

## A Ten Point Guide to Naturecultures

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one

We start from the premise that landscape architects are interested in what is called nature because they are interested in the relations between humans and nonhumans. This interest has regulated the evolution of the practice of landscape architecture that, for many centuries, was guided by habits of thought and practices of making derived from garden discourse. When natural philosophy developed into the natural sciences, landscape architectural discourse turned a corner, and began to concern itself with design practices based on discoveries in science.

two

Society, traditionally regarded as concerned with matters of value, became partitioned off from the realm of science that considered itself concerned exclusively with facts. In the world of science there were objects (nonhumans like rocks and micro-organisms); in the world of society there were subjects (social beings). Planet Earth was neatly divided into two types of being, two types of knowledge, and two kinds of reality. The problem of science was how to represent nature to social beings (of which humans were the only class). Landscape architecture joined in the game: its problem was how to construct a world for humans from the realm of objects. Nonhumans were not regarded as part of the collective for which landscape architects worked.

three

Things have changed. We realize that it is dangerous and misleading to think in terms of two assemblies, science (fact) and society (value). The sociologist of science Bruno Latour argues that we must get rid of the notion that there will always be two blocs, nature as it is and the representations we make of it. He suggests that the distinction between nature and society should be blurred, and that we should consider the inhabitants of the Earth as a collective of humans and nonhumans that are not considered epistemologically or ontologically distinct (Latour 2004: 41). This means abandoning the notion of nature and replacing it with the idea of naturecultures, an assemblage of humans and nonhumans. In doing this we still leave intact the two elements that matter most to us: 'the multiplicity of nonhumans and the enigma of their association.' (Latour: 41)

four

Accepting this idea as a working proposition, landscape architects can concern themselves with where this collective comes together, and how the collective becomes gathered into a whole. It implies a search for what makes up the common world. Instead of oppositional approaches to the gathering of humans and nonhumans, we can foreground the webs of cohabitation and encounter that landscapes comprise, permit and sustain. We can work on an account of human-environment relations that emphasizes the affective nature of human relations with the nonhuman and with other humans, in the context of constructed landscapes. We can consider, further, that landscapes encourage a subtle but passionate confrontation with what it is to be human in a constructed world. They do this by enabling specific kinds of encounter with other beings and species that share this world.

five

There is more than one site for the collective encounter of humans and nonhumans in the constructed world, but for the purposes of this Guide, we will consider one that has concerned landscape architects in recent years. Public space – the public realm – may well be the primary site of this encounter, if we extend the notion of the public to include nonhumans. (There is also a case for the design of private gardens as particularly special matrices of human-nonhuman entanglement, but we will leave that for another time). An important consideration in the theoretical construction of public space as the primary site of human-

nonhuman encounter is its operation as a dissipative structure (see the Ten Point Guide to Open Systems Theory). Public open space is very sensitive to changing conditions, and itself changes along with these.

six

It is also important to consider public space in the light of common space – the commons. David Bollier in *Silent Theft* (2002: 2-3) describes the commons as ‘the vast range of resources that the American people own.’ It includes ‘tangible assets such as forests and minerals, intangible wealth such as copyrights and patents, critical infrastructure such as the internet, and government research and cultural resources such as the broadcast airwaves and *public spaces*’ (emphasis mine). On the other hand, Henaff and Strong (2001) argue that common space ‘admits of no criteria; it is open to all in the same way. It is not owned or controlled. What makes it common is that all can go there to extract from it what is there (sea, pastures, forests).’ It is not, however, a public realm because its boundaries are not contestable.’ They regard it as having been given to humans. It is not a public space because it is not a human construct.

seven

Physical public space differs from the commons in several ways:

It is owned - by the city, by the government, by private organizations and by partnerships between these

It is contestable – its functions, boundaries and its regulations of access and use are continually put to the test

It has a long tradition in the construction of urban lives and the shaping of their interactions

It is not ‘given,’ it is created by humans

It is open in two crucial ways: Vagueness and ambivalence are important qualities of its openness, and it is open to the sky.

It consists of or includes a ‘theatrical’ element by permitting different types of visibility, in particular intransitive seeing (nonreciprocal) and transitive seeing (being present to the other)

Public space is shot through with relations of power - political, social, economic and personal.

eight

The public realm offers an extraordinary venue for the unmitigated assembly of beings or, as we should say, becomings. Actual urban terrain, it is no longer a single and privileged stage for political activity, but a location of multiple intersections, (in Peter Connolly’s words) a ‘heterogeneous continuum’ of human and nonhuman becoming different, an assemblage of naturecultures. This condition is not coded according to rankings of fact (science) and value (society), nor is it coded aesthetically in the sense of a realm in which civic images are indistinguishable from general image-making. It is not a mix of social programming and private consumption. Instead, and this is the challenge for landscape architecture, public space becomes a designed realm in which the assemblage of humans and nonhumans is made visible and vocal. New conditions for the organization of public space are required, conditions far-from-equilibrium characterized by a kind of collective imaginary, a collocation of humans and nonhumans searching for whatever it is that makes up their common world.

nine

A landscape becomes a terrain of encounter, a place where a collective of humans and nonhumans is *articulated* (to use Latour’s word). To articulate the collective – to work inside the notion of naturecultures - the landscape architect must be tuned to the habitus of all the parties that compose the collective.<sup>1</sup> The designer of collective terrains successfully articulates the assembly of species that inhabit it when he or she mixes these ‘parties’ while retaining and enhancing their freedoms. The degree to which the landscape is truly public is the degree to which potential trajectories and empowerments may be realized as a result - the degree to which the individual party’s habitus is acknowledged and brought into sensitive, practical and mutually beneficial encounter with that of others. A landscape that abandons the division between nature

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<sup>1</sup> French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes an individual’s habitus as ‘a durable, transposable system of definitions acquired by the young as a result of the conscious and unconscious practices of families. This comprises the ‘primary habitus.’ Subsequently this is transformed in to a secondary or tertiary habitus by the individual’s passage through different social institutions. (Bourdieu 1972: 56). The habitus is both structured and structuring.

and society includes all conditions necessary and sufficient for the ongoing self-organization of the assemblage.

ten

To do this it is necessary to 'explore the common worlds' of the collective – naturecultures – not in the sense of a unified march into the future along a line of time, but by means of enabling the formation of intricate attachments and affordances between and among species and elements through affective contact and inter-affirmation. The landscape architect who works for and with the republic of human and nonhuman naturecultures envisages life as a contingent process of growth and change. He or she participates in this movement of perpetual differentiation through the invention of forms that bring tree, child, rock, sky, bee, cat, moth and butterfly into equivalence and association.