



1998: Sally Mann, "Untitled" from Deep South Series

SHAPING TIME

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In a 1984 essay titled "The Word Itself," the cultural geographer J. B. Jackson explored the historical origins and linguistic derivations (German, French, and English) of the word landscape.¹ His remarks included a brief but thorough overview of the relationship of landscape to painting, framing, boundary, territory, natural processes, scale, space, social interaction, and community. He began his commentary with a verbal dissection that explained how "land" and its political, administrative, and economic relationship to ownership, area and measurement played against "scape" and its socially collective concept of bundled environmental traits and spatially overlapping terrains.

At the end of the essay, in an overt attempt to avoid determinism, Jackson refrained from elevating one particular definition, or meaning, to a place of prominence. Instead, he used the newly emergent theories of

¹ Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 1-8.

systems thinking to organize his thoughts into a meaningful statement that included marks on the land by left human action and marks on the land left by natural processes. Landscape, he stated, is:

. . . a *synthetic* space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community . . . A landscape is thus a space deliberately created to speed up or slow down the processes of nature . . . it represents man taking upon himself the role of time.²

Putting aside for the moment Jackson's gendered, Eurocentric, and anthropogenic use of language, his definition of landscape is unusually thought-provoking. It is, he concludes, much more than a monolithic, bounded terrain that designers statically frame, categorize and package. His words transform it into something temporal and interactive—both culturally and physically—that encompasses art, science, experience, and belief. The only certainty he acknowledges is change and how it is shaped—artificially and naturally—and experienced—individually and collectively. Timelessness, Jackson argued, is a negotiated compact with natural processes that enhances the awareness of change and the passage of time; a process of translation that allows things in transit to be apprehended, appraised and appreciated; a community of ecosystem interactions that beckon return. Needless to say, designers have referred to and struggled with his definition of landscape ever since. And like Jackson, their discoveries cross disciplinary boundaries and negate easy categorization.

The objective of the studio is to understand the shape of time in landscape design through visual and spatial explorations—reflective and practical—that incorporate a variety of materials and mediums. Exercises, both group and individual, will explore framing and movement, topography and scale, diurnal and seasonal cycles, intention and accident, permanence and fragility, and the impact of time on the material and spatial qualities—tangible and intangible—of sun, shade, water, temperature, sound and scent. How, for example, can design mute or intensify sound, make room for air, temper heat and cold, allow aroma to become a container of memories, acknowledge the value of a tree's protection, craft edges that hold light, or configure water into a floor or a freshly polished window?

Two systems of spaces comprise the terrain of this exploration—Maggie's Trail at the Plainsboro Preserve and the Big Box Warehouses along Rte. 130 at Exit 9 of the New Jersey Turnpike. Students can choose either site. Proposed interventions will meld the terrain of design (the imagined) with the terrain of human actions and non-human dynamics (the actual). The intent is to create designs that deepen our collective bond with our surroundings and, by so doing, foster life sustaining relationships that minimize environmentally destructive actions. In one instance, this direct contact and integrative approach will increase familiarity with what is already there through the imaginative insertion of architectural elements; in the other it will imaginatively insert soil,

² Ibid. Italics by Jackson

plants and water into an architectural superstructure to restore what economic capitalism and contemporary consumerism has erased. A collective presentation of the individual projects at the end semester will create a bundled “scape” of environmental traits that illustrate the transformative means, methods, perceptions and behaviors that landscape architects adopt and deploy to speed up and slow down time.



2001: Frank Day, “Shopping Cat”



1974: Gordon Matta-Clark, “Architecture Train Bridge”