TIMEFORTIME

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✚ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN, PLANNING

The 1683 *The Scots Gard'ner* gives advice to those who want to create an estate, urging them to raise trees from seeds for the best results. If the land owner does so, the first priority shall be a nursery, while a long-term perspective is equally important: "When they have stood 3 years at most in this nurserie, replant them at wider distance in Spad-bit trenches, 3 foot one way and two the other, where they may stand till they be ready for planting out in your Avenues, Parks, Groves &c. Which will be in 3 years, if Rules are observed."[1] This advice by author John Read suggests that landscape architecture *avant la lettre was* already familiar with the role of time in the making of landscape. Certainly, Humphry Repton [1752–1818] was familiar with it. In a letter to an impatient client who requested more trees for a quicker result, Repton asserted the importance of seeing things "as they will be." An appreciation of growth over time is needed to prevent the planting of too many trees, as "few who have planted such trees, have the courage to take them away when they have begun to grow."[2] Repton's famous Red Books, including the so-called 'slides,' perhaps the first serious attempt in landscape architecture to catch time in drawings, reveal his engagement with the dynamics in the making of landscape. Frederick Law Olmsted also expressed concern about the commitment of his clients and his public, given that "a long series of years must elapse before the ends of the design will begin to be fully realized." To help this vulnerable process of becoming, Olmsted wrote numerous letters and articles to keep his public aware of the initial goals of the design, as "these great ruling ends should be pursued with absolute consistency."[3]

Apparently, early landscape designers were very aware of the fact that time is a key feature of landscape and of landscape architecture. Today, practicing landscape architects will confirm the importance of time in landscape. However, both in the drawings and in the actual proposals of today's practitioners, aspects of time are often secondary – an ambiguous situation that is the focus of this essay. Given that landscape is so strongly time-based, we can ask what aspects of time are present in today's landscape architectural designs? We can also ask whether drawings reflect time and if not, why not?
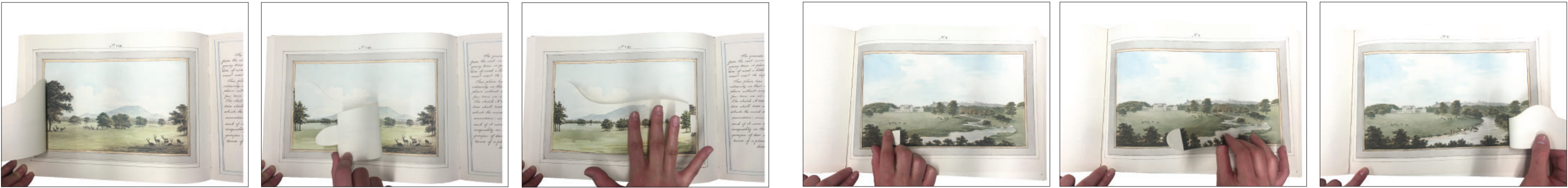
Landscape architecture practice has struggled with the role of time, and especially with its representation. There are many explanations for this, but one of the strongest influences has been architecture's hegemonic privileging of space over time.[4] Modernism in both architecture and landscape architecture also veered away from the representation and incorporation of time in design. It could be said that Lawrence Halprin's 1969 work, *RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment,* ended this predilection for design frozen in time.[5] Halprin's appropriation of the score from choreography was a breakthrough, as the score makes it possible to add the *when* and the *who* to the more regular *what* and *where* that designers present in plans, sections, and other visualizations. A focus on temporality in both representation and built work was compounded in the 1990s by the writings of James Corner and the emergence of landscape urbanism as a discourse predicated on Rem Koolhaas's notion of "staging the conditions of uncertainty."[6]

However, the nature of practice is also of importance here, and it is interesting to note that both Repton and Olmsted consciously positioned themselves as professional practitioners, and reflected in their writings upon the meaning of being a practitioner. As Repton once suggested, and practitioners today confirm, it is easier to convince clients and the public of seemingly ready solutions, than of a landscape that develops over time. Even when confirming the importance of time, when questioned, designers operating in practice reveal that they have a range of motives for *not* including time aspects in their drawings or in their designs. Although questioning designers about their work is often seen as unimportant in comparison to the actual work, or the drawings, an anthropological perspective as supported by the work of Dana Cuff and Albenga Yaneva can unravel the implicit considerations in this.[7] For example, practitioners do not expect clients to be willing to pay for time-based drawings – apparently, such drawings are seen from both sides as an unnecessary extra. In addition, as my review of 25 practices in Europe found, displaying time in drawings can be seen as too precise an attempt to predict the future, raising distracting discussions

with the client.[8] As Cuff puts it, "art and business exist as a dialectic in architecture."[9] In these ways landscape architecture practice is caught in a contradictory situation: on the one hand, time aspects are said to be a distinguishing feature of the profession, while on the other hand, in the reality of projects and representation, landscape architects come up with seemingly stable, ready-made futures. We need only think of the numerous beautiful and skilled visualizations that never say *in which year* the image might become reality, if all should go to plan.

However, some European offices such as Desvigne, Vogt, and Studio Vulkan, and certainly some of the Dutch offices such as H+N+S, Vista, and Strootman, consciously foreground temporality in their approach to projects. For example, Desvigne's Greenwich drawings convey the important message that maturing landscapes have several states of equal value. Similarly, Anu Mathur and Dilip da Cunha in the United States have worked assiduously with time in their representations of water and landscape. Operating in the fields of water management and ecological restoration (or nature development, as it is called in the Netherlands), change and uncertainty are so manifest that designers have had to experiment not only with different representational techniques, but also different forms of construction. The public and the commissioners of design need to be informed of the inherently contingent nature of landscape processes.

It is interesting to observe that it is not only the maturation of landscape that takes time, but also design processes and even the making of drawings. Most projects take years to be designed and executed. Within this lapse of time, the dynamics of society, including political changes, new trends, and new techniques, are active. It is understandable therefore that practicing landscape architects sometimes consciously opt for drawings not made using computers, but instead by hand, perhaps in watercolor, so as to suggest a certain openness toward future developments. If the original role of drawings was mainly to guide the execution process, or to test the validity of proposals, they are now increasingly seen as instruments of speculation and seduction. Today we see that
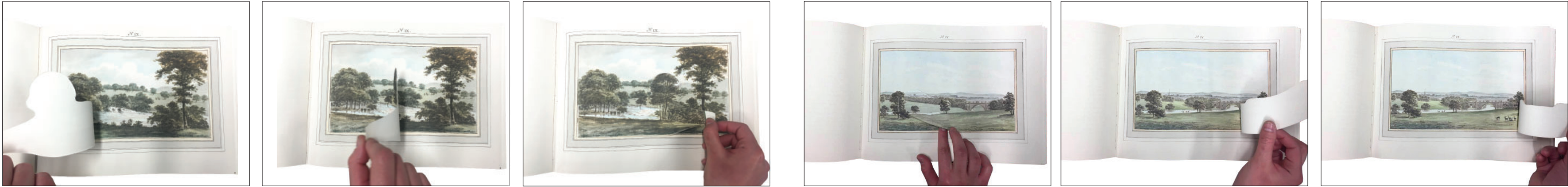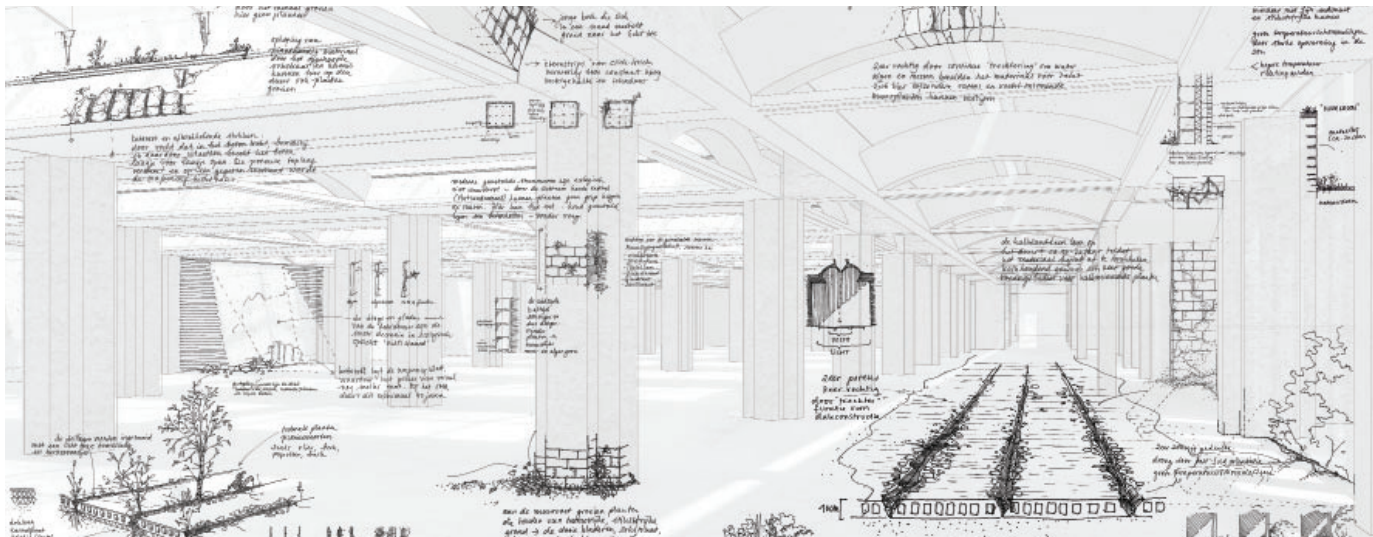
drawings are almost never independent artifacts, they are part of arguments, and knowing that, one can say that 'turning the pages,' as in a presentation or design booklet, is also a way to control time in a designer's narrative.

Despite renewed interest in the issues of time, landscape, and representation, and the availability of the technical means to display time, the majority of today's [European] practitioners hesitate to seriously engage in drawing time. This is due to the lack of a theoretical framework supporting a specific landscape architectural view on representation. I suggest that next to plan, section, and visualization–which we could group as *spatial* representations–we start to experiment more seriously with *temporal* representations. Useful examples such as film, comics, and timelines are already available. The precise use of such examples in landscape architecture is a challenge for the discipline.

Practice, particularly, is in desperate need of good examples of both projects and drawings – not only in the sense that they are eye-catching and graphically clear, but also in that they are operative in the pragmatic conditions of practice. This can be done to some extent by collecting examples of best practice, and disseminating these examples via journals, blogs, and exhibitions, but better still would be a combination of actual drawings with an anthropological perspective, in which we get to know exactly how, and why, and to what result, these drawings were made.

Such a perspective will reveal that current practice has a limited capacity to experiment and therefore educational programs in landscape architecture have a significant role to play. It is within the studio we find a space that easily invites experimentation – if it is avoided, as happens too often today, the studio merely copies the status quo of practice. As Erik de Jong and Antoine Picon argue, the Ecole des Ponts et des Chaussées was a formidable catalyst for innovation in engineering and design practice in Napoleonic times, due to its ground-breaking work in the representation of landscape: it was only then that the *irregularity* of landscape, including its change over time, was studied in a systematic way. Annual competitions in drawing maps of landscape generated a new idea about the depiction of landscape.[10] In that line of thinking, landscape architecture schools, especially in Europe, should take their role as a source of innovation more seriously, and provide professional practice with new approaches.

The future for landscape architecture is challenging, and as today's processes of making seem, at times, to render traditional drawings obsolete, the future for drawing is also challenging. Drawings as innovative instruments in the complicated game of speculating, seducing, and opining will become more and more important. Landscape architects, along with continuing to design gardens and parks, must also engage with bigger issues of environmental and cultural change. In a rapidly changing world landscape architecture's understanding of processes over time, and the ability to communicate it, are key to its success.

1 John Reid, *The Scots Gard'ner: Published for the Climate of Scotland By John Reid Gard'ner* [1683] [Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company Edinburgh, 1988], 75.

2 John C. Loudon ed., *The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Late Humphry Repton, ESQ* [1840] [London: Forgotten Books, 1988], 30.

3 Charles E. Beveridge & Carolyn F. Hoffman [eds], *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted Supplementary Series* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 1, 1997].

4 See, e.g., Mohsen Mostafavi & David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993], which points to the need to consider time in architecture.

5 Lawrence Halprin, *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment* [New York: George Braziller, 1969].

6 James Corner, "Representation and Landscape: Drawing and Making in the Landscape Medium," *Word and Image* 8, no. 3 [1992]: 243–75; Rem Koolhaas, *S, M, L, XL* [010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1996], 971.

7 Albenga Yaneva, *Made by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture: An Ethnography of Design* [Rotterdam: 010 publishers, 2009]; Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991].

8 Noël van Dooren, *Drawing Time: The Representation of Growth, Change and Dynamics in Dutch Landscape Architectural Practice After 1985*, PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam [2017].

9 Cuff, *Architecture*, ibid.

10 Antoine Picon, *French Architects and Engineers in the Age of the Enlightenment* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992]; Erik de Jong, Michel Lafaille & Christian Bertram, *Landscapes of the Imagination: Designing the European Tradition of Garden and Landscape Architecture 1600–2000* [Rotterdam: Nai Uitgevers, 2008].

Previous: Images from Humphry Repton's Red Books.

Opposite: Time developmental process for colonizing infrastructure with vegetation: Hannah Schubert.

IMAGE CREDITS

Endpapers

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Editorial

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Prisoners of Time

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Doing Time

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Designing Dialectical Landscape

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p. 35: Decaying books in Thilo Folkerts and Rodney LaTourelle's Jardin de la Connaissance, Quebec, courtesy Thilo Folkerts and Rodney LaTourelle via author.

Time for Time

p. 36: Cover of one of Humphry Repton's *Red Books*, courtesy of the Anne and Jerome Fisher Fine Arts Library, University of Pennsylvania..

p. 38–39: Interior images of one of Humphry Repton's *Red Books*, courtesy of the Anne and Jerome Fisher Fine Arts Library, University of Pennsylvania.

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The Consistency of Time

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Performing Drawing in Time

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Phase Shift

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p. 60–61: Richard Serra's sculpture today (photographer unknown), courtesy author.

Date, Painting

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Color = Space + Time

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