian grid.

a broader cultural condition is somewhat more dramatic, because situates us deep in time amidst epics of extinction and creation. As cultural history is enfolded into natural history questions arise as to our traditionally privileged roles within the community of living systems. New senses of place emerge, which neither the narratives of (Western) theology nor enlightened humanism can adequately cope. In so far as ecologists map generally deleterious impacts on ecosystems, the science of ecology paradoxically amounts to an indictment of the culture that makes science possible.<sup>42</sup> This paradox is interesting but more pertinent is that the ecosystem revealed by ecology is a cracked mirror through which to reflect upon the entire trajectory of western theology, philosophy *and* science. Although popularly manifesting a victimised 'nature', ecology is also effecting design culture as it becomes increasingly synonymous with new and more sophisticated models of universal (dis-)order such as chaos theory – itself a kaleidoscope through which both romantics and mathematicians find what they want.

The axiom of ecology, and something now confirmed by the butterfly effect of chaos theory, is that all things are interconnected. Therefore, every act let alone every design is significant and bound in a web of relations, the consequences of which cannot be predicted. Add to this the axiom of the twenty-first century that every surface of the earth is decided over by human agency, and then clearly landscape architecture is well placed to become the new mother of the arts, a position of power it has always wanted and not yet earned.

## VERTIGO

The most powerful narrative of landscape architecture, that of socially and ecologically reconciling modernity with place, finds its main frame in the aerial photo or the satellite image. But, as soon as we think about it, aerial images become contradictory representations. Contradictory, because they conceal the real socio-political and ecological relations of the working landscape they purport to lay bare. In viewing an aerial image one is confused by seeing everything but knowing nothing. One is excited by the powerful overview but equally crippled by its detachment. If at once Faustian, the aerial image is also disempowering, effectively reminding the individual viewer of their incapacity to affect the vast spread of mass culture and its landscape. In the aerial view, individuality is effaced by the obvious prospect of being a speck in a larger system.

The aerial image smoothes out conflict and reduces cultural complexity to a marvellous pattern, a contemporary sublime, which by virtue of sheer scale and technological virtuosity appears to be meaningful photography. Unlike the kinaesthetic limitations and disorientations of being on the ground, in a body and in *the labyrinth*, aerial imagery deceptively simplifies things, inviting the planner's sweeping generalities. The aerial view, particularly from the distance of satellites also *naturalises* civilisation's sprawl, smoothing out the violence of development. From high above, civilisation can be seen as either a virus or a bloom.

Extending the logic of the aerial image we can zoom out until we see the whole earth. This postmodern icon is also a troubling image because there is as

much about the void as the object and any viewer of this lonely blue orb in the middle of nowhere must make sense of the fact that it is both one's 'home' and yet also, from that viewpoint, utterly foreign. That we now learn the earth emerged by chance from 15 billion years of cosmological history – a history that knows no teleology and would appear to make meaningless curlicues through space/time toward heat death, is unthinkable.

So much for that sense of place.

A book that purposefully indulges aerial imagery, and also sets the broad scene of a contemporary landscape architectural and ecological vision, is Corner's *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*.<sup>43</sup> Throughout this elegantly conceived project, in collaboration with the aerial photographer Alex MacLean, Corner manipulates maps, photos and texts in "an attempt to acknowledge the primacy of rational synoptic measure in the forging of the American landscape while revealing the fictional and metaphorical dimensions of the land's construction".<sup>44</sup> A post-mortem of modernity, the images in this monumental book concern the tension between paradise and utopia, the tension between Christian nostalgia and humanist futurism that shape the new world imagination. What Corner is really measuring then is a mindscape, which manifests itself in the massive denaturing effects of super-power infrastructure, set sublimely against the vastness of the earth's immemorial crust.

By placing himself at the panoptic point of the aerial overview, Corner's concept is to turn the gaze of instrumental reason upon itself, and take its measure. That is, Corner's appropriation of the overview is intentionally vertiginous and not heroic. The metaphorical scope of the concept of measurement, which binds the book, connotes a society obsessed with quantity but confused by (ecological) value. Corner works the metaphor to recall classical notions of cosmological harmony, proportion and beauty while punning on the discredited anthropomorphism of humankind as the measure of all things. 'Vetruvian Man', no longer centred in the geometry of a rational world sanctioned by God, is now a disembodied eye inside a machine falling toward the surface of a ravaged planet.

Even if the hard science of ecology, itself based in supposedly objective measurement, can in some way come to control or maybe temper its ruthless capitalist nemesis (also based on measurement and distorted values), Corner's concern is not just a world with balanced inputs and outputs. For Corner, as for German political theorist Jürgen Habermas,<sup>45</sup> modernity is not so much bankrupt as incomplete, and its humanism can be, as he puts it, "critically appropriated and imaginatively redirected for its full, liberating promise to appear".<sup>46</sup> In this sense, the landscape architecture of a better world remains within the ambit of aesthetics, values and meanings – the qualities of dwelling poetically as well as pragmatically. Indeed, without these qualities, modernity is merely a fatally flawed skein of cornucopian images straightened into fictions of progress to conceal an enlightened void.

Faced with the impossibility of its scope, Corner's *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape* nonetheless anticipates and marvels over a synthetic future of constructed ecology. However, this is not a book with a plan – Corner does not

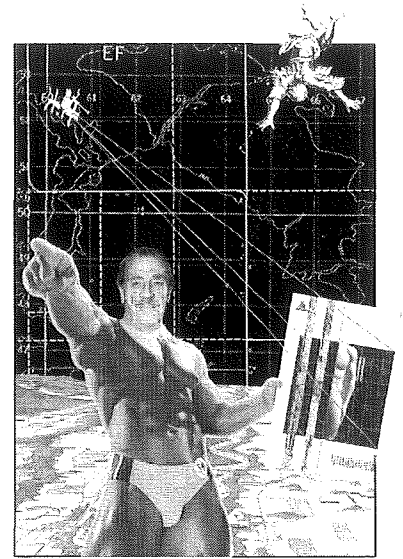


Figure 6: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002.

A Faustian Ian McHarg points to landscape architecture's promised land. In his hand an image from James Corner's *'Taking Measures Across the American Landscape'* is illuminated by a passing satellite. Meanwhile, Icarus falls toward the labyrinth of the contemporary working landscape below.

design the ground he sees, nor does he propose any form of procedural method for us to do so. Whereas, Ian McHarg's didactic overviews of how to reorganise the world below had an answer for everything (except why the plan can never be achieved), Corner's images are best understood as indications of what a hermeneutic site analysis might be, but that is all. They are unlikely to "occasion future landscapes" as he claims because they possess neither the propositional force nor the actual intimacy with a certain place that is necessary to a proposition. It is also difficult to believe that these mappings "subvert cartographic conventions" by not following them.

If we can, in retrospect, see the impossibility of McHarg's eco-logical and methodological fundamentalism, can we not also foresee an overly aesthetic, self-conscious postmodernism in Corner's all too beautiful images? Just as McHarg's method could be rote learnt and practised badly by everyone, Corner's representational elegance and attendant theoretical sophistication seems destined to remain detached and voyeuristic. His postcards from high above the earth end up falling prey to the Western intellectual and scientific problem of distantiation that Corner actually wishes to shut down. Certainly, Corner's gorgeous graphic designs do overtly bring maps to art and art to maps. That they are neither art nor maps should not worry us because more important than disputing whether they mean or enable anything much in themselves, is the fact that Corner is now taking hermeneutics up to the planner's perspective.

So, *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape* is a crucial marker, one that sets the scale and terms of reference of what would constitute a relevant, contemporary landscape architecture. However, vast as its images are, they might also be of a landscape architecture never to come, unless design techniques are developed that emerge from between those of both the poet and the planner. Corner's project of developing contemporary landscape architectural design theory will cancel itself out if it cannot find grounding within the design process. Hence, we must fall from these scenic heights into the real conditions of the working landscape they pictorialise.

## LANDSCHAFT

In his book *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner's interest in landscape shifts markedly from what designed landscapes might mean to how they "... work, what they do, how they interact, and what agency or effects they might exercise over time".<sup>47</sup> He declares that he is making "a return to complex and instrumental landscape issues" and that this necessarily "involves more organisational and strategic skills than those of formal composition per se, more programmatic and metrical practices than solely representational".<sup>48</sup> In his 1999 essay 'Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes', Corner isolates his subject by rejecting *landskip* (constructed scene) and favouring *landschaft* (working place).

Corner's frustration with design as a commodified image and with landscape architecture's infra-structural impotence is palpable. He rejects landscape designs



that indulge in scenic and semantic expressions because, as he sees it, they “fail to activate anything more than the imagery of their own obsolescence, stylistic issues notwithstanding”.<sup>49</sup> He banishes the “sentimental aestheticization” of places because it “compounds the difficulty of forging a critical and fresh landscape”.<sup>50</sup> Dismissed, too, is the academia and fine art of landscape architecture, when Corner chides us with a Marxist ruse: “whereas the connoisseurs and the intelligentsia may enjoy the associative play of narrative references in high art design, little that is socially emancipating and enabling results from authorial representational landscapes”.<sup>51</sup>

Corner now insists that a relevant practice of landscape architecture cannot work the *landschaft* of late capital with “still life vignettes”, nor, I take it, a sulking romanticism that seeks aesthetic resistance in what he pejoratively refers to as “semantically encoded reserves”.<sup>52</sup> But, if Corner is, with the stroke of a pen, cutting off *landschaft* from the history of the fine art of the garden, then he is about to lose contact with the hermeneutic wealth his enterprise is constructed upon. Given his earlier work, he could not mean this, indeed, as recently as 1997, he spoke of “semantic reserves” such as parks, gardens, words, images and maps as having had “immeasurable” impact on the formation of cultural and existential values.<sup>53</sup> Rather, Corner’s general philosophical position remains steadfast but his interest now is less to do with what art might mean and more to do with how it might connect to life, or, how we take the garden to the landscape. Therefore, he claims that in his new quotidian *landschaft* “issues such as program, event space, utility, economy, logistics, production constraints and desires become fore grounded, each turned through design toward newly productive and significant ends”.<sup>54</sup> Unlike gardens, which are generally constructed and received as mediated scenic and semantic constructions, *landschaft*, we are told, means “an occupied milieu, the effects and

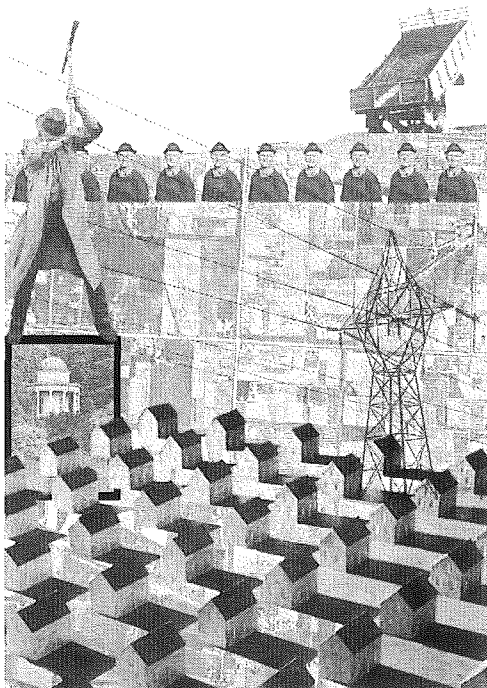


Figure 7: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002.

Set against an aerial view of a mechanised rural landscape is a post-industrial suburban sprawl aligned with picturesque sentimentality – cultural conditions upon which the authenticity implied by ‘*landschaft*’ would seem lost. A ‘real worker’ who might have once known his place is rendered placeless by multiplication. Paradoxically, it is the artists, Robert Smithson and Joseph Bueys who are engaged in actually working the land but their works are merely symbolic.

significance of which accrue through tactility, use, and engagement over time”.<sup>55</sup> Corner asks, rhetorically, if the landscape architectural project can align with “the productive and participatory phenomenon of the everyday”, arguing that the designer’s attention should be focused on staging the “conditions necessary to precipitate a maximum range of opportunities in time”,<sup>56</sup> and that design be turned from aesthetics to “engendering strategies” and “strategic instrumentality”.<sup>57</sup>

Acknowledging Foucault, Corner is perturbed by both the panoptic and voyeuristic corruptions of design (and master planning). He then follows the cultural geographer, Denis Cosgrove in thinking that real people, working in real places, develop eidetic maps of their reality and that these mental ‘maps of place’ are not dominated by the visual, the contemplative, or the ideological.<sup>58</sup> Cosgrove believes that for the insider, “there is no clear separation of self from scene, subject from object”.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Corner asserts that the eidetic richness of a place is only created and disclosed through habitual engagement, and hopes that a designer could join in this unselfconscious “collective sense of place” that communities have apparently “evolved through work”.<sup>60</sup>

First, even if Corner is theoretically correct to warn against the abuse of power that can flow from a designer’s separation from the object, it seems impossible for the designer to escape their condition. Secondly, surely one must ask: who are these working communities and where are their fields? Obviously, Corner is not referring to prelapsarian hunters and gatherers or feudal enclaves but, by the same token, he does not seem to be describing the contemporary working landscape, one that is post-industrial, de-natured, suburban and global – a landscape where no-one digs the earth and knows its *genius* but, rather, a landscape in which postmodern masses purchase genetically modified food on credit and spend their time suspended in cyberspace. Indeed, this is the un-authentic but nonetheless obscenely (hyper) real *landschaft* of our time.

No doubt Corner’s hypothetical designer sees that the seemingly innocuous, ameliorative compositions of commercial landscape design tend to conceal their complicity with existing ideological regimes. Regimes that, on the one hand, promulgate a mechanised hell of industrial and post-industrial working landscapes and, on the other, cultivate sentimental beauty spots and leisurely resorts to lull “little consumers” into a false consciousness.<sup>61</sup> Postmodernism, however, has almost no patience with the notion of hapless consumers being deceived, rather, it appreciates that people make shifting, and increasingly complex, sense of their lives and their place. A part of this postmodernism is, perhaps, a craving for simply community (*gemeinschaft*) as is implied by *landschaft*, but the *landschaft* we now look upon is more likely a sign of our failed utopias, than the setting for the next.

As touched upon earlier, landscape architecture has met the appalling yet very real onslaught of ‘commodity culture’ with a deeper ‘sense of place’. Landscape architecture has met Frederic Jameson’s notion of late capitalism’s “perpetual present” by conjuring memory, part of a postmodern tendency to situate knowledge.<sup>62</sup> Both “nature” and a “sense of place” have, however, been easily appropriated as representations and flaunted as commodities, as is the evil genius

of capital. But capitalism, and its machinations, is not a force *out there*, and Corner's critical subtext is that landscape architecture has allowed itself to become complicit and acquiesce to the treatment of places in a merely scenic way. Counter to postmodern tendencies, Corner clings to hopes of a more "authentic public life" and of "cultural relationships to the earth" other than those prescribed by a commodity culture, a disposition that goes some way toward explaining his recourse to the Germanic idea of *landschaft*. The invocation of such a working landscape seems not only inappropriate to a culture based increasingly on images and information but, even if not intended, it also falls prey to undertones of a sentimental socio-economic authenticity that is coterminous with, rather than dialectical to, the sentimental aesthetics against which Corner first set it.

The binary of *landschaft* and *landskip* seems an unnecessarily Spartan opposition, especially as it unleashes a stream of other misleading oppositions that sit awkwardly with postmodern culture. For example, Corner's argument is structured so that it exacerbates differentiations between aesthetics and work, the designer and the worker, the surface of images and the depth of place, eidetic immersion and panoptic master planning. Irrespective of the distracting internal contradictions we might find in the polarity of *landschaft* and *landskip*, I believe that Corner's resounding theme is simply that landscape architecture is distracted from designing structurally relevant time developmental strategies, by its own aesthetics, which are, in recent history, trivialised, acritical and increasingly hard to take seriously.

As will be verified and examined in part two of this essay, Corner's landscape architecture is not going to play the game of postmodern surfaces; rather, he wants to set out the game's rules.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> James Corner is currently Chair of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania and directs his own practice, Field Operations, with the architect Stan Allen.

<sup>2</sup> This study began when I was prompted by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) Graduate School of Design in Melbourne, Australia to scrutinise my own design work. The origin of this text lay in a superimposition of Corner's decade of writing *about* design upon a decade of Room 4.1.3 *doing* design. Corner's writing, and the range of our design work seem to share more than a little, even though the projects have been carried out in isolation. This superimposition was then a strategy for testing the pretence of theory to practice and practice to theory. Through this, it seemed possible to circumscribe simultaneously some of design's blind spots and fray the edges of theory's tendency to neat enclosure. Due to the unwieldy size of the result, however, I have elected to remove the descriptions of design projects. Interested readers can find the work at [www.room413.com.au](http://www.room413.com.au).

<sup>3</sup> Although this paper stays close to the writing of James Corner, I do not mean to give the impression that no-one else has been part of this conversation. Indeed, a more comprehensive essay would have been able to weave in a range of scholarship that not only examined Corner's sources, but also placed his work in its North American context. Although I regret not having done this extra work, it became clear that it was legitimate to engage explicitly with Corner's body of work, which incidentally, I think is outstanding in its proximity to contemporary design issues.

<sup>4</sup> Corner never actually says that he is trying to work a space between design and planning. This is my categorisation of his project. In conversation he has said that he is only interested in increasing

the efficacy of the field and, in that sense, avoids the binary structure of the two areas into which postmodern landscape architecture has subdivided.

<sup>5</sup> Corner, J (1999) Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York.

<sup>6</sup> Corner, J (1990) A Discourse on Theory I: Sounding the Depths – Origins, Theory, and Representation, *Landscape Journal*, v 9, pp 61–78. (Hereinafter cited as A Discourse on Theory I.)

<sup>7</sup> Corner, J (1991) A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics, *Landscape Journal*, v 10, pp 115–133. (Hereinafter cited as A Discourse on Theory II.)

<sup>8</sup> A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7, p 132, fn 21.

<sup>9</sup> Schulz, N (1980) *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Rizzoli: New York, pp 166–202.

<sup>10</sup> Seddon, G (1979) The Genius Loci and the Australian Environment, *Landscape Australia*, No 2, Feb, p 66.

<sup>11</sup> A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7, p 129.

<sup>12</sup> One could also make this point as regards the work of John Dixon Hunt and his inheritance of McHarg's Chair at the University of Pennsylvania – a suggested symmetry lost on no one. Hunt's latest book, *Greater Perfections* is perhaps the single most reliable account of landscape architecture's representational scope. Indeed, if one wanted to make more sense of Corner's emphasis on hermeneutics then Hunt's book will help to do just that, although Hunt never mentions the term hermeneutics as such. See Hunt, J (2000) *Greater Perfections*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, pp 76–179.

<sup>13</sup> The cultures of reason and romanticism can be (stereotypically) equated with landscape architecture's planning/design divisions. As regards these broader historical patterns and themes of modernity, I have found *The Passion of the Western Mind* useful, especially because it resolves the contradictions of Western history by an appeal to reconciliation, which has parallels to Corner's early work. See Tarnas, R (1991) *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Pimlico: London.

<sup>14</sup> Contrary to an empty, Godless or mechanistic universe, postmodern scientific writing, that tries to make meaning of twen-tieth century physics and biology, presents a marvellous array of profoundly speculative ideas on life. The popularity and frequency of such books testifies to the re-figuring of the universe, contrary to Corner's premise that metaphor disappears in a void. Corner only really enters the area of the new sciences in 1997 in discussions of ecology, but does, in passing in 1991, make the point that a contemporaneous hermeneutic practice of landscape design would need to concern itself with "investigations in to the galaxies, or at the opposite scale into the very structure of genes, challenging our conceptions of space and time". See A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7, p 121.

<sup>15</sup> A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7, p 116.

<sup>16</sup> A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7.

<sup>17</sup> Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice, above n 5, p 12.

<sup>18</sup> A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7, p 132, fn 29.

<sup>19</sup> *Gesellschaft* translates from German as 'society' and *Gemeinschaft* as 'community'. The Nazis favoured the latter and broadcast the former as a threat to a German *genius loci*. In theory, postmodern landscape architecture has favoured the local and vilified the abstract and global as if it were synonymous with modernism. Yet it seems to me that the concept of the global, whilst

ecologically clear, remains culturally unclear. See Berman, M (1982) *All That's Solid Melts to Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Verso: New York.

<sup>20</sup> Ricoeur, Paul (1961) *History and Truth*, Northwestern University Press: Evanston, cited in Corner, J (1991) A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics, *Landscape Journal*, v 10, p 127.

<sup>21</sup> Corner, J (1997) Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity in *Ecological Design and Planning*, Thompson, G and Steiner, F (eds), John Wiley & Sons: New York, pp 81-108, p 82.

<sup>22</sup> Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice, above n 5, p 9.

<sup>23</sup> A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7, p 131.

<sup>24</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 24, p 83.

<sup>25</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 21, p 97.

<sup>26</sup> Corner's wariness of neo-conservative postmodernity as one form of aesthetic and intellectual closure available, and as a reconciliation of the tension within modernity, is evidenced in his discussion of the Krier brothers, who would see us reconstruct cities according to classical templates. Although equally wary of the recklessly and fashionably "new", Corner indicates his progressive desire not to be "negligent of what it means to be modern", an intellectual and creative preparedness to experiment that enlarges over the course of the 1990s.

<sup>27</sup> A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7, p 124.

<sup>28</sup> A Discourse on Theory II, above n 7, p 128.

<sup>29</sup> Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice, above n 5.

<sup>30</sup> Corner, J (1999) The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention in *Mappings* Cosgrove, D (ed), Reaktion Books: London, pp 213-152, p 224.

<sup>31</sup> Corner, J (1991) Critical Thinking and Landscape Architecture, *Landscape Journal*, v 10, p 162.

<sup>32</sup> Frampton, K (1986) Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance in *Postmodernism*, Appignanesi, L (ed), ICA Documents. Institute of Contemporary Arts: London, p 78.

<sup>33</sup> Girot, C (1999) Four Trace Concepts in Landscape Architecture in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York, pp 59-69, p 64.

<sup>34</sup> Four Trace Concepts in Landscape Architecture, above n 33, p 66.

<sup>35</sup> Bowring, J (2000) The Extra In Ordinary, *Cross Section*, October, pp 10-13.

<sup>36</sup> Whilst much of twentieth-century art practice still eludes landscape architecture, it is worth noting that surrealism has influenced some relatively recent work. One thinks, for example, of the Harlequin Plaza by George Hargreaves that, although I had not visited it, was by all reports, trying to be a De Chirico painting writ large and, accordingly, met with public disapproval.

<sup>37</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 21, pp 81-108, p 88.

<sup>38</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 21.

<sup>39</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 21, p 100.

<sup>40</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 21, pp 82.

<sup>41</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 21.

<sup>42</sup> Weller, R (1989) The Future Generations University, *Landscape Review*, May, pp 62-74.

<sup>43</sup> Corner, J and MacLean, AS (1996) *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, Yale University Press: New Haven.

- <sup>44</sup> *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, above n 43, p 17.
- <sup>45</sup> The German political theorist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas has attempted to counter strains of postmodern thought that argue that contemporary cultural conditions have moved so far from modernity's originating ideals that no direct recourse to them is possible. See Habermas, J (1985) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Frederick Lawrence, (trans), Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press and Basil Blackwell, 1987.
- <sup>46</sup> *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, above n 43, p 25.
- <sup>47</sup> Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice, above n 5, p 9.
- <sup>48</sup> Corner, J (1999) Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York.
- <sup>49</sup> Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice, above n 5.
- <sup>50</sup> Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice, above n 5.
- <sup>51</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 48, pp 153–170, p 158.
- <sup>52</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 48.
- <sup>53</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 21.
- <sup>54</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 48, p 159.
- <sup>55</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 48, p 154.
- <sup>56</sup> Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice, above n 5, p 4.
- <sup>57</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 48, p 160.
- <sup>58</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 48, p 155.
- <sup>59</sup> Cosgrove, D (1991) Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape, in *Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes* Corner, J (ed), above n 48, p 155.
- <sup>60</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 48, p 161.
- <sup>61</sup> A point explored by Alan Balfour (1999) in *Afterword: What is Public in Landscape?* in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York, pp 275–282.
- <sup>62</sup> Jameson, F (1984) Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, *New Left Review*, 146, pp 53–92.

*Between hermeneutics and datascares:  
A critical appreciation of emergent landscape  
design theory and praxis through the writings of  
James Corner 1990–2000 (Part Two)*

RICHARD WELLER

THIS, THE SECOND OF A TWO PART ESSAY, continues to trace the theoretical work of James Corner over the period 1999–2000. Following Corner's lead, this second half of the essay summarises and comments upon some emerging design methods and specific design projects so as to situate the issues raised in part one. Part two begins with the unbuilt Parc de la Villette of 1982 by Rem Koolhaas and discusses its ramifications. The essay revolves around arguments put forward by Corner in the late 1990s for the agency of landscape design as structuring development rather than symbolising culture and nature, arguments for what landscape design *does* not what it *means*. To facilitate this, the writings of Bart Lootsma and Alex Wall who, along with Corner, presented the most pertinent and provocative themes in Corner's latest book *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, are considered in some detail. Part two concludes with thoughts on datascaping – a new design methodology synonymous with current trends in Dutch urbanism and one that impresses Corner with its capacity to manage and manipulate complex design programmes.

Taken as a whole, the essay offers neither a set of findings nor feigns conclusion rather, it goes to the co-ordinates Corner has set out and explores the field they demarcate. The essay does, however, seek to qualify the claim that James Corner is articulating a middle ground between the deleteriously exclusive categories of landscape planning and landscape design and that this middle ground is crucial for landscape architecture's future as a 'synthetic and strategic art form'.

INTRODUCTION

PART ONE OF THIS ESSAY established the philosophical grounding of James Corner's theoretical work in the early 1990s and discussed Corner's faith in landscape design as the topos of culture's existential orientation. In following his decade of writing about landscape architecture, part one found that the edges of Corner's thinking lie with the rubric of hermeneutics on the one hand and the concept of *landschaft* on the other. Although hermeneutics and *landschaft* would seem to diametrically polarise Corner's work, this second essay attempts to demonstrate through design techniques and projects, that Corner's work leads to and is part of a potential synthesis. In order to develop his arguments and continually define his shifting position, Corner's writing has utilised oppositional structures, however, if we fold his decade of theoretical work upon itself we find a potential reintegration of practices generally isolated as modes of planning or modes of design.

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KEY WORDS

*Hermeneutics  
Critical Regionalism  
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Vertigo  
Programme  
Infrastructure  
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Objects  
Mapping  
Datascape*

REFLECTION

To varying degrees, the design techniques, projects and practitioners put forward by Corner, and surveyed below, could all be said to be in pursuit of an art of instrumentality. As this essay will explain and explore, such a pursuit tends to erode the disciplinary boundaries of architecture, landscape architecture and planning.

In introducing his latest book, *Recovering Landscape*, Corner suggests something similar to an art of instrumentality when he momentarily defines landscape architecture as a “synthetic and strategic art form”.<sup>1</sup> As opposed to arranging scenery on the one hand or rationalising productivity and streamlining development on the other, Corner’s landscape architect is one who intervenes more powerfully, creatively and critically in both the make up and meaning of the world. Corner argues persistently that, in order to intervene in developmental processes in such a way, landscape architects need new design methods and more sophisticated modes of representation. Corner asserts that “landscape as a culturally significant practice is dependent on the capacity of its inventors to image the world in new ways and body forth those images in richly phenomenal and efficacious terms”.<sup>2</sup> Corner’s studio-based practices and writings champion the creative processes of collecting, interpreting and representing data, particularly when the processes lead to design propositions that locate meaningfulness at the structural and programmatic level.

A place that has been formative in Corner’s intellectual and creative shift away from the semantic intrigues of design toward the programmatic motors of design, and one that is seminal to a genre of work that seeks an ‘art of instrumentality’ is Rem Koolhaas’s unbuilt design for the Parc de la Villette, produced in 1982. This essay’s focus on praxis in contemporary landscape architecture begins there.

## SEMINAL GROUND

The last few decades of the twentieth century have been a boom for the landscape design industry and one can sense an increasing architectural interest in the ideas and potential of landscape architecture. However, there remains a relative dearth of speculative and critical landscape architectural projects. By this I mean there is not a lot of landscape architecture created for landscape architecture’s sake, that is, projects that risk safe amenity and specifically test ideas and new techniques. For this reason, among others, Corner is not alone in repeatedly reading a lot in to Koolhaas’s Parc de la Villette. The plan, now almost two decades old, appears in Corner’s writings on ecology and mapping and is often cited in articles by Corner, Wall and Lootsma in Corner’s latest book, *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*.

It is a measure of Koolhaas’s “cunning fluency with imaging”<sup>3</sup> that the plan can play an enduring variety of polemical roles. For Corner, the plan is an emblem of “reformulating form and program into freshly hybrid conditions”,<sup>4</sup> but he also borrows it to flesh out a discourse on designed ecologies, illustrating the point that designed ecologies need not look at all like the way the world once was.

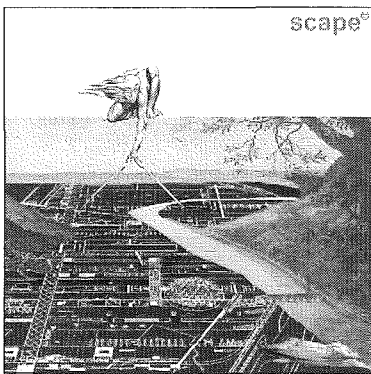


Figure 8: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002.

The self-organising striations of the plan by Rem Koolhaas for Parc de la Villette (1982) becomes a model for the whole landscape, one with no architect-Gods or memories of paradise. Buildings, open spaces and infrastructure are interwoven into one extensive hybridised condition – simply ‘scape’.



Corner agrees with Sanford Kwinter in thinking of Koolhaas's proposition as an evolutionary leap, that its qualities of indeterminacy, non-hierarchical striations and programmatic overlays can be understood, not only as ecological metaphors, but actually as socio-ecological catalysts instigating self-organising processes and injecting "indetermination, diversification and freedom into both the social and natural worlds".<sup>5</sup>

Closer to the truth of the proposal by Koolhaas and his Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), is simply the work's legitimate claim to facilitate a range of "programmatic events, combinations, improvisations, differentiations, and adjacencies".<sup>6</sup> As Corner elucidates in his essay 'The Agency of Mapping', the project deployed a system of programmatic layers, separated them out and then superimposed them so that "the resulting structure is a complex fabric, without centre, hierarchy or single organising principle".<sup>7</sup> In fact, layering is a singular organisational principle, but it is one that invites accident and creates complexity as each layer is added to others. Layering programmatic parts of a design brief deftly avoids two things: beaux-arts spatial structures and landscape as symbolic imagery. Although each layer of Koolhaas's mechanical compilation can be couched in purely functionalist, programmatic terms, the resultant "thickened surface" forms a "mosaic-like field of multiple orders".<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, function in this case leads to surprising form. Likened to the various different games written over the one gymnasium surface, Corner suggests that the resultant fusion of layers might incite hybrid games; a nice idea, but an unlikely reality. 'Reality' in this case matters because the praise for Koolhaas's Parc de la Villette, and much work designed in similar vein, claims to effect and create reality, not just represent it.

As regards ecology in the Parc de la Villette, perhaps if the masses were to interact with its bands of 'stuff' then the park's potential theatricality could bespeak, or at least represent, a sort of contemporary cyborgian ecology, a gymnasium without a roof. But if the abattoir, which the park meant to replace, was an absolute end point in the monstrous, de-natured ecosystem of feeding a city, one wonders by comparison what ecological order Koolhaas really had in mind for the site when he ruled it up and sprinkled confetti over its corpse? This is not to belittle the ecological allegory of indeterminacy in the programme of a park, but one questions whether park design should be reduced to what the protagonists of the performative over the representational refer to as 'organisational field-systems'.

What matters in design culture is not that complex scientific and ecological ideas such as indeterminacy may be [mis]appropriated to new designs, for no-one can claim the true 'ecology' or its representation, but that more fecund design strategies are invoked and circulated as rhetorical icons of practice. Significantly, Corner extrapolates from Koolhaas's Parc de la Villette to suggest "that a truly ecological landscape architecture might be less about the construction of finished and complete works, and more about the design of 'processes', 'strategies', 'agencies',

and ‘scaffoldings’ – catalytic frameworks that might enable a diversity of relationships to create, emerge, network, interconnect, and differentiate”.<sup>9</sup> Koolhaas’s programmatic alchemy has, in this sense, been good to think with and it is remarkable that landscape designers and academics have done so little with it. Equally remarkable is that Bernard Tschumi’s victorious and realised scheme for Parc de la Villette shares much in theory with the unbuilt diagrams of Koolhaas, and yet the disappointments often reported from the former do not cast shadows upon the latter.<sup>10</sup>

At Parc de la Villette the lullaby of landscape in the city was sacrificed to the model of big warehouses without roofs and, even after 20 years, no-one really knows what to do with the mutilated corpse. So, the public vote with their feet and head to Parc des Buttes Chaumont, a nineteenth-century Arcadia just up the road. Whether Arcadia turns out to be a more stubborn model in the imagination of the public than all the challenges to it might have expected, is not of immediate importance, what is of interest is that Koolhaas’s programmatic alchemy has gestated into a broader, contemporary conception of landscape architecture, shared by a new generation of urbane architects and landscape architects. Koolhaas’s Parc de La Villette has become a model for the entire landscape of contemporary culture.

In the early 1980s Koolhaas referred coldly to his systems approach to the design of Parc de la Villette as an exercise in setting out a “field of social instruments”. Expanding upon this, he now approaches the whole city (including its arable lands that are subject to the same systems) as simply “SCAPE®” a condition in which architecture, infrastructure and landscape are understood in a singular hybridised condition, one better negotiated by structural design strategies than preoccupations with aesthetic finery.<sup>11</sup> It is this sensibility that has gripped

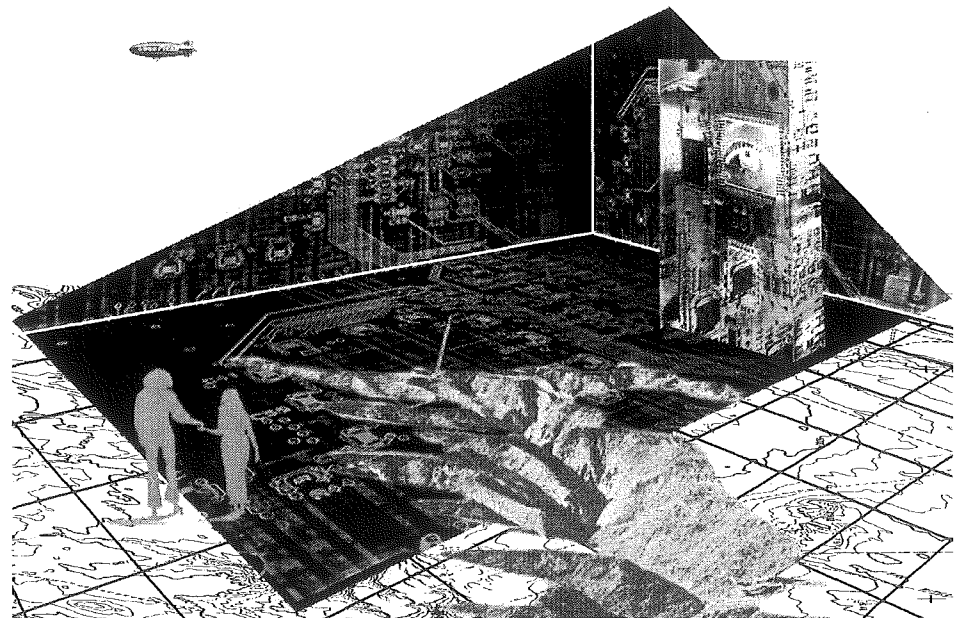


Figure 9: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002.

The ghosts of Archigram and Superstudio lead us into a future where, as described by Alex Wall, the ground plane of the city is “catalytic emulsion” or a circuit board, either determining or simply streamlining development.

the imagination of architect Alex Wall, who contributes an article entitled 'Programming the Urban Surface' to Corner's book *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*.<sup>12</sup>

## FIELD CONDITIONS

Alex Wall introduces this new urban landscape as "a catalytic emulsion, a surface literally unfolding events in time".<sup>13</sup> Just as Corner heralds his *landschaft* by juxtaposing it with the *landskip* that it is not, Wall sets his 'catalytic emulsion' in opposition to the pastoral. Wall explains that design strategies are strictly "instruments, or agents, for unfolding new urban realities, designed not so much for appearances and aesthetics as for their instigative and structural potential ...".<sup>14</sup> Echoing Corner, he explains that this new urban landscape is best understood as "the functioning matrix of connective tissue that organises not only objects and spaces but also the dynamic processes and events that move through them. This is landscape as an active surface, structuring the conditions for new relationships and interactions among the things it supports".<sup>15</sup> Wall speaks of a landscape as if it were a power board, a surface through which to run internet cables, sewerage systems and whatever else is needed to "increase its capacity to support and diversify activities in time".<sup>16</sup> He reminds us that design strategies should be "targeted not only toward physical but also social and cultural transformations, functioning as social and ecological agents".<sup>17</sup>

Wall's rationale for his conception of urban landscape design is based on new urban conditions of placelessness and the mobility of capital, goods and people – very real, but not yet well understood conditions seemingly at odds with landscape architecture's traditional desire for groundedness, orientation and emplacement. For Wall, these disorienting conditions of late capitalism have forced a shift from seeing cities in formal spatial terms to reading them as dynamic systems of flux. As opposed to the squares, parks and districts that the Krier brothers and new urbanists would have us reconstruct along classical or vernacular lines, or the nature many landscape architects mourn the loss of, Wall talks of cities in terms of "network flows, non-hierarchical ambiguous spaces, spreading rhizome like dispersals and diffusions, strategically staged surfaces, connective tissue, ground as matrix and accelerant".

What I think Wall and others are moving toward is this: All things ultimately come from or go to the ground, therefore, the landscape is *the* infrastructure of the future, not just the inert or decorative field into which mechanisms are placed. To privilege the field is to assert both the landscape that exists, and that which can be created as *the* conditions to which all other infrastructural elements or networks are answerable.<sup>18</sup> This announces an architectural paradigm shift in landscape architecture's favour. The shift involves a turn to relational readings of objects – a turn inspired not only by increased complexity and contingency in urban conditions, but also derived from the way in which both ecology and physics teach us of interconnection. This perception of landscape design owes

more to futurism, early architectural modernism and systems thinking than it does the orthodox landscape architectural pedigree of English landscape gardens, democratic parks, the garden city, ecology and Jane Jacobs. Although thoroughly 'modern' in its progressive spirit, the conception of landscape design to which Wall alludes is contrary to early twentieth-century modernism because it privileges rather than marginalises the landscape. To put it another way, perhaps what Wall and Koolhaas are foreseeing and instigating is the arrival of landscape architecture's own belated modernism. With no memory of Arcadia, paradise or a golden age, and probably unimpressed by anti-urban ecology, perhaps Wall and Koolhaas are not so much architects as a new kind of landscape architect.

Even though both authors share the conception of a landscape as primarily an infrastructural medium, Wall's futurism somewhat distorts Corner's humanism as encountered in part one of this essay. It could be contended, therefore, that a landscape as a service matrix is potentially reductive and easily degraded to an instrumental complicity in nothing other than the technological streamlining of the world, a world that Corner's hermeneutics once resisted. However, the suggestions of such complicity in Wall's model must be measured against what is arguably the failing of landscape design and planning, either to resist and critique the postmodern city or to re-imagine it creatively. In simply begrudging the city, landscape architecture ends up sulking in the corner of the metropolis or just tending its gardens. Landscape architecture, a discipline that could read and direct the field, needs, therefore, to entertain new design paradigms and scrutinise its philosophical disposition in an effort to avoid the status quo where it is trivialised and commodified by the very forces it might have once hoped to resist.

Landscape architects have always known that their field is more than inert or decorative and that development should be structured from the ground up, but they have had trouble articulating this to other traditionally more powerful disciplines. Wall's hyperbole is different to landscape architecture's existing philosophical base not only because of its futurism, but more so because it encourages a landscape position that is co-extensive with, rather than dialectical to, the city. And yet, Wall's ultimate aims are not dissimilar to those one expects landscape architects to hold high. Wall declares that the control of field conditions "may be the only hope of withstanding the excesses of popular culture - restless mobility, consumption, density, waste, spectacle, and information while absorbing and redirecting the alternating episodes of concentration and dispersal caused by the volatile movement of investment capital and power".<sup>19</sup> In seeking to resist the forces of globalism, Wall moves back to a more familiar critical regionalism, but he does so without recourse to aesthetics of the local landscape. What then would Wall's landscape look like?

## FIELD FORMS

Despite his insistence that instrumental design strategies transcend aesthetics, there is a systems aesthetic at work when Wall concludes that "the emphasis is on the

extensive reworking of the surface of the earth as a smooth, continuous matrix that effectively binds the increasingly disparate elements of our environment together”.<sup>20</sup> Wall illustrates his thesis with images by ‘Superstudio’ from the 1970s, images wherein the chaos of the city and the complexity of the real landscape is, miraculously, smoothed over by Cartesian grids extended in all directions. Certainly then, on the face of it, the landscape in Wall’s vision can lose its cherished local difference and become subsumed with, and enervated by, the mechanics of the city.

Corner’s colleague, Stan Allen, articulates similar interests to Wall but arrives at a vision of landscape that avoids homogeneity.<sup>21</sup> Allen attempts a theory of design that moves beyond the *object of desire* to the *field of events*. First, this means that in situ assessments of site conditions pay particular attention to the process of change and have a sensitivity to flux. No site is a static platform waiting for something, rather the site is a four-dimensional interdependent system. Allen, like Wall and Corner, dismisses design’s preoccupation with spectacle, grand semiotic messages and static, ideal geometries. Allen, influenced clearly by the new sciences of chaos and complexity, argues that overall form ensues not from the top down but somewhat unpredictably from localised iterations of parts, from the bottom up. Whereas in Wall’s futuristic descriptions of new urban fields there is a sense of impending homogeneity and streamlining, for Allen a sensitivity to field conditions ensures difference at the local level.

We can begin to more clearly imagine ‘field conditions’ by considering some of the examples Wall puts forward. Although seemingly at odds with Wall’s marginalisation of aesthetics, sensationally visual architectural projects, such as the Yokohama International Port Terminal by Foreign Office Architects, seem intent on blurring objects into their fields. In this project, the whole building is liquefied into an idealised and abstracted landscape of fluid folds. Highly de-natured and stylistic, yet wanting to explain themselves in functional terms, such architectural meltdowns are easily induced in computers where, unfortunately, most of them will remain. Nonetheless, such projects serve as powerful indicators of a hybridised and increasingly fluid urbanism that seeks interconnection rather than fragmentation, field conditions rather than objecthood.

Struggling somewhat to find evidence equal to his rhetoric, Wall presents the Dutch landscape architects’ ‘West 8’, led by Adriaan Gueze, as a model landscape architecture practice. Although urban squares are superseded by his own account of a new urbanity, Wall directs us to West 8’s *Schouwburgplein* (Theatre Square) in Rotterdam as an example of a zone “where the public appropriates and modifies the very surface of the city”.<sup>22</sup> When we ask why the public can do this here and not in any other empty city square, we are told that the plaza has built-in footings for ephemeral structures and that the public can interact with the spectacular robotic lights that flank the square. The design’s success is due to West 8 knowing what not to do. They have not littered the place with the detritus of their own hermeneutic subjectivity nor have they sought images of cultural continuity by manifesting palimpsests of the site’s historical context. West 8’s minimalist neo-

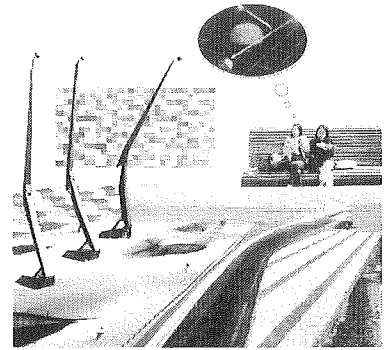


Figure 10: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002. The interactive lights from West 8’s *Schouwburgplein* in Rotterdam have walked up onto the roof of the Yokohama International Port Terminal, an icon of building as landscape and object becoming field, by Foreign Office Architects. Off to one side is also West 8’s bold supergraphic at Oosterschelde. A Japanese tourist, a global post-modern flâneur draws the connection between contemporary ‘field conditions’ and Einsteinian spacetime.

functionalism can also be seen in their simple environmental installation at Oosterschelde, a photogenic super-graphic that also happens to have some ecological merit. The stripes of different coloured shells not only suit the visual dynamics of a drive-by audience but also function well as a feeding ground for a local bird population.

Gueze has emerged as a paradigmatic landscape architect by his well-publicised turn to instrumental concerns and urban planning. West 8 claim to lead projects, not clean up afterwards. Unlike the soft environmental artworks that we have come to expect from landscape architects, Gueze's only artwork in recent times was to spread out 800,000 model homes in front of the Netherlands Institute of Architecture. This alarming display of the impending suburbanisation of the Dutch landscape not only focused debate but also demonstrated West 8's active embrace of infrastructure and architecture.<sup>23</sup> It is also worth noting the 'model' citizens that Gueze has in mind when producing design. He believes, "[t]he urbanite is self assured and well informed, finds his (sic) freedom and chooses his own sub-cultures. The city is his domain, exciting and seductive".<sup>24</sup> So, in Holland at least, the flâneur is back! But, even if Gueze's sociology seems romantic, landscape architecture should welcome this ideal client as an alternative to the hapless victims of modernism, or the desensitised suburban consumers that much landscape design must have in mind when it spreads out its familiar palliative embellishments.

In addition, Wall talks of major public works, such as new transport interchanges, networks and linkages, urging that they can be thought of as generating not destroying urban landscape spaces. At the level of urban design, Wall cites the work of Koolhaas (OMA) at Melun-Senart in France, which apparently shows how landscape can be prioritised in the procedure of setting conditions for further development. In OMA's scheme the only fixed entities are a series of negatives or tracts of landscape.<sup>25</sup> With these delineations the unpredictable and inconsistent nature of complex urban development can, not only proceed, but be encouraged. To the landscape architect, the idea of firstly securing open spaces as a strategy for place making is hardly new, however, it does seem as if it takes a glamorous architect of considerable authority and rhetorical skill, to give it publicised credence.

## NOT GARDEN CITIES

Koolhaas's most recent attempt at landscape architecture (designed in collaboration with the graphic designer, Bruce Mau) is not a garden city, rather, it is a park design entitled 'Tree City'. 'Tree City' is the winning scheme for the large, post-industrial, Downsview Park in Toronto. Here, over a vast and banal ex-military site, Koolhaas proposes a matrix of 1,000 paths and intermittent clumps of trees. Disarmingly simple and happily meaningless, if it is to be believed, this matrix is a cost-effective superstructure, within which a diversity of other programmes might eventuate. Reminiscent of Capability Brown's eighteenth-century plantings that were both beautiful and economic, and criticised as such, Koolhaas's groves of trees create an easy, soporific identity for this site.<sup>26</sup> Once again, turning the

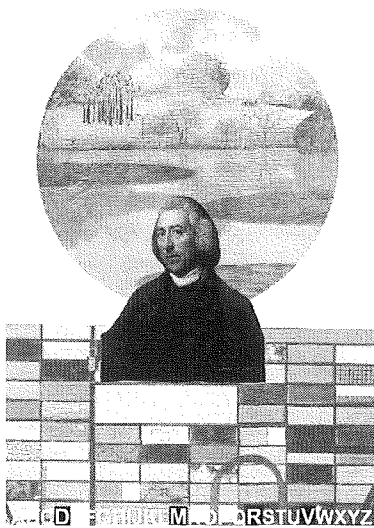


Figure 11: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002. The strangely soporific vision of 'Tree City' by Rem (Capability) Koolhaas, the winning design for Toronto's Downsview Park (2001). The design is predominantly comprised of a labyrinth of 1,000 paths and clumps of trees that cover the site like polka dots. Beneath this bubble (by graphic designer, Bruce Mau) is the grid of MVRDV's 'Plant-Pixel City', their "bettonesque" garden show touted to become a new town outside Potsdam in Germany.

tables on the normal sequence of events, 'Tree City' is a landscape strategy before it is an architectural development.

The Koolhaasian offspring, MVRDV also demonstrate a desire to move beyond crafting architectural objects and stake their new and noisy practice on its ability to negotiate the complex field conditions of the contemporary landscape. Not surprisingly, MVRDV have produced 'Plant City', a staged developmental strategy beginning with the 2001 German National Garden Show (BUGA Bundesgartenschau) held, on this occasion, in Potsdam, southwest of Berlin.<sup>27</sup> Here, as with 'Tree City', attention to programme and infrastructure in time developmental stages with in-built degrees of diversity and unpredictability are paramount. Almost making a mockery of it, MVRDV's negotiation of the National Garden Show as an instigative event is instructive for its systematic yet pluralist sensibility. In wanting expressly to free their labours from what they read as landscape architecture's burdens of "'nature', 'purity', 'harmony', and 'nobility'", MVRDV asked "[i]f it is conceivable to make a park where all demands, every imaginable paradox, all garden elements, all styles, all issues are unceremoniously gathered together in an 'e-quality' that avoids morality and prejudice, one where every element can have the space to show its beauty and power".<sup>28</sup> With apparent disregard for the site's intrinsic qualities, and the subsequent abandon that this affords, MVRDV's first move was to spread out what they call a "vegetal Manhattan", a horticultural Noah's Ark that was to exclude no plant species or design styles. Indeed, MVRDV has described this supermarket of landscape architecture and horticulture as "Bettonesque".<sup>29</sup>

For the actual garden show, everything is arranged alphabetically so as to avoid what MVRDV refers to as "artistic composition".<sup>30</sup> Top-soil is removed and stored as hills, atop of which are restaurants where each table has a telescope so visitors can enjoy the exhibits without actually walking through the show. Each grid unit has one main night-light that projects as the concordant alphabetical letter. The designers enthuse that this allows the site to be read from aeroplanes as a 'text message'. After the festivities of the garden show are complete, housing, in a range of styles and densities, is grafted on to the remnant gardens. The grid units of the matrix of Plant City are 20 x 50 metres, deemed appropriate for a range of building typologies MVRDV propose to developed. The grid is subdivided by 3.5-metre-wide paths that later become the streets of the new town. MVRDV names this new townscape 'Pixel City' claiming it to be a "true garden city" and one with such diversity and intensity that the differentiation between field and object collapses, or as MVRDV puts it, the field itself becomes an object.<sup>31</sup>

There is something refreshing, yet juvenile in this exaggeration of design programme and the designer's forecast of diversity, and one cannot help but envisage a far tawdrier outcome. Although novel, and witty, MVRDV's Plant-Pixel City is ultimately not that dissimilar to Rob Krier's 'Kirchsteigfeld', a formal, conservative, beaux arts garden city for 35,000 people, itself not far from Potsdam. Krier's master plan, developed in the early 1990s, accords with his renown aesthetic determination

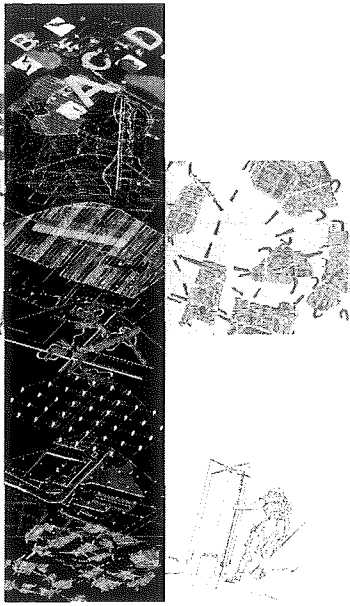


Figure 12: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002. From the ground up the overlaid maps include Guy Debord's desire lines through Paris, Bernard Tschumi's Parc de la Villette, OMA's Parc de la Villette, Peter Eisenman's site analysis for the University Art Museum of the California State University at Long Beach and finally, Raoul Bunschoten's gameboards.

to model the future on what he understands as the best of (most legible urban form) the past. Krier's master plan breaks down into courtyard components wherein it attempts to achieve some measure of aesthetic diversity by ensuring that different architects design different houses in each courtyard package. The courtyards, designed by landscape architects Muller Knippschild Wehberg, are all different in form but are also all designed primarily to hold stormwater.<sup>32</sup>

Whilst he includes other architects in his version of conformity Krier imposes a strict level of homogeneity over the entire 'Kirchsteigfeld' development, whereas MVRDV confuse botanic diversity with human diversity and propose the chaos of the global supermarket flung across an American grid. Genuine difference eludes them both.

## MAPPING

MVRDV, and Koolhaas, are developing design techniques that can cope with the contingencies and complexities of manifold design programmes in sites that are expected to be many things over time. Corner, with a view to re-aligning landscape architectural projects more powerfully toward such cultural conditions, also argues consistently for new techniques of design process and representation, and it is to this major aspect of his career that I now devote some time.

Orthodox maps succeed brilliantly by reduction of that which they pertain to represent. Design, itself unable to proceed without studying and making maps, cannot work with the overly reductive nor the overly complex. Because designers are interested in depicting and intervening in the manifold, interconnected nature of reality (in both poetic and pragmatic senses) they need mapping techniques that, on the one hand, open themselves to the infinitude of poetics and, on the other, carefully hone and manage the facts of the situation. Such maps do not exist, they must be constructed by design.

Instead of design paradigms that defer creativity until after the data is collected, Corner stresses that the entire process of collecting, assembling and inter-relating data is creative.<sup>33</sup> The data might in fact be 'pure' and 'objective' but the way it is manipulated is not. Corner explains mapping is rhetorical and hermeneutic; it is not "the indiscriminate listing and inventorying of conditions as in a tracing, table or chart but rather a strategic and imaginative drawing-out of relational structures".<sup>34</sup> What also appeals to Corner is that the rhetorically crafted map might be an end in itself, projecting not toward justifying yet another designed commodity or spectacular image, but serving to activate a different reading of a situation. To that end Corner, in his essay 'The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention', which is in many ways a seminal landscape design-studio text, presents an array of new design techniques, entitled: 'Drift', 'Layering', 'Gameboard' and 'Rhizome'.<sup>35</sup>

'Drift' implies transgressive paths through institutionalised frameworks, an example of which is the Situationist icon '*Discours sur les Passions de l'amour*', a montage by Guy Debord. The artist has taken fragments of conventional maps of Paris and rearranged them into a personalised, chimerical non-plan, a labyrinth of 'desire



lines' through the city. More concerned with (dis)orientation than linking A to B, Debord's map proposes nothing by way of design and everything in terms of imaginative re-occupation of a place. For Corner, the idea of drift "discloses hidden topographies within ruling, dominant structures in an attempt to re-territorialise seemingly repressed or spent ground".<sup>36</sup>

The technique of 'layering', as regards its manifestation in Koolhaas's design for Parc de la Villette has been discussed already, Corner, however, also takes time to accredit the technique to Peter Eisenman, in conjunction with the landscape architect Laurie Olin.<sup>37</sup> Eisenman's interest in layers is not driven by programmatic facilitation so much as by his desire to use architecture to mine the way texts and images entwine and distort within the mind. Corner says Eisenman constructs "a radically new fiction out of old facts" forcing the data into new forms. Certainly, the results of Eisenman's assemblages seem more troubled than the innocuous contextualism that mainstream landscape architecture arrives at by similarly layering information.<sup>38</sup>

Gameboards, exemplified by the practice of Raoul Bunschoten, are interactive maps that allow the multiple and inherently conflicting interest-groups within a certain place to participate in the design planning process and 'play out' their differences. The designer/facilitator attempts to translate the numerous and richly eidetic projections that bear upon a certain place, into spatial terms inscribed upon the map. As Corner explains it, the facilitator is not a mere go-between but stages the process rhetorically. This involves not the abstract accumulation of data as one expects in a Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping inventory but, rather, it is described as a "street level ethnography"<sup>39</sup> that places the designer on a very fine line of directing, but not predetermining, processes and outcomes.<sup>40</sup>

Mapping, for Corner, is a creative process concerning "... connections, relationships, extensions and potentials ..." - in a word rhizomatic.<sup>41</sup> Like the roots of mangroves, the principle of the rhizome is mainly horizontal growth but also vertical extension. Each node in the system is its own centre yet bound to every other in a non-hierarchical, multi-directional network. For example, unlike the tree of knowledge, the Internet is rhizomatic and, as a spatio-temporal metaphor of contemporary culture, its fundamental principle is not taboo and teleology but connectivity.

Connectivity is also a fundamental ecological notion where we relearn, through chaos theory, the ancient and Eastern notion of all things being interconnected. We learn also that greater potential is conferred on the local event's ability to effect the whole. It follows that cities and individual sites are increasingly understood in terms of their interconnectivity, as opposed to their bounded isolation. Corner describes a site in terms of its "... connections, relationships, extensions and potentials. In this sense then the grounded site, locally situated, invokes a host of 'other' places, including all the maps, drawings, ideas, references, other worlds and places that are invoked during the making of a project".<sup>42</sup> Denis Cosgrove suggests that sites are encrypted with "postmodern geometries and global images, the emerging forms of locality implied by networks".<sup>43</sup> Similarly, cultural



Figure 13: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002. Daniel Libeskind's rhizomatic and intentionally chaotic master plan for the centre of Berlin (1991) montaged into an aerial image of the Potsdamer Platz and surrounding landscape.

geographer, Doreen Massey extends this new sensibility suggesting, “instead of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understanding”.<sup>44</sup> In this cluster of associations, the rhizomatic metaphor comes to life as both a mindscape and ecology of contemporary culture. For Corner, the metaphor of the rhizome heralds a mode of design that no longer seeks to reflect heaven's Platonic forms, rather, it is “burrowing and extending”, laterally interconnecting and “structuring new and open-ended relationships”.<sup>45</sup>

## NOT A TRACING

Corner urges designers to make maps not tracings. In agreement with the celebrated French spatial poetics of Gilles Deleuze, Corner argues that tracings “return to the same” whereas maps can concoct, convey and connect up with alternative worlds. A map to an alternative world is Daniel Libeskind's remarkable plan for the invited design competition for the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin in 1992. Libeskind's plan is primarily rhizomatic but simultaneously layered and not unlike a buildable rendition of Debord's *Discours sur les Passions de l'amour*.<sup>46</sup> Unlike almost every other plan for the resurrection of Potsdamer Platz, that elected timidly to end the twentieth century by clinging to the palimpsest of the nineteenth, Libeskind could not *return to the same*.

The design proposition is structured along nine main lines of force that are derived from specific events and specific places related to, but not necessarily within, the site. This mandala is the author's own geomancy of the Potsdamer Platz, as opposed to official maps and histories. Fractalising along the nine “muse” lines, the design reaches out in all directions, transgressing any boundary it encounters. Libeskind's proposed labyrinth is partially underground, at ground level and hovering above ground. It is unclear what is open space, what is built space, what is street and what is building, what is figure and ground. Layered into the maelstrom are particular people's signatures, the periodic table, slices of many other cities and fragments of the author's other projects, all questioning where Berlin begins and ends as an idea, as a story and as a place. Libeskind's map ultimately hovers between the real and the impossible, between a mindscape and a cityscape.

Whilst the plan image would seem to indicate three dimensional form, it obfuscates the readily quantifiable real estate packages that developers and bureaucrats expect from architectural master planning. The plan is asking perhaps for a different way of constructing a new city centre and maybe its seemingly ‘natural’ complexity is actually arguing that order will arise, not from the master plan down but, from localised iterations up. Itself the result of somewhat indeterminate processes, this map by Libeskind, clusters uneasily around one of the twentieth century's most complex and excruciating sites. Whereas most other submissions seemed ready, willing and able to build a more streamlined new Germany, Libeskind's map beckons us into a city that is foreign to everyone and, hence, a place anyone might make home.<sup>47</sup> If Libeskind's labyrinthine map leads us anywhere it is out of the twentieth century.

Might this radically subjective and hermeneutic speculation on urban form offer us the historical optimism lacking in Krier's Kirchsteigfeld, and the substance lacking in MVRDV's Pixel City? Libeskind's scheme, sent to the judges in several pieces, with the message attached that "Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall", was resolutely rejected. It was rumoured that Rem Koolhaas, foreseeing the outcome, resigned as a judge.

## FORM FOLLOWS DATA

A new generation of designers are moving out of the shadow of poetic and theoretical giants such as Libeskind and Eisenman. The designers are doing so, first, because there is nowhere else to move and, secondly, because the dialectics of design, as an intensely psychological or spiritual tension between form and function, idea and reality, are now inappropriate orientations for generally getting on in a culture of 'too much data'. Whilst Libeskind projects a radically subjective and poetic overload of information back into the world, maps of design processes that, first, set the subjective author aside, and then saturate themselves in the banal data of a project, are known as datascares. For the so-called datascapist the design process becomes a mode of form follows data, a question of computation not semiotics, a question of negotiating statistical limits not hermeneutic intrigues.

Bart Lootsma, another contributor to Corner's recent collection of essays celebrating the recovery of landscape, explains that datascares are "visual representations of all the measurable forces that may influence the work of the architect or even steer or regulate it".<sup>48</sup> Corner advocates datascares as: "revisions of conventional analytical and quantitative maps and charts that both reveal and construct the shape-forms of forces and processes operating across a given site".<sup>49</sup> Optimistically, Corner asserts "the datascape planner reveals new possibilities latent in a given field simply by framing the issues differently ... in such a way as to produce novel and inventive solutions".<sup>50</sup> Intriguingly then, the datascapist must first convert data into a shape-form that can be used to form a project but that does not betray the original meaning of the data.

Not unlike landscape architecture's recourse to site analysis to justify its outcomes, datascares are thought to have great persuasive, commercial and bureaucratic force, because the subjectivities of the designer can be embedded in seemingly objective data. Whereas more romantic conceptions of the design process see the autonomous designer descend from the ivory tower with an ideal form that then, more or less, collides with site limitations and is endlessly contested, corrected, deformed and starved in the name of the original - the datascapist does the inverse and begins with the outer limits of a project and an acceptance that a project is always already a site of negotiation. Deferring a preconceived design outcome, datascaping actively embraces restrictions and its regulations. For example, Lootsma tells us that some of the most important threads running through West 8's landscape design work are "such apparently uninteresting things as traffic laws and the civil code - things often seen as annoying obstacles by designers who put their own creativity first".<sup>51</sup> Lootsma seems to suffer a residual and somewhat misplaced romanticism when he

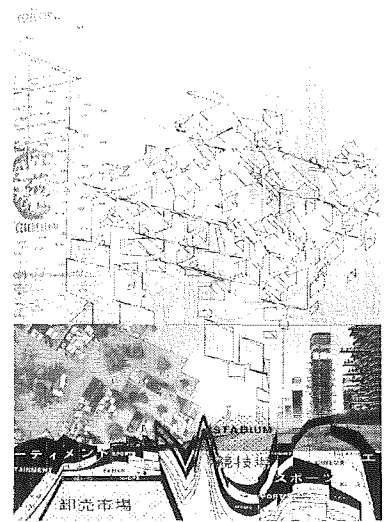


Figure 14: Photomontage by Richard Weller and Tom Griffiths, 2002.

The graph by Rem Koolhaas at the bottom of the montage demonstrates a way of mapping the programmatic features of a project into what is known as a datascape. This two-dimensional organisation of programme translates into the third dimension in two somewhat bi-polar manifestations of data by the Dutch urban designers, MVRDV. The first, directly above the datascape by Koolhaas, is 'Pig City', MVRDV's response to the statistics of pork consumption. The second, evidenced by shrapnel forms, is of MVRDV's 'Claustro City'. The form has been obtained not by intuition or art but by simply mapping banal regulations such as fire restrictions and sun angles into a 100-metre square block of (conceptual) architectural matter. MVRDV argue that, paradoxically, the result is anything but banal. In the background is the perennial spectre of robotics.

goes on to claim, that for a designer to set aside their subjectivity and follow the bureaucratic rules of a given place, means they “commit a genuinely public act in which everyone can participate and perhaps even subvert”.<sup>52</sup>

Winy Maas of MVRDV, a group synonymous with datascaping, also willingly embraces all the economic and regulatory constraints affecting any design project. Maas argues that, in focusing on and working almost exclusively with this factual material, a project’s form can be pushed beyond the romanticism of artistic intuition or known geometry and, further, that the result is somewhere between critique and ridicule of a world unable to grasp the dimensions and consequences of its own data.<sup>53</sup> For example, not unlike Adriaan Gueze literally making a model of 800,000 immanent new Dutch homes, MVRDV recently projected Dutch population numbers so as to extrapolate the number of pigs being consumed at a certain point in the future. This number equated to more land than the Dutch can feasibly afford and so MVRDV produced stark computer graphics of ‘Pig City’, rows of skyscrapers full of pigs, replete with the systems necessary to their feeding, slaughtering and processing.

In this sense, the datascape is both a dystopian shock tactic and a brave refusal to recoil from reality into ‘semantic reserves’ or boutique design. Indeed, from the perspective of ‘Pig City’, much design, and its discourse, seems decadent and largely irrelevant. ‘Pig City’, however, is an extreme example, and a somewhat inappropriate one because, by its nature, it can perhaps escape aesthetic concern. Pig City does to pigs just what Auschwitz or Eastern European architectural modernism did to humans and, therefore, when datascaping is simply a literal extrapolation and manifestation of dramatic data, it is not only relevantly monstrous but also pathetic, and dangerous.

As regards human cities, Maas points out that, in architectural terms, places around the world are not so prone to homogeneity as critical regionalists would have us fear. For Maas, places are manifestly different and this difference is quite simply because of the basic data that lies behind their main formal qualities. Manhattan is the result of certain simple building codes and other quantifiable indices, just as different types of agricultural modes shape certain landscapes. Self-evidently correct as Maas’s point is, it also smacks of an attempt to translate what in the biological world is presented as genetic determinism, on to the plane of the built environment. It is equally self-evident that every city and every landscape is a manifestation of deeper layers of ‘data’ such as the stuff of politics, language, memory and mythology, most of which is hard to map empirically. Everyone knows this, but MVRDV, to its credit, is trying now to get at things from a different angle and in a manner that makes an impact. If this means abandoning or radically relocating the fine art and craft of design then so be it. In this sense, the datascape not only threatens to drain objects of authorial meaning it also challenges the hegemony of the eye in the conception, construction and interpretation of design.

It is easy to understand how datascares are descriptive of design problems and programmes, but not so easy to see how they are generative of inventive (as opposed to crudely neo-functionalist), design responses. How the representation of data

morphs into the third and the fourth dimensions is curious, but perhaps the point is that datascares are not chasing a final and unique aesthetic form. That is, the designer/datascapist is more concerned to reframe the issues and manifold contingencies operating over any given site and, in so doing, might restructure the way a site is thought of or impacted upon by a range of different influences over time. The creative and critical operation of design is directed at the nexus of social, political and economic issues that will ultimately manifest themselves in any given place, which is, in an old-fashioned word – planning. There is no doubt as to the instrumental efficacy of the datascape but there are real doubts as to its potential to collapse into precisely the sort of methodological reductionism Corner originally set his hermeneutics against.

Making form, and crafting its semiotic load, cannot be indefinitely deferred or completely conferred on to mechanisms beyond the author. One must take responsibility. As Sanford Kwinter says, diagrams do not lead causally to forms, so conceptual and aesthetic leaps are made in datascaping that can really only be accounted for by designers manipulating computers and their design programmes.<sup>54</sup> The unique author, wrestling with the problems of translating poetic meaning into form, is now replaced by the datascapist manipulating computational limits and real-world rules. In emergent processes of computer-generated design, new intellectual and representational problems arise, but simultaneously, the reciprocity between designer and project across the gap between ideas, forms, site and programme begins to accelerate. The computer encourages and enables a more fluid design process between mind and matter.

Data related to a programme or a site is fetishised in architecture at the moment. This is promulgated by the fact that computers can take reams of banal information, convert it into zeros and ones and then visualise previously unimaginable and unbuildable spaces. Landscape architecture, however, is no stranger to site data. On the contrary, it has made site analysis data central to its design process and philosophy for the last three decades. Landscape design and planning have both been effective at collecting data, but it could not be said that they have been good at creatively manipulating that data. Although some of the design results and claims made for datascaping seem as faddish as they are inflated, we can productively ask that, if the datascaper can now, according to Corner, take bland data and make novel and inventive solutions why has the landscape design process as we know it not been able to?

First, the purpose and medium of landscape design should not, and does not always lend itself to the pursuit of formal novelty. Secondly, where landscape architects have paid close attention to their data they have perhaps expected it to do all the work. Positivist rather than hermeneutic sensibilities have reduced the catalytic role of the author in any design process beyond recognition. Alternatively, consider that much landscape architecture, whilst paying lip service to site analysis data, has not in fact worked with the data carefully enough and allowed it to come to the surface. This is because designers are often more intent upon usurping the data rich design process as they make haste toward the mimesis of a

preconceived, expected or desired image. For example, regardless of what site data might indicate, designers and clients will, as is often bemoaned, arrive at something picturesque. Finally, in so far as the computer is an essential tool for the creative manipulation of data, we should recognise that computer-aided design in landscape architecture is incipient and, therefore, it is too early to admonish for a lack of inventiveness. Certainly the opportunity is there for landscape architecture, because every site is a richly imbricated datascape, a complex ecological and cultural field condition that can be modelled and then shaped. The computer can work in time, simulating and visualising dynamic processes of change under specific conditions – modelling complex ecological and cultural flows in relation to design interventions. What beckons within the conceptual and technical frame of the datascape is an intersection of the deleteriously divided art and science of the discipline.

Lootsma stresses that the datascape “is less about philosophy, theory, and aesthetics, and more about how the visionary and the pragmatic may be combined in creative and paradoxical ways”.<sup>55</sup> Lootsma continues to distinguish a new generation from the old, declaring that datascaping is concerned with “critical pragmatism” not critical regionalism.<sup>56</sup> We know that the grand narrative of reconciling modernity with place, rules the passion of critical regionalism – so the question to ask of Lootsma’s critical pragmatism is ‘critical of what?’ and ‘pragmatic toward what end?’. Lootsma, Wall and Corner all answer that the purpose of design is to “realign the conditions of late capitalism toward more socio-ecologically enriching ends”.<sup>57</sup>

In the final analysis, the datascape is either a canny placing of the art of design where it is least expected, or an end game. Gerrit Confurius, editor of *Daidalos: Architecture, Art, Culture*, sees datascaping as a form of modernism cured of the great illusions of the twentieth century. But this could mean simply postmodernity, which postmodern theorist, Dick Hebdige devastatingly defines as modernity without hope. Perhaps, for our purposes, there is hope in thinking that a “form of modernism cured of the great illusions of the twentieth century” could be a definition of a relevant practice of landscape architecture.<sup>58</sup>

## CONCLUSION

With express support for the idea and methods of the datascape, Corner explains that his own design work aims “to both subvert and engage dominant interests”.<sup>59</sup> Importantly, Corner *does* design, but his projects do not feature in his writings and it has not been the purpose of this essay to test Corner’s theory against his design work. Corner’s design projects, in so far as one can tell, do start to give form to his repeated priority, that design engages at the level of structural, ecological, cultural, economic and political forces that impinge upon sites. However, if there is attention to hermeneutic richness in Corner’s work then it is not explicit, but buried deep in the instrumental aspects of each place.

In the light of all that Corner has said about the theory and praxis of landscape architecture his design projects deserve scrutiny, especially now that his finalist

scheme for Downsview Park in Toronto can be read against those by Tschumi and Koolhaas. Additionally, the practice he shares with architect, Stan Allen has just won a competition for the design of Fresh Kills, a vast wasteland on Staten Island, in New York. This project seems well timed and is of such a scale and complexity as to facilitate a manifestation of the issues this essay has circumscribed.

The main feature in Corner's writings is his foundational faith in landscape architecture as a medium through which larger historical questions of meaning, modernity and ecology can be enacted and influenced. Part one of this essay drew an arch, from hermeneutics to *landschaft* and attempted to chart the philosophical undercurrents into which these columns are plumbed. Part two sought to apply and examine this in closer proximity to design projects and emerging design techniques. My purpose in this whole essay has been to offer an unashamedly subjective survey of a body of work by a landscape architect I consider to be particularly relevant. The breadth of the field Corner's polemics light up conveys a grandeur that is properly within landscape architecture's philosophical and practical scope. James Corner's writings have not didactically prescribed what landscape architecture is or how it is to be made but he has set the coordinates for landscape architecture to be discussed and practised as a "synthetic and strategic art form", if not the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the twenty-first century.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Corner, J (1999) Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice, in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York, p 2.

<sup>2</sup> Corner, J (1999) Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York, p 167.

<sup>3</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 2.

<sup>4</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 2, p 164.

<sup>5</sup> Corner, J (1997) Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity in *Ecological Design and Planning*, Thompson, G and Steiner, F (eds), John Wiley & Sons: New York, pp 81-108, p 102.

<sup>6</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 5.

<sup>7</sup> Corner, J (1999) The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention in *Mappings*, Cosgrove D (ed), Reaktion Books: London, p 235.

<sup>8</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 235.

<sup>9</sup> Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity, above n 5, p 102.

<sup>10</sup> These disappointments are largely anecdotal and also based on my own experiences of four different occasions. Academically, Elizabeth Meyer does a sound job of exposing the park's reality versus its rhetorical positioning. Meyer, E (1991) The Public Park as Avante-Garde (landscape)

Architecture: A Comparative Interpretation of Two Parisian Parks, Parc de la Villette (1983–1990) and Parc des Buttes Chaumont (1864–1867), *Landscape Journal*, v 10, pp 16–26.

<sup>11</sup> For a succinct summation of Koolhaas's continued conflation of architecture and landscape into hybrid conditions, see Angelil, M and Klingmann, A (1999) Hybrid Morphologies: Infrastructure, Architecture, Landscape, *Daidalos: Architecture, Art, Culture*, v 73, pp 16–25.

<sup>12</sup> Wall, A (1999) Programming the Urban Surface in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York, p 233–249.

<sup>13</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 233.

<sup>14</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 243.

<sup>15</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 233.

<sup>16</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 233.

<sup>17</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 234.

<sup>18</sup> I have explored this further in a recent keynote address at the 2001 MESH landscape conference at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). A transcript is available in CD format in *KERB, Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 2001, November, #10.

<sup>19</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 247.

<sup>20</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 246.

<sup>21</sup> Allen, S (1997) From Object to Field in *Architecture After Geometry*, AD, #127, pp 24–32.

<sup>22</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 242.

<sup>23</sup> A range of West 8's projects can be found in, Molinari, L (ed) (2000) *West 8*, Skira Publishing: Milano.

<sup>24</sup> Gueze, A cited in Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 242.

<sup>25</sup> Programming the Urban Surface, above n 12, p 238.

<sup>26</sup> See the following website established by Tom Leader and others for the express purpose of reviewing the five finalist schemes for Downsview Park, <http://juncus.com/home/home.html>.

<sup>27</sup> The Bundesgartenschau – National Garden Show is a major event in the German design calendar, and landscape design companies compete to win the event. The show itself is a major attraction, but it is also expected to instigate more enduring urban design developments in any given locale.

<sup>28</sup> MVRDV, FARMAX (1998) *Excursions on Density*, 010 Publishers: Rotterdam, p 620.

<sup>29</sup> MVRDV, FARMAX, above n 28, p 621.

<sup>30</sup> MVRDV, FARMAX, above n 28, p 622.

<sup>31</sup> MVRDV, FARMAX, above n 28, p 623.

<sup>32</sup> Muller Knippschild Wehberg (MKW) is now reconfigured as Lutzow 7. I am aware of the design of Kirchsteigfeld because, with MKW, I worked on it.

<sup>33</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 217.

<sup>34</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 230.

<sup>35</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 229–250. Not only do these examples present an array of contemporary techniques that landscape architects can develop further, as has been the trend in design studios for some time now, they also help qualify Corner's brash rejection of "the narrative references of high art".

<sup>36</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 235.

<sup>37</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 237–239.

<sup>38</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 239.



- <sup>39</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 243.
- <sup>40</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 40.
- <sup>41</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 213–214.
- <sup>42</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 224.
- <sup>43</sup> Cosgrove, D (1999) Liminal Geometry and Elemental Landscape: Construction and Representation, in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York, pp 103–119, p 118.
- <sup>44</sup> Massey, D (1993) Power, Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place in *Mapping the Futures*, Bird, J (ed), Routledge: London, pp 68.
- <sup>45</sup> The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention, above n 7, p 244.
- <sup>46</sup> I have described this scheme and others submitted to the 1992 competition more substantially elsewhere. See Weller, R (1996) Lebensraum: The Life and Death of the Potsdamer Platz, *Transition: Discourse on Architecture*, v 50/51, pp 40–52.
- <sup>47</sup> Writing in Corner's *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Alan Balfour passes over Libeskind's plan as "fantastic and outrageous". Whilst hardly enthusiastic for the winning design, Balfour also intimates that Libeskind's work would fail to give form to public life. Balfour suggests that the work is emblematic of a discipline corrupted by authorial subjectivity. Balfour neglects to tell us upon what basis design work should then be placed and, in my view, he misreads the spatial potential for public life that Libeskind's provocative plan could instigate. Balfour mentions the landscape design proposition of replacing the existing earth of the site with that from international borders as "the ultimate symbolic landscape". Through no fault of his own, Balfour neglects to credit it to Room 4.1.3 in association with Muller Knippschild Wehberg. See Balfour, A (1999) Octagon in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York, pp 87–100, p 96.
- <sup>48</sup> Lootsma, B (1999) Synthetic Regionalization: the Dutch Landscape Toward a Second Modernity in *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, Corner, J (ed), Princeton Architectural Press: New York, pp 251–274.
- <sup>49</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 2.
- <sup>50</sup> Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 2.
- <sup>51</sup> Synthetic Regionalization: the Dutch Landscape Toward a Second Modernity, above n 48, p 266.
- <sup>52</sup> Synthetic Regionalization: the Dutch Landscape Toward a Second Modernity, above n 48, p 266.
- <sup>53</sup> Maas, W (1999) Datascape: The Final Extravaganza, *Daidalos: Architecture, Art, Culture*, v 69/70, p 48–49, p 49.
- <sup>54</sup> Kwinter, S cited in Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes, above n 2, p 166.
- <sup>55</sup> Synthetic Regionalization: the Dutch Landscape Toward a Second Modernity, above n 48, p 257.
- <sup>56</sup> Synthetic Regionalization: the Dutch Landscape Toward a Second Modernity, above n 48, p 264.
- <sup>57</sup> Synthetic Regionalization: the Dutch Landscape Toward a Second Modernity, above n 48, p 273.
- <sup>58</sup> Confurius, G (1999) Editorial, *Daidalos: Architecture, Art, Culture*, v 69/70, p 6–7.
- <sup>59</sup> Corner, J (1999) Field Operations, *Architecture of the Borderlands*, AD, vol 69, 7–8/1999.