

The Narrative of Landscape. People can find meaning in their lives by communicating, talking, writing and telling stories. Landscapes and places are not able to do this. And yet, they tell their stories to those of us who are able to decipher them. The identity of a place reveals itself to those who speak the language of landscape and know how to interpret shapes, structure, materials, form and function the same way they interpret words. We shape landscape and language – and they shape us. The articles in this issue, which are as diverse in genre and theme as always, ranging from short stories to films and dramas, question this narrative of the landscape.

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MARIEKE TIMMERMANS READING A LANDSCAPE • DANIEL CZECHOWSKI THE LAYERS OF LANDSCAPE • RICHARD SENNETT NARRATIVE AND AGENCY • MARTÍ FRANCH DISCOVERING THE LIQUID LANDSCAPE OF LA TANCADA LAGOON, SPAIN • LUIGI LATINI CULTIVATION IN LANDSCAPES OF WAR, BOSNIA • ALEXA WEIK VON MOSSNER CINEMATIC LANDSCAPES • SASKIA SASSEN LAND AS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR LIVING • ADRIAAN GEUZE THE NARRATIVE OF STOLEN PARADISE • J. M. LEDGARD, MATTHEW SKJONSBERG ON EARTH – A CONVERSATION ABOUT AFRICA

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Beasts of the Southern Wild, Seville International

64 The story of the six-year-old Hushpuppy in the film “Beasts of the Southern Wild” refers to the degraded landscape of the Louisiana marshlands.



Jeroen Musch

88 A pergola in Máximapark in Utrecht, The Netherlands, by West 8 surrounds the green courtyard, evoking illusions of paradise.



Martin Wegmann

102 Soil is crucial for living in Africa. The photo shows a dirt road in Atakora Province, Benin, West Africa, close to the border of Togo.

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Landscape architecture has the chance to tell narratives within its projects: West 8 creates an artificial waterfall, an illusion of mist and digital projections in Yongsan Park, Seoul.

“... early humans needed a story of everything important that happened to them, because the conscious mind cannot work without stories and explanations of its own meaning. The best, the only way our forebears could manage to explain existence itself was a creation myth. And every creation myth, without exception, affirmed the superiority of the tribe that invented it over all other tribes.”

Edward O. Wilson, The Social Conquest of Earth, 2012, p. 291



THE NARRATIVE OF SOILS

The image of progress is the cultural narrative, passed on from generation to generation – retold, questioned, rejected – but appearing nonetheless to be consistently tending towards greater individual freedom. The shared narrative embodies commonly held beliefs and aspirations, shaping them and progressively shaped by them – it is both the identity of the spirit of the age and its legacy. This narrative can provide the basis for a common vision, yet can also blind us to reality. For centuries this common narrative has been derived from a nature-negating notion of “manifest destiny” that distorts reality. Just so, the city itself is a result of the narrative – perhaps its best evidence.

“The Narrative” addresses the role of storytelling in the interpretation from scientific, professional and academic realms into the public realm, focusing on the meta-narrative – the big-picture narrative in which we situate ourselves and our work as architects, landscape architects, and urban designers. This narrative must be durable enough to last from generation to generation, yet relevant enough to situate our decision making from day to day. This meta-narrative is fundamentally related to the pedagogical tradition of *coincidentia oppositorum* – the coincidence of opposites – and the recognition that every revolution prompts a counter-revolution, and every thesis an antithesis. These coincident oppositions and thematic polarities, establish the bandwidth of the spectrum of our disciplinary ambitions. If something is planned for in a design, its opposite is also to be anticipated. Landscape architecture will always focus on outreach, public opinion, interaction, legal systems, implementation, and compromise. The discipline cannot avoid responding to socio-political contexts. But in the end we deal with physical reality, with growth and form. Landscape architecture is built of living materials – vegetation, water, and soils – and the ephemeral qualities of light, climate, and other atmospheric conditions. The narrative of landscape is therefore richly

varied and multifaceted – at times apparently even self-contradictory. Among the themes currently addressed in our disciplinary field, water is clearly crucial, but soils are largely overlooked. A common theme highlighted through various facets, some essays collected in this issue of *Topos* bring this framework to bear on soils – using the narrative as a lens with which to focus on the fundamental relevance of soils as the dynamic media of interaction between water and geology that is literally the foundation of life as we know it.

Urbanization consumes far more resources than can ever possibly be generated by cities, and rural exodus ultimately results in fewer lifestyle options for entire populations. Today’s industrial and conventional agricultural practices result in the loss of over 24 billion tons of topsoil every year – several tons annually per person, many times the rate of soil renewal – leaving behind uninhabitable regions of vast dimensions, accelerating the exodus of rural inhabitants, and fragmenting rural lifestyles and cultures.

Architectural solutions to reverse these tendencies are well known and widely acknowledged as proven: avoiding to build on fertile ground, retaining disturbed soil through terraces, ensuring that waste cycles return nutrients to the soils from which they are derived, etc. In today’s world, mechanistic attitudes in “biotechnology” are detrimental to the balance of fertile soils. Mostly seen as a business venture, research in the field of biotechnology largely leads to proprietary research in DNA and industrial chemistry that is generally aggressive towards its own foundations – be they environmental or social. Along with the contemporary shift in progressive thinking – away from applied chemistry and towards applied ecology – landscape architecture can contribute the low-risk notion of the “chronobiological city”, cultivating the ecology and biology of soils – the *terra firma* of civilizations.