



# Abstract Landscape Architecture

AESTHETIC OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN SPACES

YURA LOTONENKO

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Aesthetic of landscape architecture  
and urban spaces

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*Landscape Architecture is probably one of the most challenging art, it deals with art and with science at the same time.*

Abstract landscape architecture is the theory that inspired by contemporary art. The intention of this work is to bridge abstract art with the landscape architect and urban design movement nowadays. This publication will guide through the history of art and the evolution of landscape architecture.

PREFACE

Secondly, you are invited to look at the principles and method for designing abstract landscapes. Lastly, it is a journey to explore conceptual abstract landscape architecture projection Urban Canvas. The intention of Urban Canvas is to bridge the philosophy of abstract landscape with reality providing understandable results.

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**AESTHETIC**

of landscape and urban

**SPACES**

I was always curious - how does the fine art affect landscape architecture and urban design? What if a canvas will be a landscape or an urban space?

# PICTURESQUE LANDSCAPE

In Renaissance times landscape was considered a constant environment. Also, the main idea of that time was in the creation's perfection of ideal landscapes. This idea described in the concept of 'Landscape Two' by John Brinckerhoff Jackson. The landscape characterized as

*'permanent position both in the social and topographical sense, that gives us our identity' (Jackson, 1984, p. 152).*

The landscape was shown as a very static, constant, scenery element of a person's life.



*'A landscape identified with a very static, very conservative social order, and that there can be one true philosophy of nature: that of landscape Two.'* (Jackson, 1984, p. 155).

In addition, the landscape was seen as a gentle organism and of course an inspiration for many painters. In pictorial art, the paintings of Claude Lorraine are reflecting the idea of seeing a landscape at that time. At that time the landscape was seen as a pastoral scene with a balanced unity of man and nature.



Claude Lorrain. Landscape with the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, 1648.

# LANDSCAPE OF PROCESSES

Lately, Jan  
Bijhouwer in  
his book *Het  
Nederlandse  
Landschap*  
noticed that  
landscape  
development  
is seen as a  
continuous  
process  
over time  
(Bijhouwer,  
1972). Thus,  
the permanent  
visual  
image of the  
landscape  
changes to a  
more dynamic  
and unstable  
system. Also,  
Jackson  
inspired by  
American  
landscapes and  
its processes  
of changes  
wrote:

*'I am confused by the temporary spaces I see: the drive-in, fast-food establishment that is torn down after a year, the fields planted to corn and then to soya beans and then subdivided; the trailer communities that vanish when vacation is over, the tropical gardens in shopping malls that are replaced each season; motels abandoned when the highway moves.'* (Jackson, 1984, p. 155)

DYNA M I C

The landscape is no longer a scene where components are static and permanent, like paintings of Lorrain. In addition, constant changes in the landscape have been described in 'Landscape Three' process-oriented concept by Jackson:

*'Landscape is not scenery, it is not a political unit; it is already no more than a collection, a system of man-made spaces on the surface of the earth. Whatever its shape or size, it is never simply a natural process, a feature of the natural environment; it is always artificial, always synthetic, always subject to sudden or unpredictable change.'* (Jackson, 1984, p. 156).

Lately, this idea supplemented by the 'Total landscape' concept by Rolf Peter Sieferle. This concept describes the landscape as a result of a variety of activities and processes:

*'The totality of the total landscape is a residual product of many different actions, each of which pursues its own ends. It reflects the results of work, traffic, housing, recreation, tourism, consumerism, landscape planning, and nature protection...'* (Sieferle, 2004).

These theories describe the landscape as a system of processes. Also, these processes are constantly changing and evolving. The landscape is no longer the permanent static scene, but rather a temporally and spatially open system that evolves.

As a result, different actions and processes lead to a change of style and aesthetics of the landscape. Sieferle described the lack of aesthetic of the place:

'The current phase of transformation has no identifiable goal. It is not like in previous transition periods that there is a change of a stylistic identity, that a newer one replaces an older type. Instead, we find a general loosening-up, a cultural de-centralization where nothing stable can be built. It is exactly because of the specific character of this situation that the stabilization of structures is impossible. Instead of a specific, stylistic color, which could be labeled *modernity*, we now have a whole *kaleidoscope of colors*' (Sieferle, 1997).

Sieferle highlighted the idea of the landscape that changes its aesthetic from scenic images of Renaissance times to more relational and process-oriented. This switch from classical aesthetic to relational aesthetic was also described in *System Esthetics* by Jack Burnham in 1968:

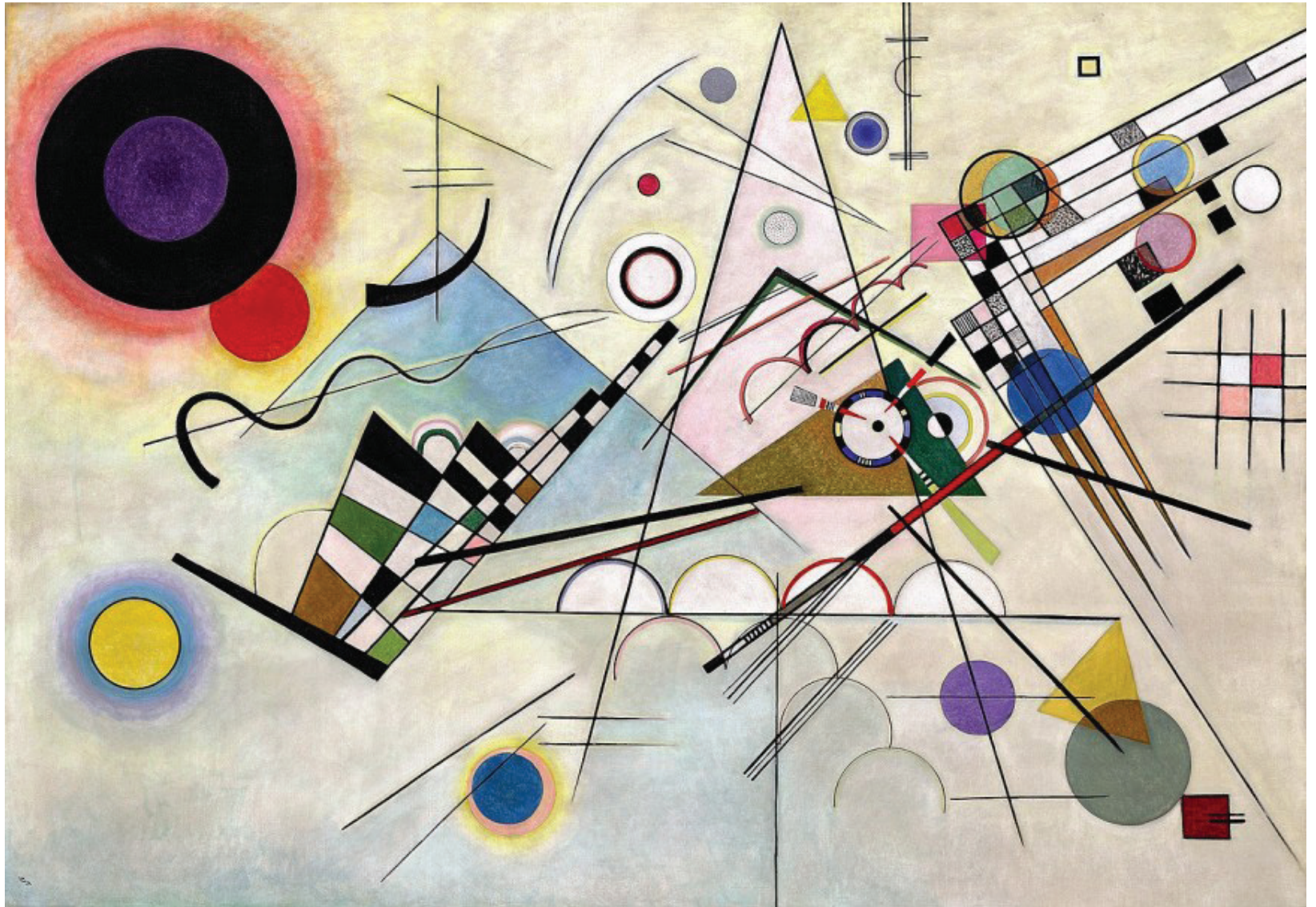
'The systems approach goes beyond a concern with staged environments and happenings; it deals in a revolutionary fashion with the larger problem of boundary concepts. In systems perspective, there are no contrived confines such as the theatre proscenium or a picture frame. Conceptual focus rather than material limits define the system the consistency of a system may be altered in time and space, its behavior determined both by external conditions and its mechanisms of control.'  
(Burnham, 1968, p. 3).

This work represents the change in the Aesthetic perception from statical canons to a relative aesthetics. Hence, classical scenes principal does not anymore limit an artwork, it s defined by conceptual focus and relationship of the things in time and space.

Curiously, a good example of the 'System Esthetics' in the pictorial art can be a work of

# Wassily Kandinsky

It represents objects and process that correlates in relation to each other in one system of complex composition.



Wassily Kandinsky. Composition VIII, 1923.



Rem Koolhaas described this concept as freestyle .

*'The best definition of the aesthetic of the Generic City is 'freestyle.' How to describe it? Imagine an open space, a clearing in the forest, a leveled city. There are three elements: roads, buildings, and nature; they coexist in flexible relationships, seemingly without reason, in speculator organizational diversity.'* (Koolhaas & Mau, 1995, p. 1254).

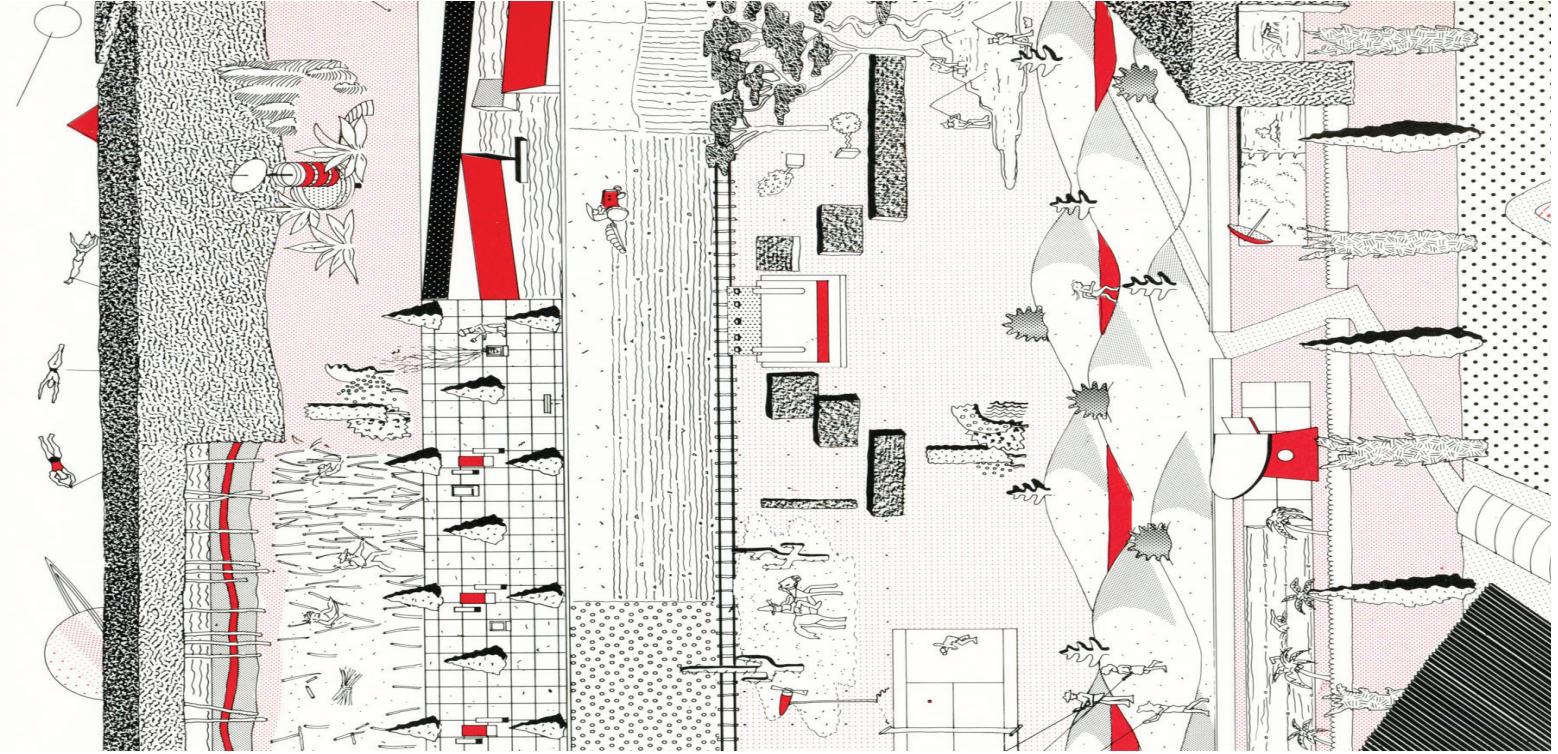
In addition to 'freestyle' Koolhaas described New Urbanism as:

*'If there is to be 'new urbanism' it will not be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence; it will be the staging of uncertainty; it will no longer be concerned with the arrangement of more or less permanent objects but with the irrigation of territories with potential; it will no longer aim for stable configurations but for the creation enabling fields that accommodate processes that refuse to be crystallized into definitive form; it will no longer be about meticulous definition, the imposition of limits, but about expanding notions, denying boundaries, not about separating and identifying entities, but about discovering unnameable hybrids...'*

*(Koolhaas & Mau, 1995, p. 969).*

The overview of the theories described the new approach in landscape architecture and urban design. It describes the landscapes as a system of processes that evolve in an unpredictable way, uncertainty of future changes. Moreover, it is switching the aesthetic from classical, ideal pastoral scenes to the more relational aesthetic.

Parc de la Villette's proposal by Rem Koolhaas is an extremely complex example of processes that in some way could be related to the artworks of Kandinsky, Klee, and Mondrian.



OMA / Rem Koolhaas, Parc de la Villette proposal,

*'Finally, we insist that at no time have we presumed to have produced a designed landscape. We have confined ourselves to devising a framework capable of absorbing an endless series of further meanings, extensions, or intentions, without entailing compromises, redundancies, or contradictions. Our strategy is to confer on the simple the dimension of adventure.'* (Koolhaas & Mau, 1995, p. 934).

To sum up this period, I would love to mention Kandinsky and Bachelard:

*'In general, the ideal balance between the head (conscious moment) and the heart (unconscious moment—intuition) is a law of creation, a law as old as humanity.'* (Kandinsky, 1935).

Also, Gaston Bachelard described this concept as

*joy in accepting limitations*  
(*The Psychoanalyses of Fire*, Bachelard, 1938).

# TRIUMPH OF MODERNISM

*Bigness is the last bastion of architecture - a contraction, a hyper-architecture. The containers of Bigness will be landmarks in a post-architectural landscape - a world scraped of architecture in the way Richer's paintings are scraped of paint: inflexible, immutable, definitive, forever there, generated through superman effort.*

(Koolhaas & Mau, 1995, p. 516).

When we think of Abstract art we might refer to the works of Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Gerhard Richter. Someone could say – my child could do the same. But what if we look at the essence and philosophy of abstract art?

# *What is special about abstract art?*

Well, we know that abstract art is not attached to the fixed object, it is more emotional power that somehow comes from the unconscious mind of the artist. How come that for centuries we have seen beautiful objects aligned on the piece of canvas with Golden Rule and today we can experience completely new of seeing this world. Abstract art has no strict rules, forms, objects that are limiting the masterpiece.

*Abstract art has helped  
us to experience the  
emotional power in pure  
form.*

Anton Ehrenzweig

Some may refer to the emotional power of space to

# Genius loci

, the spirit of space or identity of place by the theory of  
Christian Norberg-Schulz.





Abstraktes Bild. Gerhard Richter, 2012.

*Vibrant colors with playful contrast, an unusual collaboration of bright paint, mixed styles and great deepness in one complete unconsciousness composition. Here you won't find an object, you won't find a subject to stick your attention to. Each of the colors, styles, techniques represents diversity and contrast of emotional power without any limitations.*

LIYRI Art / Yura Lotonenko

After all, an open question arrived - Does it actually mean that in the modern Urban design we will see the triumph of expressive, emotional places delivered from the unconscious mind and without any limitations?

Christian Norberg-Schulz highlighted this question in *Genious Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, 1980. In this work, he investigated the spirit of place, also in regards to his theory the structure of a place is not fixed. However, it does not mean that genius loci gets lost, in fact, the identity of place can be preserved.

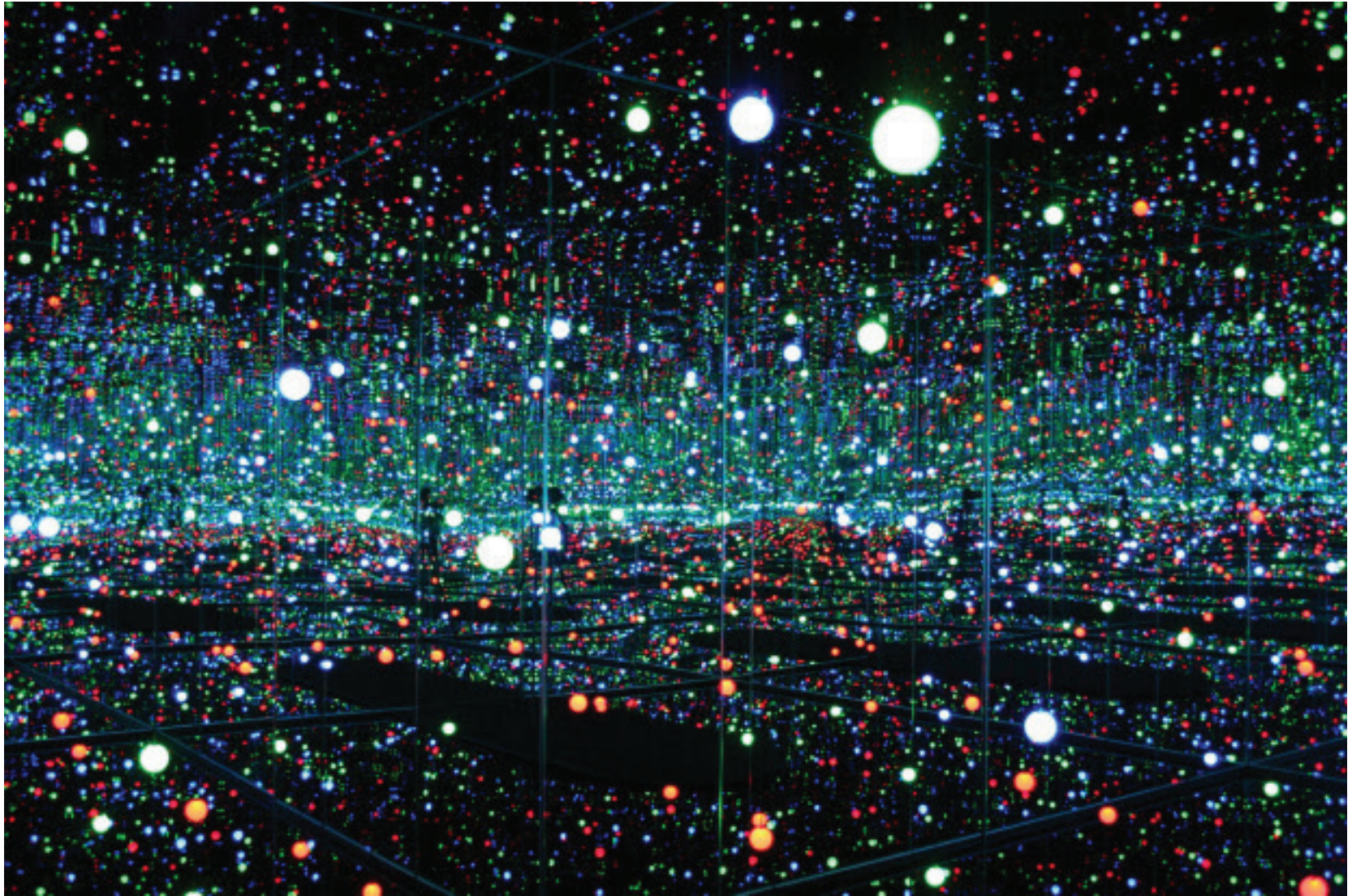
Another interesting work is *Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and Lao Religious Culture* by John Clifford Holt, 2009. In his book, Holt investigates spirit, senses and the power of place in relation to Buddhism and Laotian culture.

So somehow, this idea delivered from many different regions and cultures.

In conclusion, I would like to mention artworks

by Yayoi Kusama and Olafur Eliasson

and their exhibition at the Louisiana museum of modern art.



In infinity. Yayoi Kusama, Louisiana, Denmark.



Riverbed. Olafur Eliasson, Louisiana, Denmark.

# PRINCIPLES

for designing

landscapes

ABSTRACT

[Rather an open question ] >>>

*The permanence of even the most frivolous item of architecture and the instability of the metropolis are incompatible. In this conflict the metropolis is, by definition the victor; in its pervasive reality, architecture is reduced to the status of a plaything, tolerated as décor for the illusions of history and memory. In Manhattan, this paradox is resolved in a brilliant way: through the development of a mutant architecture that combines the aura of monumentality with the performance of instability. Its interiors accommodate compositions of program and activity that change constantly and independently of each other without affecting what is called, with accidental profundity, the envelope. The genius of Manhattan is the simplicity of this divorce between appearance and performance: it keeps the illusion of architecture intact while surrendering wholeheartedly to the needs of the metropolis. This architecture relates to the forces of the Grosz stadt like a surfer to the waves.*

Rem Koolhaas, 1978. (from S, M, L, X, L. 1995)

Designing landscapes as evolutionary systems by Martin Prominsky, 2005. The bases were the works of J. B. Jackson Landscape Three and R. P. Sieferle Total Landscape . The main debates were about a new way of seeing Urban, Landscape, Total Landscape, Third Nature. Following the idea, an Evolving landscape system is a system of many interrelated processes that are constantly changing and evolving in an unpredictable future way. The landscape is a system that constantly evolves over time and space. The second part that I found interesting was that an aesthetic of these landscapes is changing from classical, scenic landscapes to a relational aesthetic or System Esthetics described by Jack Burnham in 1962. Finally, the critical issue for me was the relationship between the landscape and the history of art.



# Link to the Past

*'Landscape is never finished or completed, like a can of preserves; it is an accumulation of events and stories, a continually unfolding inheritance.'*  
*George Descombes (Descombes, 1999, p. 81).*

This principle emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the past and the upcoming future. A link between the past and the future is important since it tells us about the history of the place. This principle considers reality as a result due to the contribution of existing processes and challenges.

However new blueprints could change the evolution of space including history and future. Link to the past shall be considered as a heritage versus limitations for the design interaction. Vroom described this principle as historical continuity (Vroom, 1990, p. 114). Also, Marot called this principle anamnesis (Marot, 1999, p. 50).

As canvas is a blank landscape can be as well when it is rural, otherwise, it has a meaning, stories, identity.

# Holism

The landscape becomes more complex, probably there is very little distinguishing if any between landscape and urban. The processes that sustain the landscape have different and complex nature. This principle suggests considering the whole image of the landscape.

Jan Smuts coined the term holism in 1926. Smuts defined holism as:

*'The tendency in nature to form wholes that are greater than the sum of the parts through creative evolution' (Smuts, 1927, p. 88).*

Following this principle, the landscape system has to be viewed as wholes and as a part of a larger context, rather as separate sites, processes, elements, etc..

It is necessary to determine the main directions, in order to better understand the principle.

The first is the scale. A landscape consists of many smaller parts that further sustain and take a part of the larger system. Consequently, the site has to be seen as an open system for surroundings and a bigger context.

The second is the components of the landscape. The landscape system consists of many components and defines a whole system. For instance, a holistic approach is a sustainable approach in many different ways – nature, human, urban life, processes. These components and processes form the landscape together.

The last one is relations. The components and processes are one interrelated coherent system.

# Creativity

*A dream cannot come  
true unless you dreamed  
the dream.*

Oscar Hammerstein

*'Creativity - Relating to or involving the use of the imagination or original ideas to create something' (Oxford Dictionary, 2011).*

This principle suggests that the landscape is unique. The principle suggests that there is simply no common creative tactics to design the landscape project. Schoon described this issue like:

*'Depending on our disciplinary backgrounds, organizational roles, past histories, interests, and political/economic perspectives, we frame problematic situations in different ways.'* (Schön, 1990, p. 4).

It is the creativity of our mind that looks for a way out of a problematic situation. This principle suggests that the landscapes as evolving systems does not limit, but encourage creativity.

# Adaptability

We will try to operate in the future, however, we don't know the exact result of the design because of future unpredictable changes. Moreover, the design has to consider possible unknown, uncertain needs. Therefore, the program has to be flexible and adjustable. Vroom, described this principle like flexibility:

*'The landscape is never completed or in a final stage but keeps changing and developing as a result of natural and functional modifications. In a dynamic process of change in use and meaning the main contours are fixed, while the details may be repeatedly transformed.'* (Vroom, 1990, p. 145).

In addition, any landscapes as an evolutionary system have to admit open-ended strategy. Marot described this idea in preparation principle:

*'... Any project must assume the role of an open-ended strategy, as in staging or setting up future conditions. Being itself in a process of becoming, a landscape is fully bound into the effects of nature and time... by bringing the effects of time back to life and appearance, the designer may both restore and prepare sites for unforeseeable futures. (Marot, 1999, pp. 50-51).*

An evolutionary landscape system deals with the integration of time and future uncertainty in the design. Therefore, the landscape becomes more adaptable according to future unknown processes.

# Formlessness

The landscape system includes a set of processes that are constantly changing and evolving.

Therefore, materiality is also changing. Moreover, the character of the changes ongoing is uncertain. The processes that will take place in the future are also not defined. Therefore, the form that we see does not carry any meaning. Vroom one of the first was to draw attention to this problem in the landscape:

*'In the city, there are many forms with a pre-determined and all too obvious meaning. This can have an oppressing and even paralyzing effect on the creativity of the designers. This is why some deny the existence of a relation between form and meaning or form and context and thereby proclaim the existence of 'formal autonomy' (Vroom, 1990, p. 147).*

Vroom addressed this issue from the designer's point of view. However, formal autonomy is the result of existence. The formlessness of the landscape is meaninglessness. Thus, these changes do not carry a holistic stylistic direction. An aesthetic of the landscape has the relational character of elements in space and time. The switch towards relational aesthetic or 'System Esthetics' described by Jack Burnham in 1968. Rem Koolhaas described similar ideas in 'Generic City' as 'free style' (Koolhaas & Mau, 1995, p. 1254).

FORMLESSNESS = open for future changes.

As an abstract art piece finished and working in balance but still open for future possible changes.



# The emotional power of space

Christian Norberg-Schulz described the theory of Genius loci, the spirit of space or identity of place (Norberg-Schulz, 1976). In Abstract art, we define qualities by emotional power represented by technique, colors, and contrast.

In this principle, we want to see the best emotional, identity qualities of each space and clearly define them. Therefore, we can work on transitions, change of experiences, diversity of places, sequences of emotional power that make each project unique giving its users a willingness to live, love and explore the city.

Here radical switch between different spaces is essential. We want to enhance the next space with emotional power with the play of light, sizes, colors, usage, etc. of spaces.

**URBAN**

**CANVAS**

methodology for designing abstract landscape and urban spaces

page 42

# Identifying the Challenges of the place

Every landscape architect project is seeking for the challenges, there could be few of them in an untouched rural environment. When we look at the urban scape there can be so many existing processes that one could easily be lost. However, we will still identify the main processes and challenges of the site to deal with.

WHAT



CHALLENGE



PROSPERITY

SILENCE

drink

CAR

COLL

HAPPY

NATURE

enjoy

DIVERSITY

A

SAFE

FAMILY

DANCE

food

FUN

read

CONNECTION

LIFE

Life

IDENTITY

FREEDOM

CHALLENGE

NOISE

PLEASURE

SOUL

FRESH AIR

LEVERPOSTED

PROCESSES

SUN

TALENT

FRIENDS

SKATE

Rela

DISBY

MOM

HUMAN

BIKE

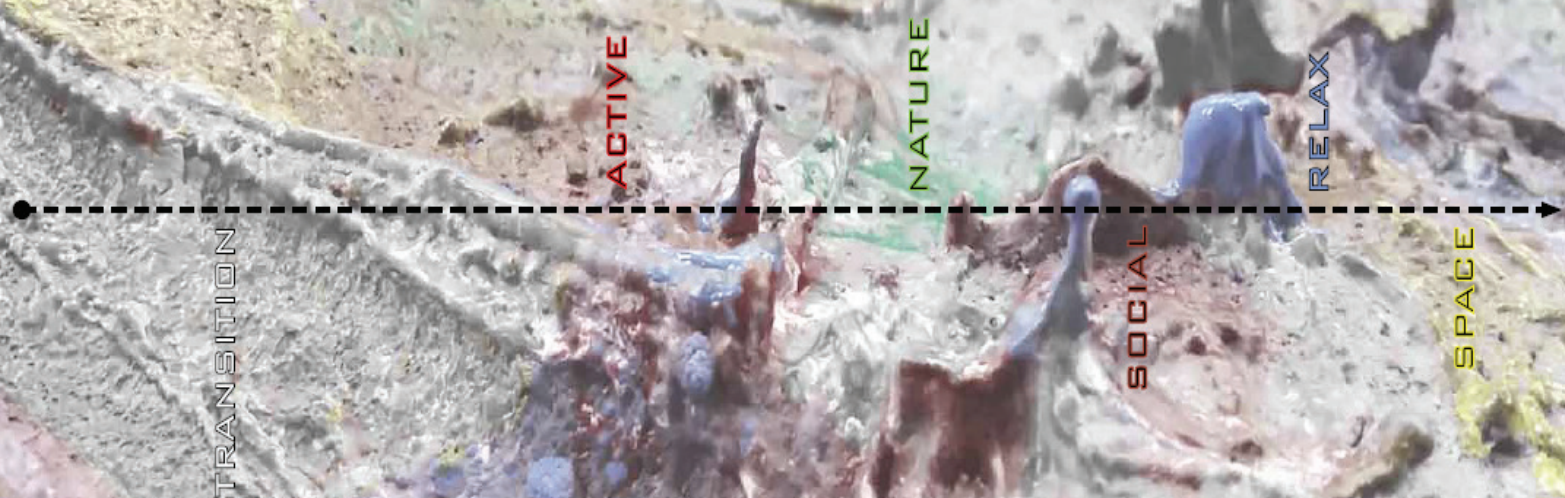
TO HEAT

# Concept generation

Urban canvas intended to be a sophisticated abstract composition with a given to place a specific program of perception and experience in the free form of structure that evolves and mutates naturally through the time.

# CONCEPT

**URBAN** CANVAS INTENDED TO BE A SOPHISTICATED  
**ABSTRACT composition** WITH A GIVEN TO PLACE SPECIFIC PRO-  
GRAM OF **PERCEPTION** AND **EXPERIENCE** IN THE FREE FORM  
OF STRUCTURE THAT EVOLVES AND **mutates** THROUGH THE TIME...



# Programing of the site

Abstract landscape architecture is about the experience of life, diverse places for everyone, radical switch of perception between different zones, making people feel, experience and love the city. The urban canvas concept is an interpretation of abstract landscape architecture philosophy that can be implemented in every city around the world.

Urban canvas is an abstract composition with a given to place a specific program of perception and experience of unconsciousness mind within the freedom of form that evolves and mutates naturally through the time.

# INSTALLATIONS

VISION OF PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCES



EXPERIENCE

ENERGY

MY CHOICE

LIVE

FREEDOM

FEEL

LOVE YOUR CITY



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