

## Introduction

### Transformative ground

Proposing a transformative ground implies that there has been a shift in thinking that brings about a qualitatively different field of concern for landscape architecture. As the range of theory and design precedents covered in this book indicates, there has been a transformative shift in fundamental ideas that underpin landscape architecture, amounting to a significant shift in aesthetic theory. This transformational period, spanning over the last 30 years, has seen conventional ideas and key thematic areas giving way or changing emphasis as new conceptualisations and shifts in aesthetic appreciation have progressively opened up, generally advancing in response to the emergent territory of the post-industrial landscape. This book offers considerable scope, drawing on the rich conceptualisation of landscape in the contemporary field, to capture a sense of how this period of radical rethinking has challenged long standing conventions, as new theoretical and strategic frameworks have emerged.

Transformative ground also refers to the convergence between site, as the physical ground of the landscape, and reasoning, of how we ground abstract theoretical or cultural sensibilities as a progressive field of concern, where the means and the imagination of our culture intersect with the dynamic combinatorial potential of the real world. For several decades now, the increasing presence of post-industrial sites have opened up a new territorial ground for landscape architecture, disrupting conventional ideas and aesthetics of space making that have been deemed inadequate for dealing with the structural complexities, toxic histories, and cultural ambiguities of abandoned sites. There is a highly contested quality to many post-industrial sites, where abandonment and opportunity, decay and growth, history and erasure, create a compelling entanglement between seemingly contradictory conditions. These contextual realities are challenging, requiring new conceptualisations and spatial tactics to negotiate issues that are often complex, temporal, beyond perception, and in extreme cases, irresolvable.

In current thinking the common designation of post-industrial sites as "wasteland" has been challenged, where many theorists have questioned the derogatory emphasis of this term, to instead bring emphasis to how abandoned sites are places of latent potential. Each site has a unique set of conditions and qualities that requires an engaged, responsive, and revelatory approach, to work with the potential of these spaces as transformative grounds for society and nature, where they can be robust structural complexes that offer a myriad

of spatial experiences and structural re-appropriations; imbued with a sense of open-endedness, vibrancy, and opportunity that traditional public space often lacks; containers of rich ecological habitats and exotic species, as a spontaneous nature that evokes a sense of the wild; and places of social appropriation and participation, for communities to emerge with shared values and aims.

While post-industrial sites, especially those of former heavy industry, were complicit in bringing about the environmental problems we now face, including climate change, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, economic decline, and social marginalisation, they are also recognised as offering the grounds for positive transformation into accessible and valued public space. In this way the transformative potential of abandoned sites has catalysed a progressive movement in landscape architecture, compelled by the challenges of re-integrating sites, largely structured for utilitarian purposes, back into the urban fabric. This book provides considerable scope on how new expressive forms and design sensibilities, based on distinct societal and environmental issues, have emerged in response to this context, providing a sense of how post-industrial sites not only offer a transformative ground for society and nature, but also a progressive field of concern for landscape architecture.

### Urban transformation

While post-industrial sites are associated with urban decline and degeneration, they are increasingly seen as part of the broad scale transformation of cities, which has seen the disappearance of a range of heavy industries that once dominated city skylines, such as factories, shipyards, and steelworks, providing a sense that we are in a post-industrial era. However, this could better be described as a process of urban succession, where abandonment is seen as part of the progression from a production to consumption society, which started around the 1950s and has significantly accelerated in recent decades. This broader sense of transformation implies that understanding and dealing with the post-industrial landscape involves more than the re-integration of abandoned sites, but appreciating that these are components set within the expansive reorganisation of cities and their urban regions, which encompasses a broad range of socio-spatial concerns related to urban transformation.

Urban transformation is underpinned by large-scale infrastructural design, as an increasingly extensive sociotechnical network that supplies the demand for energy, food, goods, and other services or resources to sustain a growing urban population, calling for urban strategies, such as network, metabolic, or circular studies, which engage the systematised dimensions of landscapes. Other characteristics of urban transformation involve spatial shifts, such as the increasing presence of edge city and network developments, which require strategic frameworks to integrate the interspersed, transitional, and fragmented structure of expanding urbanisation. Urban transformation also involves culture change, including increased concern for social mobility and tourism; nature conservation and ecological restoration; climate control and resilience to flooding; mitigation of noise pollution; smart cities and living technology; and productive landscapes and the social rights to the city, amongst other cultural interests.

What emerges in this conceptualisation is that urban transformation is as much cultural and system based as spatial. This indicates that the urban can no longer be understood through prior conventions that placed emphasis on spatial form, proportion and enclosure, requiring a shift from emphasis on spatial structure as fixed and stable, to instead grapple with conceptualisations of the urban landscape as a dynamic process, of ongoing spatial transformations underpinned by social activities and environmental systems. As evidenced in this book, landscape architecture plays a key role in providing strategic frameworks that respond to urban transformation on spatial, cultural, and system based levels, to engage the expansive territory of transitional urbanism and infrastructural design, alongside fresh thinking about scale and temporality.

### The ecological lens

The increasing emphasis on process and systems based thinking has brought closer alignment between landscape architecture and the ecological sciences. The discipline of ecology has informed the appreciation of landscape as an environment of relational interactions, which embodies a process oriented approach that brings the design of landscapes closer to their living, dynamic qualities. Landscapes are increasingly seen as composites of ecological systems, social activities, and their interactions, as a progressive shift from thinking of ecology in cities to considering the ecology of cities and their urban regions, which reflects the essence of the recently established fields of urban ecology and ecological urbanism. This shift in understanding challenges conceptualisations of urban landscapes, where the indivisible associations between environmental and human factors includes an assemblage of components, such as the complex and dynamic interplay between people and society, society and the environment, and non-human components, including technology, materials, objects, and biota, working in dynamic combinations, with varied reach and extent, flow, and stasis.

While the formative influence of ecology largely involved the use of liberating metaphors that allowed landscape architecture to move beyond outdated aesthetic conventions, both disciplinary fields have evolved to view the urban landscape as a complex system, requiring a more enlivened appreciation of scale and temporality. This has led to the emergence of operative terms in design that aim to conceptualise the landscape as an arena of enactment, as a progressive shift in theory, where older conceptions, such as stability, harmony, equilibrium, and balance, have been replaced by terms that reflect the generative capacity and distributed structure of living systems. As explored across the chapters of this book, current ideas that bridge understanding between ecological science and landscape architecture offer an array of operative terms to engage the dynamic qualities of landscapes, such as flow, flux, duration, emergence, distribution, self-organisation, contingency, resilience, and adaptation, amongst others.

As post-industrial landscapes have opened up a new territorial ground for landscape architecture, this has coincided with the rise of environmental awareness and the formation of the distinct movement of environmental philosophy. Ideas stemming from this movement have largely challenged the traditional

aesthetic conventions of an (art) object-centred appreciation, which involved a delimiting, constrained, and directed aesthetic appreciation of the environment. Instead, environmental philosophers bring emphasis to the ecological vitality of messy “unscenic” systems, the “everyday aesthetics” of human activity, and the value of “more-than-human” actants in shaping landscapes, none of which were part of traditional landscape aesthetics, in particular the scenic fixation of “the picturesque.”

Environmental philosophy calls for a cultured sensibility, to move beyond outmoded traditional values that place emphasis on appreciating environments as formalised objects or composed scenes, to align our appreciation with current imperatives to engage socio-ecological dynamics. Underlying this shift is a progressive aim to better align aesthetic appreciation with the living world, emphasising the unbound and subjective qualities of open-ended, indeterminate, immersive, and relational systems, which are experienced as multi-sensorial and participatory encounters. This perspective challenges landscape architects to view landscapes as complex, multi-dimensional systems, where interaction and entanglement, emergence and becoming, come forth as operative terms to appreciate the interconnected fabric of the living world.

Such philosophically driven conceptualisations of the environment challenge the fundamental ground of landscape architecture, especially for a discipline responsive to an industry that favours product over process, while ideas stemming from outdated bucolic traditions remain stubbornly entrenched. Yet, as this book seeks to illuminate, many practices have progressively shifted towards the engagement of environmental dynamics, to work pragmatically and creatively with the potential of sites as transformative grounds, where spatiality is inter-related with socio-ecological dynamics. This implies a culture shift in landscape architecture, of new ways of thinking and methods of design, while informing how environment is mediated by our direct experience and the development of a cultured sensibility that informs our appreciation of it.

### A field guide

The book is structured to follow the general logic of a field guide, in that it aims to provide a useful, informational guide to improve the state of knowledge for entering and making sense of a particular environmental field. However, while conventional field guides provide descriptive accounts of the various characteristic species that make up an environment, this study explores how our understanding of landscape is largely shaped by its conceptualisation. Following this logic, the book provides critical purchase on operative terms that shape current thinking and practice, based on a constructive evaluation of design concepts and comparative theory.

Another convention of field guides is that while they involve gathering together a comprehensive range of informational material, as useful guides there has to be a clear sense of how this information is organised, most usually presented as a scheme of classification that takes on a homogenous structure of content, with characteristic components isolated through abstract classification.

As a homogenous structure would not align with the ethos and subject matter of this book, this field guide takes on an asymmetrical and heterogeneous structure that in part corresponds to the aforementioned qualities of the environment, as complex, open-ended, and relational. This structure also reflects the contemporary field, as characterised by an inherently heterogeneous spread of practice and theory, which defies easy categorisation and instead invites the reader into an entanglement of illustrative projects and theoretical perspectives. Adding to this heterogeneity, the book includes a broad range of transdisciplinary viewpoints, drawing on ideas from across philosophy, ecology, urban theory, and geography, which reflects how landscape architecture has always synthetically recharged itself by drawing insight and inspiration from allied fields of environmental concern.

The field guide is structured through nine thematic chapters that explore shifts in fundamental themes that underpin landscape architecture, including 1) nature and the picturesque; 2) wilderness; 3) the sublime; 4) technology; 5) social space; 6) the city and urbanism; 7) infrastructure; 8) scale; and 9) temporality. Each theme is expanded upon through a range of interrelated concepts, to provide a critical evaluation of operative terms derived from the current field of landscape architecture, summarised in the following sections.

Chapter 1, *Relinquishing control*, explores shifting attitudes to nature, drawing reference to the emergence of an environmental philosophy that aimed at “*de-objectifying the landscape*,” as a concern to shift from an (art) object-centred aesthetic to better align aesthetic appreciation with the qualities of nature. A parallel shift in landscape architecture is illustrated through the example of Candlestick Point in San Francisco, which was predicated on the comparative concept of “*relinquishing control*.” This case study highlights how concepts of the *relational*, *open-ended*, *indeterminate*, and *immersive* became operative terms for landscape architecture, informing a progressive shift in aesthetic appreciation that challenges the traditional idea of “the picturesque” and its delimiting of nature and society. Further concepts of *staged landscapes*, *symbolic landscapes*, and *unscenic landscapes* are identified as operative terms that place value on the immersive and experiential quality of landscape.

Chapter 2, *The agency of the wild*, continues the exploration into how nature is valued with regard to shifting ideas about wilderness and “*the agency of the wild*,” exploring how post-industrial sites have opened up new territory for spontaneous nature, which has been classified as “*new wilderness*.” This form of spontaneous nature was not part of conventional city planning, resulting in levels of ambivalence about its value and presence in the city. Using Nature Park Südgelände in Berlin as a case study offers an example of design that embraces wilderness and natural succession as experiential qualities. This includes conceptual approaches that view *succession as narrative*, while outlining how this establishes a “*wasteland aesthetic*” that works on the *interplay and tension* between spontaneous nature, industrial artefacts, and designed elements.

Chapter 3, *A menacing dragon*, uses the renowned precedent of Duisburg-Nord to evaluate how the spatial conditioning of post-industrial sites can be interrelated with conceptual shifts in the meaning of the sublime. This evaluation highlights that ideas about the sublime have been revived in response to