

HISTORY - THEORY THINKING - APPLIED PRACTICE

PAST FUTURE PRESENT

We need to make change.

We need to instate a radical pedagogy that is able to draw on examples from the past in order to construct a new future.

'It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.'

— Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*

Landscapes are a messy business, it is experience and production, representation, and archive. The study and production of landscapes — Landscape Architecture, means that we necessarily have to cross over with other disciplines, forming connections across time and geographies, operating within polymathic networks simultaneously and at multiple scales. It is, as Georg Simmel described in 1913 'the infinite interconnectedness of objects, the uninterrupted creation and destruction of forms'.

Landscape Architecture and the histories that accompany this discipline, often begin and end with the landed gentry — the white, male, privileged classes. Whether this is through the private estates and gardens driven by mercantile capitalism and built for pleasure and production, or the making of public landscapes in the wake of industrialisation and urbanisation. These narratives tend to represent those in power, reinforcing social and environmental inequity.

By linking landscape history with landscape theory - or landscape thinking, especially the thinking that is emerging in the current context of a greater awareness of social and environmental inequities, as well as the urgency to be more inclusive and diverse in our teaching, we can clearly see that the historical narratives (white, male, privileged) of landscape architecture can seem restrictive.

We need to approach Landscape Architectural history (and theory) as a live discipline, something that plays a vital role in designing spaces for the future.

To do so we must be encouraged to critically question the narratives that have hitherto underpinned the discipline, understanding landscape architectural history and theory not through -isms but as representations of political and social ideologies as well as technological innovation.

We need to look to what has been done previously to inform the work we do today, but we must also challenge it by bringing in vernacular and global histories to disrupt the status-quo.

'The planet will never come alive for you unless your songs and stories give life to all the beings, seen and unseen, that inhabit a living Earth.'

— Amitav Ghosh, *The Curse Of The Nutmeg*

We must allow these narratives to inform the design decisions we are making today.

To be able to work with these relationships and to address the intimate (dis)connections between the recording, production and the enactment of Landscapes we need to question how we think about Landscape: how we categorise, how we conceive of its borders and boundaries; the language we use to talk about the multiple human and non-human agents that work simultaneously, but not always together, to alter and redefine our Landscapes.

We must expand our frame of reference.

We must explore the critical discourses surrounding landscape, architecture, and urbanism whilst identifying itself as part of an interdisciplinary dialogue across design, performance, philosophy, sociology, geography, history, and anthropology. We must be happy to exchange ideas (our own and other people's) as a key part to understanding Landscape and Urbanism as a live interdisciplinary practice.

We must embrace interconnectedness, adopting an interdisciplinary approach across our teaching so that we can introduce more nuanced discussions between ourselves and other disciplines, other agents, other collaborators. Allowing this to inform the exchange between the history of the discipline, the theories that propel it forward, and the applied practice that creates the present.

As thinkers and designers we must use this discussion to explore the porosity between history, theory and applied practice.

But we must make change.

So, we must practice as well as confer.

This might mean making new mistakes and learning from them. We must actively encourage participation with research and with active citizenship, through workshops, seminars, site-specific investigation, presentation, education and action.

We must do this to develop a critical methodology, to develop an understanding of the multi-scalar sites of landscapes: the theoretical understanding of a site, the expansive view that comes with hindsight and the immediacy of working with people and materials.

It is an approach that appreciates that knowledge – like landscape – is forever in flux and only in embracing the knowledge held by different disciplines can we allow our own to grow continuously and exponentially.