

Intersecting Visions: The New, The Preserved, and The Adapted Urban(s)

A Finding Aid for So Many Futures: Revisiting Landscapes as Archives

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One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion:

deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes afterwards, from the outside, one fine day.

It is always already at work in the work.

Jacques Derrida, *Memories: for Paul de Man*

Multiplicity means trouble.

Now, it should be stated at the outset that I think of this as good trouble, the best and most generative trouble. But trouble nonetheless.

One need only look to the persistent and pernicious conceptions of an American Nature to see that our collective resistance to embracing multiplicity leaves us yoked to either/or binaries that have inhibited the expansion of our vocabulary around climate change and adaptive ecologies. Landscapes, after all, have the capacity to absorb remarkable amounts of residue from complicated forms of imagination. But direct causality is, in many ways, unavoidable: to make is to unmake something else; to remember one version of the story usually requires a good deal of forgetting; to lay claim to a space means to unseat, devalue, or neutralize another's. Successfully resisting environmental fluctuation inevitably produces vulnerabilities somewhere else in the ecosystem, perhaps soon, perhaps at an inconceivably distant time.

In archiving change – sometimes over spectacular durations of time and with extraordinary detail, landscapes become critical finding aids for not just one future but multiple futures. Therefore, to accept the notion of multiplicity, we must also embrace a host of environmental paradoxes and conundrums, each of which produces friction as the various actors, systems, spaces, cycles, and perceptions intersect. Such multiplicity suggests that framing landscapes as finding aids is not purely retrospective or an exercise in preservation, but rather a process of accruing simultaneous views that gradually produce an imaginary fundamentally defined by pluralism. It is a way of moving both forward and backward in time and across the perceptions of many constituencies; a way of continually repositioning the present relative to vectors that project in multiple directions. For one history to happen, a thousand must almost unfold. Each leaves behind varying traces of evidence wherein actors have begun to chart a particular path, envision a trajectory, and plan for the steps needed to move in that direction. Such material evidence offers multiple ways (back) into alternative projections.

By accepting that alternative environmental formations are always possible, and by visualizing the trajectories that are inescapably plausible and within the collective capacity of a given community, the framework for future world-building inevitably shifts. This suggests a modified territory for the work of designers: one where past conditions are as important as those yet to unfold. At the slippage between truth, fiction, remembering, and forgetting, this paper will offer a series of strategies for revisiting the landscape as an archival space ripe for simulating a host of alternative futures.