

S(t)imulate Me: A Loose Manifesto

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Abandoning the concept of nature as it has stood for centuries dissolves the corresponding idea of culture as it has stood as well. Subsequently, ideas of subjectivity, epistemology, and normality ("the natural") become questionable. Doing away with nature as an epistemological ground for everything from sexuality to recreational wear ruptures the alibi that culture employs to disguise its workings as absolutes.

However, if as is often portrayed, the environmental problem hinges on a corrupt and decadent western culture, then perhaps it is culture rather than nature, itself a construct, that needs to be called into question.

The need, the morbid desire if you will, on the part of landscape architects to play with the cadaver of Nature, to prop it up as a transvestitic effigy, to continually s(t)imulate themselves and this dead thing, might be said to result from a pathological reaction to the underlying realization that there is no Nature. Landscape architecture enters into a state of "panic environmentalism" (following Arthur and Marilouise Kroker's work with "panic sex") where the natural is hysterically produced and reaffirmed to disguise the fact that there is no longer a natural. In this, nature is no longer a basis for culture as we have known it since the Renaissance.

Western culture fears nothing more than the reversal of that which it employs as its source of power both materially and symbolically. The s(t)imulating signs of the aestheticized hyper-nature of landscape architecture exists to cover the disappearance of the nature on which Western culture founds its privileged discourse. The socio-cultural system thus co-opts, indeed encourages, the supposed radical challenge of the environmental movement to an anti-environmental culture.

The tumescent sign system of nature distracts activism and critique. It allows a consumer culture to voraciously deplete limited resources while replacing them with simulations; environmental "restoration", the weekend camping trip, the "100% natural" foods replace the models of the "real" which once ex-

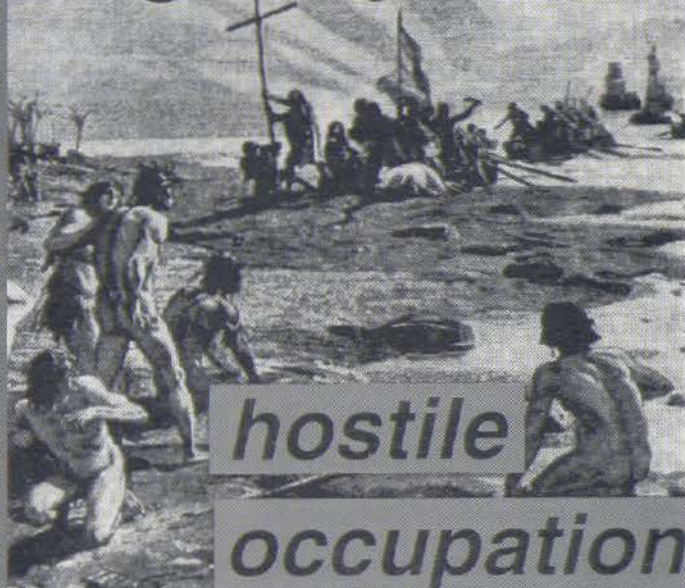
isted in the untamed wilderness. These aestheticized and fetishized products become more natural than the natural. The materialist/semiotic recuperation however serves as an alibi for something more insidious than merely destruction of pristine ecosystems.

The concepts of nature, the natural, and the naturalized constitute a major source of oppression. If nature stands as an unquestioned category, then the identities and cultural roles of women, non-traditional families, lesbian/gays/bisexuals, etc. remain grounded in oppressive concepts of the "natural". Consequently, the "unnatural" exists and functions as a categorical term of exclusion. Should this particular conception of nature fall, the shadow of nature perverted would collapse in step. Needless to say, the status quo can not afford to allow nature to collapse for most of its dichotomous structure rests upon a matrix of culture/nature/un-nature.

The role, then, of radical landscape architecture becomes one of rupturing the he(d)gemonic discourses of nature, of deconstructing the basis of culture to open a new realm of play. Cultural studies, women's studies, and queer studies, among other fields, have attempted this dismantling within their spheres of academic influence. However, these interrogations have by and large rarely influenced the layperson or the practitioner (the theorist even) of landscape architecture.

Part of this hesitation results from the rugged anti-intellectual tradition of landscape architecture. I would argue though that the strongest resistance derive from fears of losing the traditional *raison-d'etre* and privileged realm of the profession, nature. Despite this, landscape architecture might be one of the few disciplines situated strategically

every design (re)enacts an originally



hostile

occupation

enough between theory and practice, the academic and the popular, the professional and the layperson to attempt a rupture of the onerous nature/culture dichotomy.

Landscape architects might be able to insinuate themselves and their work within these economies of a hypernature and critically question the hundreds of magazines, products, media spectacles that constantly and frenetically (re)produce the signs of nature. The field as a multidisciplinary matrix seems well positioned to unravel and subvert the concept of nature within the s(t)imulation machines of glossy magazines, conferences, and research, to break the code, to reverse the natural. As Baudrillard has pointed out, the one thing totalizing systems fall prey to (for they do not take it into account) is their own reversibility and death.

... Tres Fromme currently pursues a Master of Landscape Architecture degree at the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design. His interests revolve around applying poststructural and cultural theories to the discourse and representations of "nature". *Image: S.A.L.A.D. (Secret Association of Landscape Architects Deconstructing).*...