Architecture Goes Landscape

Architecture Vanishing into Landscape
Landscape Invading the City
Hybrid Morphologies
Topological Landscapes
Infrastructure, Architecture
and Landscape Converging
Applied Nature

Projects:
adidas-Scape
Petrosino Park, Manhattan
Swiss Self-representation
on Expo 2001
Vehovar & Jauslin
Diller + Scofidio
Vito Acconci
Ken Yeang

as well as:
Zaha Hadid, Adriaan Geuze,
Foreign Office Architects, Greg Lynn,
Ushida Finlay, Bernard Cache,
Paul Virilio und Claude Parent

Authors:
Marc Angélil
Anna Klingmann
Mark Lee
Linda Pollak
Philipp Ursprung
Anthony Vidler
Gregory Volk
Hybrid Morphologies
Infrastructure, Architecture, Landscape

If there is to be a “new urbanism” it will not be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence; it will be the staging of uncertainty; it will no longer be concerned with the arrangement of more or less permanent objects but with the irrigation of territories with potential; it will no longer aim for stable configurations but for the creation of enabling fields that accommodate processes that refuse to be crystallized into definitive form; it will no longer be about meticulous definition, the imposition of limits; but about expanding notions, denying boundaries, not about separating and defining entities, but about discovering unnameable hybrids; it will no longer be obsessed with the city but with the manipulation of infrastructure for endless intensifications and diversifications, shortcuts and redistributions—the reinvention of psychological space.


Marc Angélil & Anna Klingmann
Smithson writes: “The highways crisscross through the towns and become man-made geological networks of concrete. In fact, the entire landscape has a mineral presence. From the shiny chrome diners to glass windows of shopping centers, a sense of the crystalline prevails.” From a driver’s viewpoint, this artificial, crystalline landscape even merges with the topography of the car’s dashboard. The reflections on the windshield, the plastic buttons of the car radio, and the depression of the glove compartment are read as a kind of extension of the territory of the sub-urban conglomerate. This landscape, according to Smithson, has not grown organically but exhibits properties of mineralogical structures that depend equally on natural and synthetic processes. In its geology, the city consists of a stratification of layers forming a consolidated entity.

Smithson introduces a method by which to scrutinize, through the juxtaposition of the terms Site and Non-Site, the
interaction between the real conditions of a place and his interpretations of that place. Site stands for the material reality of a pre-existing situation, as for example, the familiar landscape of New Jersey. A Non-Site, on the other hand, is an abstract representation or reinterpretation of the site in the form of a text, a map, or a sculpture. Smithson’s earthworks, which he calls “a sedimentation of the mind,” involve in situ a context, while concurrently suggesting other readings of that context. In a series of interventions referred to as “flows” in which “large quantities of asphalt, concrete, mud, or glue” are “poured across parts of landscapes,” Non-Site strategies are superimposed onto the Site, thus altering its perception.3

Site and Non-Site stand in a close relation to one another, yet they represent different states of the same phenomenon. One can be transposed onto the other and vice versa. The analogy in “The Crystal Land” between city, land, and geology, between the topography of the urban landscape and the car’s dashboard, belong to both categories as they coalesce into a new physical / mental landscape. While the infrastructures for transportation constitute a de facto condition of the site, they are at the same time solidified fossils. The windshield glass of the car is captured in its physical condition but read as an extension of the landscape. Site and Non-Site demarcate a space that, according to Smithson, can be traversed—a space, fundamentally determining the so-called reality of space.

Scapē®

“SCAPÉ®,” a term introduced by Rem Koolhaas, implies a reading of the urban territory as landscape.4 The term prompts a strategic distancing from traditional terminologies. The binomial and dialectical nouns town-scape and land-scape are not considered separate entities but are conjoined to form a singular expression. “SCAPÉ®” is an idiom for the edgeless city, in which the distinction between center and periphery, between inside and outside, between figure and ground is erased. The city is understood as a continuous, topologically formed field structure, its modulated surface covering vast extensions of urban regions. Despite its inherent discontinuities, breaks and fragmented orders, a specific form of cohesion is attributed to the contemporaneous city, the urban landscape perceived as an interconnected tissue. Koolhaas speaks of a city of “exacerbated difference” that does not follow the ideal of a harmonic order but is marked, through the juxtaposition of opposites, by a permanent hybridity—a hybridity constituting the city’s primary connective principle.
left: Hans Scharoun, water color
In his essay "The Generic City," Koolhaas attempts to identify the integral elements and structures of this new form of urban fabric. He writes: "How to describe it? Imagine an open space, a clearing in the forest, a leveled city. There are three elements: roads, buildings, and nature; they coexist in flexible relationships, seemingly without reason, in spectacular organizational diversity. Any one of the three may dominate: sometimes the 'road' is lost—to be found meandering on a incomprehensible detour; sometimes you see no building, only nature; then, equally unpredictably, you are surrounded only by building. In some frightening spots, all three are simultaneously absent."7

Such a view leads to a dissolution of traditionally established categories. Infrastructure, architecture, and landscape amalgamate to become one complex. Instead of accentuating their differences and treating them as separate entities, the possibility of their convergence is proposed. When architecture is declared as landscape, infrastructure as architecture, and landscape as infrastructure, then the predicament is given for potentially understanding the phenomenon city on other grounds than those conventionally pursued. The method deployed is that of a hybridization of terminologies, identified by Koolhaas with the term MERGE© and allowing hitherto separate phenomena to be connected: "landscape and city = SCAPE®, business and pleasure = BUSINESS VACATION®, golf course and urban fabric = SMOOTH® green crust of THIN® urbanism."8
Separate elements of the city form a network conglomerate of unstable components which amidst divergences offers the impression of a constant uniformity. This unifying principle acts on a particular notion of spatiotemporal considered by Koolhaas, Deleuze and Guattari, a type of smooth space. This peculiar kind of space is not bound by a specific place but is primarily marked by vectorial displacements, "multitudes, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities." It is a hierarchical, decentralized, and nomadic in a-organization. Smooth space is that of oscillating relationship always addressing through their simultaneity multiple dimensions. It is a space of coexisting structures. Smooth space intersects differences and distinctions: it literally smoothes over spaces.

Scape /-schaft

Such an understanding of the city as a dissolved and yet consolidated territory has historical antecedents. Hans Scharoun, for example, transposes within urbanism the concept of landscape onto the concept of city, as suggested by his choice of terminology. He speaks of an urban-land-scape and of an awareness of the urban-land-scape-space as a basic condition for any form of planning development. In his writings, one encounters repeatedly the term —-schaft, derived from the Old High German schaft, meaning to give form or to shape. Word combinations used by Scharoun as Gemein-schaft (community), Nachbarschaft (neighborhood), Himmelschaft (sky-scape), or Land-schaft (land-scape) form the basis of what might be termed Stadt-schaft (city-scape).

According to Scharoun, this form-giving process must relate to the "demand which expresses itself in the unfinished," that is, in open systems, which he considers essential within planning and urban design. Rather than based on "formal-dogmatic
This formation process pertains to heterogeneous and nonetheless coherent relationships developing into a connected entity. In this sense, the city evolves, not through the external imposition of order, but according to internal interdependencies. For Scharoun the urban field emanates from a process which includes the traces and histories of past processes. Urbanity is an expression of a “mental landscape” mirroring societal changes both at material and cultural levels.

This conceptual framework forms the base of Scharoun’s architecture. In his design for the Berlin Cultural Forum, the buildings of the Philharmonic, the Chamber Music Hall, and the State Library literally comprise an urban landscape. A “valley” is formed between the “mountains” of free standing edifices as objects. The stepped-down geometry of the building’s volumes contribute to the integration of structures of varied scales, thus incorporating the New National Gallery by Mies van der Rohe and the Matthei Church by Martin Stühler into a coalesced loose ensemble. Urban space is created, less by the implementation of predetermined type forms than by the tension resulting from a field of interactive forces. In that, architecture eludes the domain of bounded compositions to favor the dynamic, unceasingly fluid condition of the urban landscape space.

**Infrastructure Architecture Landscape**

Within contemporary architectural discourse, potential interconnections of infrastructure, architecture, and landscape are investigated. In the work of Adriaan Geuze, Zaha Hadid, and Rem Koolhaas, for example, one encounters proposals for structures of a hybrid nature, structures pertaining concurrently to different categories. Through mutations and transformations, new morphologies are explored considering the possibility of an architecturalization of landscape and infrastructure, a terminology which reciprocally suggests an infrastructuralization or landscapification of architecture.

The landscape architect Adriaan Geuze addresses in his work prevalent urbanization patterns of the natural landscape, inferring from such conditions a distinctive spatial conception. Rather than separating landscape and infrastructural elements, he interweaves them, so as to form new conglomerates. An example of this strategy is the Storm Surge Barrier project in
Flanders, a coastal region artificially created by land reclamation processes and marked by infrastructures, farming, abandoned industrial sites and sand depositories. Geuze approaches the site as an ecological system. From the residues of the local mussel industry, a polder landscape is created using black and white sea shells, functioning as a hatching ground for prevailing bird populations. The project responds to the large scale of the surrounding landscape. The alternating light and dark stripes of sea shells appear as an extension of nearby infrastructures forming a linked territorial complex. According to Geuze, the landscape is always subjugated to a process of transformation in
which disparate elements are conjoined into a fluid spatial continuum.

A similar preoccupation with issues pertaining to the configuration of the land is at the core of Zaha Hadid's work. She considers her architecture as a form of landscape extension. Her buildings, while responding to varied influences of their surrounding contexts, are conceived as dynamic fragments strategically bundled into a congruous assembly. In the Hong Kong Peak competition project the building is thought of as an artificial landscape, its formal vocabulary derived from a reading of the site, expanding and heightening its topographical characteristics. Through the superimposition of architectonic layers and the blurring of boundaries, the structure unfolds as an open tectonic field, countering traditional notions of the architectural object as a finite entity. The form of the building dissolves as the structure multiplies into a series of levitating planes. While transforming the mountain in its form, the form of the building seemingly dissipates into the mountain itself. “To conceive of the building as an artificial mountain is to render the floor as a faceted escarpment and to project the roof as a dematerialized cavern. Hadid’s Hong Kong project can be seen as a piling up of geological plates, which through their mutual displacement serve, at one and the same time, both to excavate and reconstruct the original body of the mountain. The strength of Hadid’s work resides in its energetic spatial fluidity.”

Rem Koolhaas understands the city as a field determined by accumulations, connections, densities, transformations, and fluctuations. This choice of terms, borrowed from the field of topology, points to a conception of the city as a dynamic system in which architecture, infrastructure, and landscape are no more than events or occurrences within an uninterrupted spatial field. In a project entitled “Dolphins,” strategies are developed pertaining to possible interpretations of traffic infrastructures using architectural means. Koolhaas focuses on the spaces created by freeways intersections, or as he calls it, the “slack within seemingly exhausted infrastructural spiderwebs.” These left-over spaces are densified using landscape and architectural elements. Green open spaces and a dense, built fabric are interlaced within the network of streets creating a new conglomerate of mutually dependent parts. A wasted territory within the city is reclaimed through the introduction of new programs and through the interconnection of systems, commonly kept apart, such as those for infrastructure, architecture, and landscape. The project avoids any type of compositional order which might prioritize architecture; it instead alludes to potential strategies promoting a hybridization of components within a space of topological extension.

Fluid Morphologies

While the traditional city demarcates a figure against the ground of its surrounding landscape, in the contemporary city figure-ground distinctions are revoked. Landscape and built fabric increasingly interact, entangle, interweave. Neither ground nor figure can explicitly be discerned within the amalgamated and indefinite field of the urban territory, thus requiring other formal differentializations. Moving from closed to open structures, the city as an urban landscape increasingly evolves as a dynamic process, questioning the authority of self-reliant architectural form. The boundaries between architecture, infrastructure, and landscape dissolve while de-centering the notion of the architectural object as a closed entity.

The morphology of traditional city planning encompasses organizational geometries such as grids, axes and radial organizations through which to establish order within the urban fabric. These principles confirm the specific distinctions between center and periphery, core and edge, inside and outside, categories no longer adequate to describe the urban conglomerate in its entangled complexity. In the new city, formal principles of compositional provenance miss their target. Its morphology instead unfolds from a system of relations between different, sometimes contradictory forces, no longer as an absolute but in reference to other structures. Formal and spatial constellations emerge from continually changing processes, open to new interpretations. The city forms a territory of strategic possibilities in which the relation between different parts is unceasingly renegotiated. The city morphology, in this sense, is fluid and formally undetermined, pertaining to the oscillating interdependencies of contextual forces rather than to the logic of pre-established form. Encapsulating magnitudes of processes the city manifests itself as an open field.

The city is a system in motion, characterized by fluid conditions. Within such a dynamic conglomerate, infrastructure, architecture, and landscape lose their autonomy, the established meaning of their respective definitions exposed to mutable significations. With the dissolution of categories, an undetermined state is attained, that repudiates—as to the logic of a new spatial conception—firmly secured hierarchies.

Marc Angéli is an architect with offices in Zurich and Los Angeles and is the director of the first year course at the Architecture Department of the ETH Zürich. Anna Klingmann is an architect and teaches architectural design at the Hochschule der Künste Berlin and at the ETH Zürich.
Notes:
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8 Ibid., p. 4.

Further development of the diagrams by Rosalind Krauss concerning the relationship between architecture, infrastructure and landscape.