Landscape Architecture as Necessity
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Review by Julie Marin, University of Leuven, Belgium

Human-caused risks and challenges such as landslides or floods are daily reminders of climate change, but also of the necessity of an urbanization sustained and directed by landscape structures working with rather than against nature, as outlined in landscape urbanism (*Waldheim 2006*). Infrastructural urbanism reframes the landscape's potential to become a soft and hybrid economic and ecological infrastructure guiding urbanism and transcending hard engineering solutions (*Bélanger 2013; Carruth 2016*). Both of the above positions reflect how current landscape architecture discourse and practice are increasingly taking the lead in complex multidisciplinary and cross-scalar challenges related to climate change.[1]

The Landscape Architecture as Necessity conference gathered established academics and professionals, emerging voices as well as doctoral students, in the fields of landscape architecture, urbanism, environmental planning, ecology, public agency, activism, and art. The conference urged that landscape architecture be claimed as a necessity in addressing the interdependent environmental and socioeconomic systems. This implies a paradigm shift in landscape architecture to complex systems thinking. The conference was meant to demonstrate landscape architecture's spatial capacity to (re)structure environments through complex transitioning processes.

The keynote panels set the lines for the conference. The opening panel urged landscape architects to get out of their comfort zones to proactively engage in public and other agencies. With their systemic thinking skills, it's landscape architects' responsibility to translate complex issues into landscape language in order to make transdisciplinary translations of interdependent natural and man-made systems.

Kristina Hill called for courage, shared resourcefulness, and compassion. Optimistically speaking, we are in the last two decades of a stable climate era. We shouldn't think we can save the world, but instead we have to stick with it as it is and evolves. This point was elegantly elaborated in Dilip Da Cunha's lecture titled 'The Unnecessity of Landscape'. He argued that in the context of climate change, we have to design for wetness or the moment of precipitation instead of the moment of flow in the hydrological cycle: aqua fluxus.[2]

Nina-Marie Lister opened a conversation on the culturally shifting way landscape architects speak about plants and animals.[3] As a result of climate change, animal habitats are geographically shifting and what we think of as native and exotic plants or animals needs to be drastically reconsidered.[4]

Other speakers also elaborated on the discipline's cultural mandate. Hadley Arnold took us through remarkable photographs of storage tanks, pipelines, and reservoirs, a result of multiple explorations of the West as a network of infrastructural support systems. Anuradha Mathur gave a beautiful insight into the manual production process of the multi-layered maps from the shifting Mississippi landscape (*Mathur & da Cunha 2001*). She explained how this production process was simultaneously a way to think about spaces in terms of time, approaching them as evolving practices instead of static projects or programmes.

Hosted in Los Angeles, many conference presentations addressed the Los Angeles River watershed's complex situation. Los Angeles suffers droughts and has a lot of water consumptive vegetation. A transdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach seems the only way forward, but encounters many

obstacles. In the meantime, environmental art installations such as Mel Chin's low water consumptive garden patches can provoke greater social awareness and responsibility in a water-starved city.[5]

Several discussions focused on the role that landscape architects should play when working with multiple agencies and scales; the necessity to bridge and connect stakeholders in order to achieve integrated design. They addressed the challenges landscape architects face in overcoming barriers and government structures, in designing decision-making processes and convincing governments as agents of transformation. Clearly, landscape architecture's context-based capacity to address interdependent environmental and socioeconomic systems needs much more application in practice.

In terms of landscape architecture's spatial capacity, the role of design itself was debated. Even though mapping can make the case for integrated, multidisciplinary, and systemic approaches to complex territorial issues, according to Kelly Shannon, landscape architects also need design that demonstrates the change and communicates to a general and professional audience alike how landscape can operate as a spatial framework to guide these changes.

Furthermore, the role of technology and quantitative approaches was questioned. Holzman and Lipschitz discussed digital support tools in industrial agriculture (*Holzman & Lipschitz 2016*) and their presentation triggered a lively discussion on ethics when engaging with actors such as private industry. It brought back the question from the opening panel of whether and how landscape architects are ready to engage with all relevant actors in the landscape field. Integration of quantitative approaches in landscape architecture can be useful to convince other audiences such as engineers and economists of landscape architecture's agency, as successfully demonstrated by a student design on thermodynamic connections and 'air' as a design material (*Wallis 2016*).

Finally, there was the question of how landscape architecture can prepare, orient, and base decision- and policymaking. Joseph Edmiston urged landscape architects to go out and network in political spheres, at fundraisers, and at other events to increase the recognition for landscape architecture as a necessity.

The Landscape Architecture as Necessity conference represented a tremendous effort to link practice, academia, and government. We look forward to subsequent editions of this conference and to continuing the conversations on the challenges and opportunities that landscape architects face. Maybe next time we can talk a little more about design itself.

Notes

1 Several teams of greater New York's federally funded *Rebuild By Design* programme in the aftermath of hurricane Sandy were headed by landscape architecture firms such as Scapestudio or West 8.

2 In analogy to *Terra Fluxus*, James Corner's seminal essay in landscape urbanism theory, advocating for a 'fluid' and open approach in design and planning in response to the true complexity of cities.

3 Lister stated that Del Tredici's last book on wild urban plants would have been titled 'weeds' a couple of decades ago. Del Tredici, P. (2010), *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast: A Field Guide* (Cornell University Press).

4 As illustrated on the Nature Conservancy's map, available online at <http://maps.tnc.org/migrations-in-motion/#4/19.06/-78.00>.

5 Mel Chin's land art project for the 2016 LA's Public Art Biennial on 'CURRENT: LA Water' is titled 'The Tie that Binds: the Mirror of the Future'.

References

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