

Deconstructing the Dichotomy between Ecology and Art in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*

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현대 조경설계에서 생태-예술 이원론의 해체*

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ABSTRACT

20세기 후반을 거치며 환경 관련 이슈는 조경 이론과 설계에서도 중심 주제로 자리잡아 왔다. 환경에 대한 고려를 중심에 둔 이른바 생태적 조경계획·설계는 조경의 패러다임에 일대 전환을 가져오고 조경의 대사회적 역할을 교정했다는 평가를 받고 있다. 그러나 이러한 흐름은 동시대 조경 이론과 설계의 가장 첨예한 쟁점 중의 하나인 생태학과 예술 사이의 이분법을 심화시켰다는 비판에 직면하고 있는 것 또한 사실이다. 즉 생태적 조경은 환경적 가치 대 형태 구축, 부지의 생태적 분석 대 창조적 표현이라는 이원론적 갈등 관계를 형성해 온 것이다. 이 논문은 이러한 양상의 생태-예술 이원론을 해체하고 대안적 조경의 지평을 구축하는 일이 현대 조경설계가 풀어야 할 최우선의 과제라고 파악한다. 이 논문은 특히 최근의 조경 설계에서 실험되고 있는 경험의 구축, 변화와 프로세스의 고려, 일시성과 불확정성을 존중하는 태도 등을 통해 생태-예술 이원론을 해체할 수 있는 실천적 전략을 모색한다. 뿐만 아니라 그러한 전략에서 드러나는 대안적 조경미학이 최근의 환경미학과 공유하고 있는 이론적 지형을 검토함으로써 생태학과 예술의 접점을 가로지르는 조경설계의 새로운 좌표를 탐색한다.

Key Words : *Ecological Landscape Design and Planning, Landscape-as-art, Process, Strategic Design, Environmental Aesthetics, Engagement.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Environmentalism appears to have become central to human culture. More than forty years after public interest signaled the first signs of a new

era in environmental thinking, environmentalism has shifted from a marginal theme to a central issue in landscape architecture. In spite of its contribution to concern environmental values in design processes, ecological environmentalism in landscape archi-

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cture occurred a hotly debated topic : the conflicts between ecology and art, and the polarization of site analysis and design expression. In this dualistic situation, contemporary landscape architecture has drawn more from instrumental models of ecology, while design creativity has frequently been reduced to dimensions of environmental problem solving and aesthetic appearance. This is one of the critical questions that contemporary landscape theorists and designers should pay attention to.

This paper is intended to explore a strategy for deconstructing the dichotomy between ecology and art in contemporary landscape architecture. This study takes its clue for discussion from two correlated fields: recent alternative landscape architectural practices and an emerging theory of environmental aesthetics. Furthermore, it attempts to find a common denominator of landscape architecture and environmental aesthetics that could reconcile ecology with art in landscape practice and education.

II. Conflicts between Ecological Environmentalism and Design Expression

Over the last quarter century, environmentalism has shifted from a fringe issue to a central theme in the theory and practice of landscape architecture. As Elizabeth K. Meyer notes, “[m]otivated by environmental values, landscape architects became increasingly knowledgeable about ecological principles and systems. The associated types of design practices are not monolithic but diverse, ranging from scientific restoration ecology to site-specific artistic interventions.”¹⁾

However, the evolution of environmental and ecological concerns occurred the conflicts and debates

between ecology and design and between science and art, which characterized the landscape profession in the late 20th century.²⁾ In other words, for a landscape designer, one conundrum presented by the environmentalism was “the disconnection between site analysis and design expression or between environmental values and form generation.”³⁾ Is it possible to create places with forms different from those of earlier designers who were not environmentally aware? Can one make the ecological planning process visible to those who come to the site? How can one give form to dynamic processes and fluctuating systems?

Landscape architects of the late 20th century have confronted two strong models. The first model is *ecological planning*, which emerged out of the theory and teachings of educators such as Ian McHarg.⁴⁾ Its primary contribution to the design process was to construct the preconceptual phase according to a scientific method. On the other hand, McHargian approach raised a problem of the lack of formal invention, and much of ecological planning and design has been frequently clothed in the pastoral and romantic dress.

The second model is *landscape architecture as art*, which emerged from the practices of designers such as Peter Walker.⁵⁾ This camp was concerned that the design process had become so beholden to

1) Elizabeth K. Meyer, “The Post-Earth Day Conundrum: Translating Environmental Values into Landscape Design,” in *Environmentalism in Landscape Architecture*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), p.187.

2) For a more detail, see Jeong-Hann Pae, “Theory and Critical Practice in Contemporary Landscape Design(4): The Shadows of Ecological Planning and Design,” *Environment & Landscape Architecture of Korea*, Series 158 (June, 2001), pp.72-77.

3) Meyer, “The Post-Earth Day Conundrum: Translating Environmental Values into Landscape Design,” p.189.

4) Ian McHarg, *Design with Nature* (Garden City, NY: Natural History Press, 1969). Form a more critical explanation of McHarg’s theory and practice, see Ann Whiston Sprin, “Ian McHarg, Landscape Architecture, and Environmentalism,” in *Environmentalism in Landscape Architecture*, pp.97-114.

5) See, for example, Leah Levy and Peter Walker, *Peter Walker: Minimalist Gardens* (Washington, DC: Space-maker Press, 1997).

analyses that the art of making the landscape visible, beautiful, and memorable had been made subservient to the landscape's function. Though the primary contribution of this model was its application of the vocabulary and tactics of contemporary art to the making of landscapes, its artistic invention did not acknowledge the difference between the land's surface and materiality and that of a canvas or a gallery floor.

These two models have existed in isolated opposition from one another, based on separate value systems and vocabularies. In recent years, landscape architecture has been "at war within itself, diverse factions pitting ecology against art—as if the two could not coexist."⁶⁾ With this dichotomy of science and art, contemporary landscape architects are caught in confusion. As James Corner points out clearly, "[t]he tension within contemporary landscape architecture between the rational, analytical, and objective 'planners'(who put such great emphasis upon a linear process of data accumulation, logical determinism, and large-scale engineering) and the emotional, intuitive, mystical 'artists'(who put such great emphasis on subjectivity, emotive experience, and aesthetic appearance) is but one fallacious outcome of...dualistic paradigm."⁷⁾ This is among the crucial question that landscape architectural theory and practice must solve. Where is the reconciliation space between *ecological planning* and *landscape design as art*? What is a truly ecological landscape architecture that can deconstruct the dogmatic dualism of science and art, and of nature and culture?

III. Cases : Recent Strategic Practices to Deconstruct the Dichotomy

Relations between landscape architecture and environmentalism encompass a vital issue for landscape architects. For this reason, there is no

6) John Beardsley, "A Word for Landscape Architecture," *Harvard Design Magazine* 12 (Fall, 2000), p.58.



Figure 6. Lawrence Halprin, *Sea Ranch Community*, Gualala, CA.

doubt that a new landscape aesthetic should be born. And, in fact, the works of a few contemporary landscape architects have experimented alternative strategies and aesthetics that could overcome the dogmatic dualism in various ways and have reconciled ecological planning with landscape-as-art. Such works include those by Lawrence Halprin, George Hargreaves, James Corer, Adriaan Geuze, Rem Koolhaas, etc.

First of all, Lawrence Halprin's works are considered to represent a critical practice that gives form to ecological environmental values through the construction of experience.⁸⁾ His projects can be interpreted as a first step toward creating a design vocabulary predicated on landforms created by natural processes, such as erosion and deposition due to water and wind. Moreover, Halprin's attempts can be evaluated as a searching for a middle ground between McHarg's formless environmental designs and Walkers landscape architecture-as-art objects. Especially, in *the Sea Ranch Community*, Gualala, California(Figure 1), and *the Auditorium*

7) James Corner, "Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity," in *Ecological Design and Planning*, eds. George E. Thompson and Frederick R. Steiner (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), pp.89-90.

8) See, for example, Lawrence Halprin, *Changing Places* (San Francisco : San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1988).



Figure 7. George Hargreaves, *Byxbee Park*, Palo Alto, CA.

Forecourt, Portland, Oregon, Halprin reconceptualized landscape as bounded flow, a fluid medium experienced in a multisensory way by the moving body. His design methods and concepts, such as the landscape as a temporal medium and the body's role in the experience of place, have contributed to a type of landscape architectural practice that is an art of environmental engagement.

George Hargreaves's works of the early 1990s are the experiments of creating non-visual aspects of landscape by combining the physicality of natural process and the narratives of the site's culture and history.⁹⁾ We can examine how a landscape works not as a form but as a process in his well-known environmental parks, such as *Byxbee Park*, Palo Alto, California (Figure 2), and *Candlestick Point Cultural Park*, South San Francisco, California. Hargreaves's interest in the sensual qualities of natural processes expands the hegemony of vision that underlies landscapes pictorialization to include other senses such as smell, sound, and touch. As Julia Czerniak notes, "rather than copying natural scenes in his constructed landscape work (whether images from history, like the pastoral park, or from a particular location, like a neighborhood wetland), he generates abstract compositions that amplify and

9) For a more detailed discussion, see Steve Hanson, ed. *Hargreaves : Landscape Works/Process: Architecture* 128 (1996).



Figure 8. James Corner, *Lifescapce*, Fresh Kills Design Competition.

materialize the physical, cultural, and historical layers of a site."¹⁰⁾ This strategy is considered to create reconciliation milieu between ecology and art and between nature and culture. His site-specific, open-ended, sensuous and tactile approach can be a "poetics of process" that constructs the engaged environmental experience.

Through a lot of eidetic mapping projects, James Corner presents landscape as a "complex network of material activity" rather than a "static and contemplative phenomenon."¹¹⁾ Offering the concept of a dialectical landscape characterized by natural (ecological) and cultural (artistic) processes, he explores how landscape representation not only reflects a given reality but also conditions a way of seeing and acting in the world. According to Corner, "*landscape as noun* (as object or scene) is quieted in order to emphasize *landscape as verb*, as process or activity."¹²⁾ Therefore, his focus is upon "the agency of landscape (how it works and what it does) rather than upon its simple appearance,"

10) Julia Czerniak, "Challenging the Pictorial : Recent Landscape Practice," *Assemblage* 34 (1998), p.114.

11) For instance, see James Corner and Alex S. MacLean, *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1996).

12) James Corner, "Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice," in *Recovering Landscape : Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, ed. James Corner (New York : Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), p.4.

and his unique mapping works are the strategy for displaying how invisible aspects of landscape works as physical and cultural processes. This is why Corner's mapping is an "eidetic" representation rather than a simple tracing.¹³⁾ Though his built works are few, *Lifescape*(Figure 3), Corner's recent winning proposal for *the Fresh Kills : Landfill to Landscape International Design Competition*,¹⁴⁾ shows how his landscape strategy and mappings can realize in a productive way. He declares 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,"¹⁵⁾ and we can observe this alternative ecological thinking in *Lifescape*.

Adriaan Geuze—director and chief designer of West 8—positions a landscape architectural practice within the residual margins between city and green areas, industrial sites and infrastructure.¹⁶⁾ In addition, he posits a view of "landscape as a vital and functioning process, and active and productive system within the public realm"—a strategy, recently named "landscape urbanism."¹⁷⁾ He produces



Figure 4. Adriaan Geuze, *Schouwburgplein*, Rotterdam.

landscape as a process of continuous cultural and natural transformation. For Geuze, landscape is not created from a pastoral kit of parts. Instead, landscape is a strategy, a network of development. For instance, we can observe landscape as evolutionary system in his various kinds of projects, such as *Schouwburgplein*(Figure 4), theatre square at Rotterdam. We cannot find any dualism of ecology and art in Geuze's alternative landscape design.

Lastly, we should be quite concerned about strategic landscape projects of Rem Koolhaas and his office OMA(Office for Metropolitan Architecture). Rem Koolhaas's second-prize scheme for *the Parc de la Villette competition* arranges built and vegetal material within the same repetitive structure. Its form and structure is not one of contrast, built versus vegetal, but of similarity. This repetition of alternating built and vegetal strips calls into question the oppositional nature of naturalness and artificiality. As Sanford Kwinter describes : "All of Koolhaas's recent work is *evolved*—rather than designed— within the hyper-modern event-space of complex, sensitive, dynamical indeterminacy and change.... [The design prin-

13) For a more detail, see James Corner, "The Agency of Mapping : Speculation, Critique and Invention," in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London : Reaktion, 1999), pp.212-52.

14) For an information of the Fresh Kills competition, see the following official website : www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/flk/index.html

15) James Corner, "Ecology and Landscape as Agents of Creativity," in *Ecological Design and Planning*, p.102.

16) See Bart Lootsma and Inge Breugem, ed. *Adriaan Geuze : West 8 Landscape Architects* (Rotterdam : Uitgeverij 010 Publishers, 1995), and Luca Molinari, ed. *West 8* (Milano : Skira, 2000).

17) For a more on "landscape urbanism," a new territory and emerging field of landscape architecture, see Alex Wall, "Programming the Urban Surface," in *Recovering Landscape*, pp.233-249 ; Jeong-Hann Pae, "Theory and Critical Practice in Contemporary

Landscape Design(8) : An Emerging Field of the Landscape Urbanism," *Environment & Landscape Architecture of Korea*, Series 164 (December, 2001), pp.90-95.

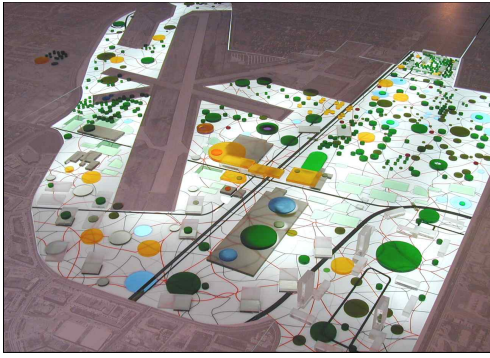


Figure 10. Rem Koolhaas, *Tree City*, Downsview Park Design Competition.

principles display] a very clear orientation toward evolutionary, time-based processes, dynamic geometric *structurations*—not structures per se, but forms that follow and fill the wake of concrete yet unpredictable events.”¹⁸⁾ Moreover, Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau’s *Tree City* (Figure 5), a winning entry of the recent significant international design competition for *Downsview Park* in Toronto, declares that city is park and park is city. They intend for Downsview to be an environment that is never actually designed but is formed through natural succession, cultural action, and programmatic insertions.¹⁹⁾ Rather than designed objects and formal solutions, their strategy is to allow the landscape to evolve with changing uses. *Tree City* marks the end of the dichotomy between city (culture) and park (nature) and will become an alternative model for urban park design.²⁰⁾

18) Sanford Kwinter, “Rem Koolhaas, OMA : The Reinvention of Geometry,” *Assemblage* 18 (1993), pp.84-85.

19) For a more information and criticism of Downsview Park competition, see www.juncus.com and Julia Czerniak, ed. *Case : Downsview Park Toronto* (Munich : Prestel, 2001).

20) For a more discussion, see Jeong-Hann Pae, “New Strategies for Contemporary Landscape Design : Downsview Park International Design Competition and Its Implications,” *The Journal of Korean Institute of Landscape Architecture* 29:6 (February, 2002), pp.62-71.

IV. Environmental Aesthetics and Its Correlations with Contemporary Landscape Architecture

It is not difficult for us to observe an emergence of new landscape/environmental aesthetics in many projects operated by landscape architects mentioned above. Rather than creating landscapes offered to gaze of beholders, these designers aim at creating events that prompt visitors to interact with one another and their environment. They also attempt to offer a wide range of multisensory experiences by inviting everyone to make sense of his or her relationships to the environment in strictly personal terms. Finally, they attend to the dynamics of all possible aspects of the landscape through time, turning these processes into sources for design.

Their design strategies might be considered to share a common idea with environmental aesthetics, an emerging interdisciplinary field of aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics is a bridge between traditional forms of aesthetic appreciation and the recognition of significant aesthetic value in other domains conventionally excluded from the fine arts, such as design, landscape architecture, urban and regional planning, and the many other activities that form the life of every human culture. Moreover, environmental aesthetics provides us with a retrospective understanding of the cultural milieu and the key role of aesthetic experience of the environment played not only in postmodern art but also in contemporary landscape architecture. Especially, the “engagement” model, aesthetician Arnold Berleant’s recent theory of environmental aesthetics, can be attributed to the development of a mutual relationship between landscape architecture and environmentalism that can deconstruct the ecology-art dualism.

Environmental aesthetics emphasizes the *continuity* that exists between nature and culture, and between science and art. Environment is a name for a complex, integrated whole, and its aesthetic is a

dimension of that whole. In this sense, the environment is not an independent object, but a situation that construct an aesthetic experience, a synonymous as the situation of “the aesthetic field.” “Environmental continuity leads us to recognize that every environment of which we are a part—that is, every human environment is a living landscape.”²¹⁾

The traditional dogmatic aesthetic theory of contemplative disinterestedness cannot be used to explain an aesthetic experience of environment. Such an experience should be accounted for by an integrated mode that involves man and environment in interaction. The aesthetic experience of environment is an experience in continuity. What all the environmental experiences have in common is the kind of participatory appreciation, and this is what Berleant call aesthetic “engagement.” In experiencing the environmental continuity aesthetically, disinterestedness (contemplation) can be substituted by engagement (participation). Engaged experiences display three related characteristics : continuity with ordinary life, perceptual integration, and participation of objects and perceivers.²²⁾ Through engaged participation, not disinterested contemplation, we meet face-to-face with environment in a dialogue.

The workings of the senses are very important, when an experience of environment encompasses and links all the facets of environment. The sense of vision in itself does not grant man’s engagement with the environment. Thus, we need to shift our attention to the grossly untapped potential of the other senses. Moreover, we need a new awareness that all the senses come alive together in the

aesthetic experience of environment. For such reasons, environmental aesthetics introduces the concept of “*synaesthesia*—the experiential fusion of the senses—”²³⁾ as the alternative to visual predominance in perception. It is the perceptual integration and multisensory perception that provides for mutual participation by man and environment.

The modification of traditional aesthetic theory is not all that is required by the alternative environmental aesthetics. It also carries with it some practical implications that could link environment with the aesthetic dimensions of life. A cultural act that enables such a link in the context of practice is landscape architecture. The practical coordinates of truly landscape architecture are where man and environment, and art and ecology meet. Environmental aesthetics, especially the engagement theory, can be the basis for a practical landscape architectural theory that enables critical reflection on the ecology-art dichotomy in landscape architecture of the late 20th century, leading to a rediscovery of the art of dialogue and mediation. In this context, landscape architecture is an experiment of engaged aesthetic experience in environment.

V. CODA : Toward a New Horizon

Despite of the conflicts between ecological planning and landscape-as-art and the dichotomy of science and art, recent alternative landscape projects of some experimental landscape architects have overcome the dogmatic dualism and have opened a new horizon. Moreover, their designs have a common denominator with the environmental aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics can assist in re-envisioning the relationship between humans and their environment, and contemporary landscape architects can learn the theoretical basis for alternative design strategies from environmental

21) Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape : Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence, KS : University Press of Kansas, 1997), p.8.

22) For a more detail, see Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1997), pp.32-50.

23) *Ibid.*, p.46.

aesthetics that break out the dualism and translate environmental values into landscape design.

As Meyer argues persuasively, “giving significant form and meaning to ecological processes through the making of landscape experience has laudable goals—to foster design practices that engender more mature understandings of humanity’s interdependence with nature, that stir ethical as well as aesthetic debates, and that do not sacrifice significant landscape form in the name of environmentalism.”²⁴⁾ The future landscape architecture should make environment processes and forms more understandable and engender a sense of mutual exchange between humans and nature. This is a strategy for reconciling ecological environmentalism and landscape-as-art in landscape architectural theory and practice.

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24) Elizabeth K. Meyer, “The Post-Earth Day Conundrum : Translating Environmental Values into Landscape Design,” p.244.

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