



Thilo Folkerts
Time

(gardens on the run)^[1]

There is an assertion about landscape architecture, which attributes to the profession a profound knowledge about time. Landscape architects are supposed to know about time because they deal with plants and nature in general. For those in turn who are not closely involved in conceiving and building open spaces it often must appear difficult to deal with unpredictable futures and the sometimes dramatic, but more often subtle, changes involved.

Indeed, outdoor space and gardening are connected to time: Growth and ageing, the disappearance and reappearance of the plants after the winter, constant intentional change and reaction to unforeseeable changes (because sometimes things are unpredictable): these have been any gardener's burden - after the proverbial doors of Eden were closed behind us. Or, put differently, after the loss of the absolute garden^[2] we now have to keep active in time and conscious about how to use and shape our environment. The knowledge about time that is necessary to make good landscape architecture, however, is not limited to managing a well-conceived plant growth throughout the seasons. The time to be considered is a complex structure: manifold, multilayered, aimed backwards and forwards. It encompasses a site's past and future potentials. For landscape architects time is a substance. Since every place has its own embedded set of time, the work of synchronizing a site is a shuffle and reshuffle of what is there. It takes a fine sensibility to reveal the substance of time properly. Encased in the original site, it may initially be obvious, visible, touchable, present, but may also be hidden and not yet discovered. In a very loose sense the process of making a good landscape architecture then follows the assignment brief of a cartographer, an archaeologist, a historian or that of a storyteller.

Good landscape architecture collapses the findings, the ephemeral layers of time in the present. In shedding the unnecessary from the site, and then building, maintaining and developing from an initial set of conditions, in extracting a form and shaping space, such a landscape architecture may find its form as a re-invention; an update or a strong, contrasting futuristic gesture.

Time in the garden and in the landscape is retroactive and multidimensional. While carrying seeds of the future, its ground bears remains and memory. To create a landscape architecture is to shape the time-surface, level it out and dig deep into it. Landscape's ground and its space are layered, a thick varnish of meaningful substance. As such, any site is a hoard of time. Working with the ground as a material one essentially takes what is there. This restraint is a strategy and a compositional principle and is an economy of measures, making adequate use of the layers which are available and once lavishing, once accentuating, or merely pricking them with additions, novelties, markers. Even though the time thus becomes stitched, patched, re-tailored, the fabric becomes increasingly rich and valuable.

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Landscape architecture is about growth and movement. It is about movement in space. The movement involves time in thick bundles of parallel trajectories, always coexisting, always at different speeds. As plants grow, they move slowly through space. We humans have an impulse for more. We move: quickly, running, driving, testing ourselves against time. How does one manage these different velocities? How does one control one velocity, while another is welcome to run freely? How finished does a landscape architecture have to be when inaugurated and how much space for subsequent development is there? Today there is a need for instantaneity; an urge for the NOW! While re-starting a site and instilling in it a renewed development fresh landscape architecture can be ready for consumption, yet leave time for maturity as a subsequent layer. We accept that there is always a start, always a beginning and choose to set our markers as references in time and space. Landscape architecture is always an initialization, a first layer.

It is said, that the garden is an ideal place. After we left paradise, the garden has been about a desire for something new and better, about devising an ideal. The garden is a site and a means of expressing ideals; it is a place of ideas. What are our ideas today? Can we not regard the world as a (mostly urban) garden, as a place that necessitates activity and consciousness about its shape? We do not have one garden anymore, but many, all of them different. They are all real and contemporary. However, there still is an underlying script to all of them. These gardens bridge time from the narrative of paradise to contemporary tasks of care and attention – and they involve a twist of curiosity.

We grasp the world as a description, a storyline, an intricate map, a geography of ideals. Designing a site is describing it anew, re-signifying it. Every site is new, each one at a different depth of time. Designing is to retell stories, adjust the focus while the film is running, restore the plot. At their best the stories take off on their own. At the same time we do not reinvent the world by a tale, we're minimally adjusting, reorganizing movement and time. As landscape architects we know about the garden. It is about change, its design opens the veins of time. With gaining knowledge, we lost eternity. We now have time at our hands.

[1] This text is a starkly modified version of „Nine Walks“, published in Thilo Folkerts (Ed.) *Libria Publishers Melfi (I)*, 2008. Since the form of the present text has considerably changed, I thought, that taking the walks to a run would be an appropriate step forward. I take the opportunity to point to the work from to whose general spirit the original title and text took inspiration and owes a mention: „Occasional Work and 7 Walks from the Office of Soft Architecture“, by the Canadian poet and writer Lisa Robertson, published in 2003.

[2] The artist Robert Smithson's interest in processes rather than finished (sculptural) objects mediates the mystery of time and place. His fine desastrousness about the garden facilitates a lighter approach to the discourse. "Too much thinking about gardens leads to perplexity and agitation. (...) The abysmal problem of gardens somehow involves a fall from somewhere or something. The certainty of the absolute garden will never be regained." (A sedimentation of the mind: Earth Projects". In: "Robert Smithson: The collected writings". Jack Flam (ed.), Berkeley, 1996 p.113.