Discussing Landscape Architecture

Edited by Christiane Sörensen Karoline Liedtke
European Conference of Landscape Architecture Schools
specifics
Landscape architecture’s fundamental task is to uncover and develop the specificity of a site. SPECIFICS emphasizes the differences of qualities of a location and invites to focus and concentrate on significant strategies for research and teaching in view of recent insights and global developments.
IMPRINT

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EDITED BY
Christiane Sörensen, Karoline Liedtke
Department of Landscape Architecture,
HafenCity University Hamburg

PROJECT COORDINATION
Nora Kempkens

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
Luise Letzner, Dominique Peck

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Oliver Kleinschmidt
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ECLAS, the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools is the organization representing the interests of academic institutions that provide teaching programs and undertake research in the discipline. Founded as a loose organization at a conference in 1989, it grew to first become the European Conference of Landscape Architecture Schools, was renamed a council in 2000 to reflect its wider interests, and ultimately was registered legally as a membership organization in 2006. The main aims are “to foster and develop scholarship in landscape architecture throughout Europe by strengthening contacts and enriching the dialogue between members of Europe's landscape academic community and by representing the interests of this community within the wider European social and institutional context.” The annual conference forms the basis of the council’s activities, but a number of initiatives have also developed since the early days, the most important being the recently ended “LE:NOTRE Thematic Network. Project in Landscape Architecture.” In 2006, ECLAS founded JoLA, the Journal of Landscape Architecture, as its vehicle for publishing high quality academic output. The conference is therefore the centerpiece of ECLAS’s annual activities and represents the main opportunity for the academic community to get together and discuss research, critical practice, teaching, and so on. The conference program has evolved over time and is held each year in a different country by a member university. There are keynote papers by well-known and highly respected academics and practitioners, oral and poster sessions, parallel activities such as a doctoral colloquium for young academics and researchers, a meeting of heads of landscape schools and departments, and the executive committee meeting. There is also the annual General Assembly of ECLAS and the ECLAS awards ceremony, where outstanding achievements of ECLAS members are recognized and celebrated. The conference also includes field visits and excursions, and of course a conference dinner. Each school hosting the conference identifies a theme and set of subthemes that form the basis of the conference. Calls for abstracts are followed by reviews and the selection of a full program of oral presentations, with approximately four parallel sessions being held. Papers are then written and published in the proceedings. At the Hamburg conference an innovation was introduced—a PechaKucha session—where contributors could offer something more than a poster, but less than a standard oral presentation. These were often a means for younger researchers to present works in progress and obtain valuable feedback from more experienced colleagues. For the proceedings to be accurately described as “proceedings,” they should proceed from the conference and reflect not just what people wrote in the papers accompanying their presentations, but also the flavor of the discussions that took place in the sessions, as well as the keynote papers which are usually not produced beforehand, and the summaries, if any, made by session chairs and others. If a conference is to help move forward the discipline or subject area that serves as the program theme, then the ensuing reflections are highly significant. Hence, it is advisable to allow some time to pass before producing a volume that truly reflects the spirit of a conference and captures more than the sum of the papers delivered.
The ECLAS Conference held in Hamburg in September 2013 was memorable for many reasons. The location, St. Katharine’s Church, was an outstanding venue. It was an inspired choice for being a fallback location, after it became clear that the original planned venue in the new HafenCity University Hamburg campus would not be completed in time. Everything could be found under one roof, the pastor made us very welcome and joined in the event himself. We got to hear the amazing organ, a replica of one on which Bach had played, and everyone could easily mix, meet, and network.

St. Katharine’s Church sits on the edge of the HafenCity, across the canal. We were also able to visit and experience the renaissance of the old port area, as well as see the building exhibition and garden show, taking place in Hamburg at the same time. These possibilities added considerable value to the conference. At a reception in the city hall held at the invitation of Dr. Dorothee Stapelfeldt, the Second Mayor and Senator for Science and Research of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, we were able to hear more of the ambitions and aims of the HafenCity project from key people involved in taking it forward.

Finally, I would like to thank Christiane and Karoline (Jane and Karo) for the hard work they put in organizing and running the conference, as well as taking the extra time to produce these excellent proceedings. It is an aim of ECLAS to continually improve the quality of the conference and this example helped to do so.

Simon Bell  
President of ECLAS
THE EXPERIMENT “SPECIFICS”

Many questions arose when HafenCity University Hamburg was chosen as the venue for the ECLAS Conference 2013. ECLAS provides a basic framework and structure for every conference, which allows the host university to develop it further and add specific details. We were fascinated by that recurring academic ritual of shaping an event in various fashions according to each location and university. What does it mean for the field of landscape architecture if the HCU hosts and organizes such a demanding conference and exhibits the global professional discipline? And how can we best represent the research profile of a still very young university—a university “under construction”—founded just in 2006? What should be the title? What should be the main focus of the conference program? Or as phrased by Simon Bell: “What spirit can we instill in the conference?”

At HafenCity University, landscape architecture is particularly involved at the interface of architecture, city planning, and civil engineering, which suggests the term interdisciplinary as a possible title for the conference. Hence, the conference program should of course attract a wide range of disciplines. We invited colleagues from various HafenCity University disciplines to explain and define the role of the landscape within their degree programs. In an ongoing process of thought and discussion, the concern gradually shifted to analyzing the differences between disciplines and working patterns, and focusing on individual profiles in order to gain a better understanding of our interdisciplinary discourse. This process led us to the opposite term and finally to the title, SPECIFICS. Through this process, we realized that defining the specifics is, in fact, the basic condition for interdisciplinary practice. The need subsequently arose to define the task and role of landscape architecture as follows: a fundamental task of landscape architecture is to examine the typical characteristics and potential of a place, to reveal its genius loci, and thus extract the specificity of the location. The shaping of cultural landscapes owes much to regional experiences and individual interpretations alike.

During the conference, guests were introduced to the specificities of Hamburg as a subject of consideration. Under the title, “Specifis in One Place,” Jürgen Bruns Berentelg, director of the HafenCity GmbH and sponsor of the conference, invited internationally renowned landscape architects, who distinguish themselves as being responsible for HafenCity’s open spaces, to a critical discourse on the nature of their work. This resulted in a keynote contribution on the prelocation of HafenCity University, now within the new HafenCity Hamburg urban district, to that of the former port. But can the title SPECIFICS be applied to the question of research profiles and the methods that accompany them? Research and teaching approaches shape the thinking of future generations of landscape and environmental planners. The immediate task is to emphasize differences of quality and concentrate on significant strategies for research and teaching against the backdrop of globalization.

During another intensive discussion on various research perspectives at the HCU, we developed together with our neighboring disciplines the following subtitles for the sessions: “Nature Happened Yesterday,” “Who Owns the Landscape,” “Best Practice Landscape Architecture,” “Landscape and Structures,” “Event and Conversion”

The call for papers triggered an intense process of evaluating the 268 submitted abstracts and selecting suitable contributions for the final shaping of the program. Selected presenters—all highly respected academics in different fields—were
involved in the organization and selection process from the early developmental phases of the sessions. They were responsible for the arrangement and configuration of their panels. The moderators’ final assessments and comments on the sessions in these proceedings enriched and revised the overall perspective beyond the respective views of each individual presenter. We have allowed ourselves curatorial freedom and opted for a personalized selection process based on a preceding anonymous review procedure. In her contribution, Kelly Shannon excellently presented the scientific practice of such methods but moreover analyzed the weaknesses of amalgamation.

We were also particularly interested the marginal areas, the interfaces between art and the sciences. Landscape architecture is a relatively new profession in research. It is not possible to rely on traditional methods and is often reliant on the methods used by other sciences (humanities, and so on). Therefore, it was our concern to include the specific practice of landscape architecture in the conference as a subject of reflection, within the session of best practice landscape architecture. Design theory has been pointed out as an original means of expression and of landscape architecture. To what extent can different design methods contribute to the construction of a basis for theory? The question as to whether design itself is research was an issue of controversy. This, and other discourses, is analyzed in this publication.

Opening with the film *Nightfall* and the parallel lecture by artist and researcher James Benning created a wonderful prelude to the spirit of the conference. The film *Nightfall* opened the conference entitled SPECIFICS with a call to reveal, to bring forth nature in its unending (sustainable) existence. In his lecture on the methodology of his practice, James Benning addressed landscape architecture as an ontological discipline. What could we learn from the widespread international network of specific experiences and how can we draw inspiration from them? Bringing together all the specific cultures in landscape architecture led to a true, overall understanding of the similarities and differences in our professional practices. We look back on an exciting time and are impressed by the richness of content. It documents the current discussions in landscape architecture in the form of the Proceedings of the Conference of 2013.

Christiane Sörensen, Karoline Liedtke
Editors
SPECIFICS was an exciting opportunity and challenge for the HafenCity University Hamburg (HCU). As a still very young university, we felt honored and privileged to host the 2013 annual conference of the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools (ECLAS). Christiane Sörensen and her team of landscape architects at the HCU were able to host and organize an inspiring program for the conference, which attracted researchers and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines. Not only planners and designers, but also social scientists, engineers, artists, and representatives from the humanities gathered in Hamburg to discuss vital and prevailing topics of landscape architecture. To have the international community of leading scholars and professionals in this field as guests at our university was a unique experience and a chance for fundamental debates about landscape architecture and its intertwined relation to other areas of research. I am, therefore, glad that by publishing the papers of the conference in this volume, readers will have the opportunity to relive major discussions and intellectual debates of SPECIFICS.

The notion of landscape is in itself already interdisciplinary. It is omnipresent in planning, in cultural aspects of metropolitan development, as well as urban design. Therefore, the HCU appears to be not only a suitable, but also a demanding venue for the annual ECLAS Conference. As a focused university of the built environment, interdisciplinary teaching and research between design, technology, culture, society, the arts, ecology, and economics are everyday challenges at the HCU. During the time of the conference, our researchers had many chances to put forward their interdisciplinary approaches and questions of the role of landscape within the manifold debates about the built environment and urban society. The new ideas, methods, and hypotheses presented in response by specialists of landscape architecture and planning from around the world will be a lasting benefit for our university. Therefore, the contributions of this volume show, once more, in which ways the analysis of urban and regional landscapes are at the heart of every institution of the planned and built environment.

For a conference dedicated to specifics in landscape architecture, we believe that choosing Hamburg as the conference's location had a lot to offer for the participants of the conference. The HCU is a significant component of the emerging HafenCity district, currently Europe's largest Inner City development project. Right next to HCU, Lohsepark, envisaged as the “Central Park” of HafenCity, will be built by 2015. Being a vital part of such a large project with a development time that will last for another decade proves that institutions of higher education such as the HCU can play a major role in urban revitalization. At the same time, as a university, Hamburg's HafenCity gave us the possibility of being in the middle of a laboratory, of an urban experiment ready to be explored. While SPECIFICS was taking place in Hamburg, two other experiments were held: the International Building Exhibition, and the International Garden Show, which also raised new questions, offered new approaches, and presented new solutions for urban development. All this added to the intellectual uniqueness of the conference in Hamburg, which was made possible through the support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, HafenCity Hamburg GmbH, Hamburg's Architectural Association, and others.
Who can take up the current challenges to generate new ideas for exploring urban landscapes if not young researchers? Therefore, I was especially grateful to be asked to introduce the PhD colloquium “Creating Knowledge” during the ECLAS Conference. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, director of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, once said: “When you do research, you haven’t discovered yet what you don’t know.” This quote is a reference to the well known (and shortened) ancient quote “I know that I know nothing,” but it transforms the thought into a double negation making the task of the researcher even more complex. Rheinberger’s quote tells us something about the special condition of research: a serious researcher is in the dark and hopes to discover something that nobody has found before on his or her expedition. Research, therefore, should raise types of questions which do not predict what they will discover. As a researcher, one needs to bear the state of irritation, disturbance, at times also boredom, indirect perception, or insight. Allowing uncertainties is necessary to find the right questions of research. In this sense the conference motivated young researchers to question and challenge their presumptions, causing a helpful “PhD-confusion.” SPECIFICS in this way stimulated a new generation of researchers to find the right questions for many years to come.

Gesa Ziemer
Vice President of Research, HafenCity University Hamburg
THE PARADOXES OF PEER-REVIEW (FOR LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE)

Since the eighteenth century, methods for the assessment of science have been instilled through official societies and academies, initiated with the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1732. Today’s peer review process is a direct descendent of its earliest iteration developed for the hard and social sciences, whereby an impartial review of experts in the same field (peers) serve an evaluative or gatekeeping role towards claims to knowledge, old and new, and for “possible errors of fact or inconsistencies of argument” (Ziman 1984 quoted in Bedeian 2004, 198) before publication. The now conventional format for modern science—introduction, method, results, discussion—repeated in countless “scientific” papers in all academic disciplines and followed by rote, is a supposedly rational sequence of activities resulting in new knowledge. “Peer review … is a linchpin of academic life” (Eisenhart 2002). The process controls access to funding, is utilized by universities to make decisions about hiring, promotion, and tenure, and to assess the quality of departments and programs.

Yet, for decades, the peer review process has been held under increasing scrutiny and has raised concern regarding bias, fairness, unnecessary delay, and general ineffectiveness. Moreover, critics contend that review panels tend to comply with conventional standards, thus disqualifying innovative and unorthodox scholarship, as well as young researchers and researchers with diverse perspectives (Bedeian 2004; Eisenhart 2002; Suls and Martin 2009; Trafimow and Rice 2006). Inevitably, peer review panels are vulnerable—to a certain degree—to nepotism and strategic maneuvering, depending on the contexts in which the process occurs.

In the arena of the built environment, there are further complexities and concerns regarding peer review. First, there remains the continual transition from professions to disciplines; the shift from professional diktat towards cerebral endeavor has been evolving worldwide. According to the Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi, research is the mechanism through which professions advance and improve their techniques, and escape the tendency to reflect the prevalent mode of production (quoted in Milburn et al. 2003, 126). The transitory process is artificially hastened by the “democratization of education” and leveling of the educational playing field (evidenced in Europe by the Bologna Process), with the consequence that more research must be produced by faculty and doctoral students alike. Second, in landscape architecture and architecture, the perceived dichotomy between research and design has led to tremendous debates concerning academic scholarship and research assessment (Benson 1998). Knowledge production in landscape architecture, as in architecture, is generally a complex interplay of social-cultural, historical, economical, and even technological components, rather than the product of an absolute truth, as in the sciences. And, at the same time, it has been well-documented that, historically, there has not been a deep-rooted research culture in landscape architecture; it is predominantly an emerging phenomenon. The field’s ongoing struggle to establish design as a viable form of research comes from a long-standing battle to reconcile forms of traditional knowledge with requirements of rigorous scholarly research (Benson 1998; Milburn et al. 2003).
Landscape architecture clearly needs research, and a double-blind peer review process guarantees a certain degree of impartiality, validity, and reliability. At the same time, there are numerous faults in the peer review system that can be improved. However, if its basic principles are followed, then it appears to be the best process academia has at this point to "democratically" assess research. Yet, landscape architecture (like architecture and other creative fields) can perhaps do better and create new frameworks for research and papers in the applied arts—particularly, for instance, ones that are distinct from science’s "introduction, method, results, discussion." Landscape architects can more convincingly become reflective practitioners, provide engaged critique, and not simply attempt to mirror the science canon. ECLAS conferences are the perfect test beds.

*Kelly Shannon*

*JoLA Editorial Team*

**REFERENCES**


“Nightfall … is a ninety-seven-minute study of changing light, from daytime to complete darkness. It is a portrait of solitude. Nothing happens—no wind, no movement, just changing light.”

JAMES BENNING
20  In Fact Nature
    Christiane Sörensen, Hamburg

22  NIGHTFALL, USA 2011, 97 min.
    James Benning, Film Director, USA

24  All of Life is Memory
    James Benning

26  Landscape at Work
    Angelus Eisinger, Zurich
In his keynote address, the artist James Benning reveals himself also as a researcher, as someone who is searching for the foundation of his art. In an abstract language he leads us to a basic understanding of his work. His text is a mathematical metaphor for his oeuvre.

James Benning bases his method—the Greek word for the way one’s work progresses—on a string of instants, of infinitely short time intervals that are lined up to constitute the axis of time. As one often says, “time has passed in an instant.”

In Benning’s work, landscape serves as a framework for experiencing the flow of time, but also for the durability beyond the limitations of a time segment. Nightfall represents a real experience of time in the staging of a Californian forest. In only one take, it shows the forest as day becomes night—a systematic documentation of the flow, the essence of time, as night is being made. We witness how sunny spots turn pale white and then to total darkness.

The film screening is a meditative tour de force due to the highly focused attention demanded of the viewer. We move between the opposite poles of meditative contemplation and a strange agitation brought on by intensively staring into the picture that is fully devoid of additional effects. Only the humming of insects marks a physical presence.

Nothing seems to happen, but in fact there are many changes. The relationship between light and dark changes. The memories of one moment must be kept open for the next one. We are asked to give ourselves over to this process of guided attention and perception. The spectator is left to him or herself and becomes vulnerable and open to the unfolding of the pictures. We gradually let go of the pressure to discover a deeper sense. The conference participants experience an unexpected reality after a long journey, which was certainly full of certain expectations of the conference. They become part of a common process of “arrival.”

The term landscape, in German “Land-schaft,” implies the creation of the land, and thereby, a common process of taking possession of the territory. Landscape is always a common concept. The film by James Benning thus embodies, at the opening of the conference, the collective appropriation of the topic “landscape.” Nightfall requires a naive attention to pictures and sounds. It does not include the sentimental aesthetics so common in European romanticism, generated by an image of dusk that has multiple encodings.

In his lecture “All of Life is Memory,” Benning presents a pragmatic scheme for his visual acoustic expedition through the American landscape. He simplifies the complex perceptions of landscape by reducing our memories to a projection on the time-based axis—“in fact, memory.” This radical method of working translates the modern understanding of landscape into film. This concept captures reality without evoking it. In contrast to the European tradition in art, memory
here is free of a subjective charge, and can be understood as the pure experience of time.
Paul Cézanne, a precursor to modernity, painted the St. Victoire mountain in Provence more than eighty times and, in the course of this artistic concentration on this multifaceted object in the southern landscape, reduced the topos mountain to a triangle; meaning the mountain is detached from its landscape and becomes finally an aesthetic construction. This step is what made Cézanne the father of abstract painting.

Benning’s Nightfall was filmed in a forest high up in California’s Sierra Nevada mountains. The precise choice of location was the result of the author’s lifelong experience. Omitting all distracting side effects could only have been done by someone with proven and highly developed artistic and technical skills. For the viewer, the forest remains vague, seemingly without a precise localization. Like in Cézanne’s paintings, we encounter an artistic concentration that overcomes the weight of a fixed location. This “no-place,” which leads to a true understanding of the temporal processes in nature, is radically different from the globalized, completely unspecific but fixed “non-place,” as described by Marc Augé in his renowned Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity (1995).

The film Nightfall at the beginning of the conference entitled SPECIFICS represents the emergence of nature in anticipation of its own existence. Making nature visible is an active and creative process, and precisely the task and challenge of the landscape architect. Nightfall equally stands for generating thoughts and concepts of nature, for deciphering landscape, and for revealing its properties, in order to concisely establish the true essence of nature: in fact, nature.
NIGHTFALL, USA 2011, 97 min.

James Benning, Film Director
Mathematicians represent the real numbers on a straight line and every real number has a particular place on that line. If we look at the set of counting numbers, \( C = \{1, 2, 3 \cdots + \infty\} \), we see that they are evenly spaced (one unit apart) and go on forever, that is, they are infinite.

The number zero wasn’t accepted as a number until the twelfth century. The church had objected to a symbol representing nothing. Once zero was in place, the natural numbers, \( N = \{0, 1, 2, 3 \cdots + \infty\} \), were born. The unit distance could now be defined as the distance from zero to one.

Adding the negative counting number gave the set of integers, \( I = \{-\infty \cdots -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3 \cdots +\infty\} \). Note: since the integers can be counted (that is, put in one to one correspondence with the counting numbers) both sets are of the same size, even though the counting numbers are a subset of the integers. It is easy to count the integers starting with 0, then 1, then -1, then 2, then -2, and so on.

Between any two integers there is an infinite amount of fractions; for example, between 0 and 1 there is \( \frac{1}{2} \), and \( \frac{1}{4} \), and \( \frac{1}{8} \), and \( \frac{1}{16} \), etc. This can go on forever. Yet, there is a way to count all of the fractions, just queue them up by giving them a place in the queue like an airline does when it calls first class, business class, group 1, group 2, group 3, and so on. Each fraction’s group number is simply determined by adding its numerator to its denominator, that is, \( \frac{1}{2} \) is in group 3, \( \frac{7}{8} \) is in group 15, \( \frac{3}{29} \) is in group 32, and so on.

Like the airplane queue, each of the groups will be finite in size and can be called in order, making it possible to count the set of all fractions even though the number of groups of fractions is infinite (unlike the airplane example). The set of all fractions is known as the rational numbers, \( R = \{ p⁄q \text{ where } p \text{ and } q \text{ are both integers, } q \neq 0, \text{ and } p \text{ and } q \text{ are not both even}\} \). At this point one could think that all of the points on the real number line have been defined, that is, taken up by the rational numbers, yet there are more points on the line that have not yet been named than have been named. This is because even a larger set of numbers exist that can’t be expressed as fractions, they can only be repressed as decimals whose digits never repeat and go on forever.

\[ \pi = 3.1415926535897932384626433832795028841971693993751058209749445 \ldots \], the ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter, is perhaps the most famous example of these kinds of numbers. Since \( \pi \)’s decimals go on forever, its value can only be stated as between some interval, the more digits considered, the smaller that interval, converging only when an infinite number of decimals are reached, which of course is never realized. These kinds of numbers form the set of irrational numbers, \( R’ \).

It is easily proven that the irrational numbers cannot be ordered and therefore cannot be counted. Simply assume a full list of the irrational numbers exists. One can then show that an irrational number can be found that is not in this list by
creating a irrational number whose first digit is different from the first digit of the first number in the list, and its second digit is different from the second digit of the second number in the list, and its third digit is different from the third digit of the third number in the list, and so on. Therefore no complete list of irrational numbers can ever be achieved, making them not countable. They are in fact, a larger infinite set than the infinite set of rational numbers that can be counted. This is known as the second order of infinity. There is a third order of infinity, which is even larger. It is the set of all curves. For me, this is a rather startling notion that infinite sets can vary in size. A fourth order of infinity is yet to be found.

Finally, all of the points on the real number line have been defined. Any point on the line is either a rational number or an irrational number, but not both; they are mutually exclusive. To accommodate these two infinite sets, \( R \) and \( R' \), a point on the real number line has no dimension, which is the main point of this talk. Now consider the real number line as a time line, where zero is the present. The positive numbers represent the future, and the negative numbers represent the past. As of yet, we cannot move along the time line, that is, travel in time. We are stuck at zero, but zero has no dimension, meaning the present doesn't actually exist, as soon as the future becomes the present, it becomes the past, instantaneously. All of life can only be understood through memory, in fact all of life is memory. Consider a car passing with its directional light blinking as it passes. At the present, the light is either on or off, it isn't blinking. We only think it is blinking because we remember that it was off when it is on, and that is was on when it is off. In fact to sense that the car was moving at all can only be perceive through memory. At any moment in the present the car is located at one particular spot. It only moves through time, and there is no time at the present. Perhaps talking itself is the best example of this. By the time I get to the end of any sentence the first word of that sentence is easily understood to be in the past, in fact any word that you hear me utter is already in the past, not because the speed of sound is slow (although that does add to it), but because the present has no dimension. So how do we make sense of anything? It's always from memory. What has just occurred is judged from what we've experienced in the past, along with what we've read, been taught, or told. But this should never be a one-way street. Even though new experiences can only be understood through memory, the past should also always be re-evaluated from the present, otherwise we will only reinforce our own prejudices, be them right or wrong …

**FILMOGRAPHY:**