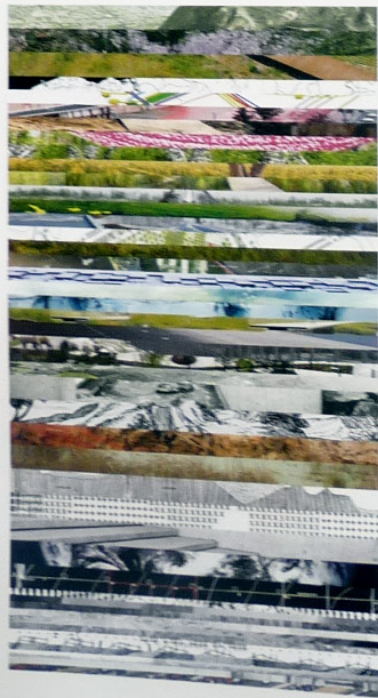


EMILY WAUGH

CORE SAMPLE



When asked to be the guest editor for this issue of *Harvard Design Magazine*, I was intrigued by the title “Landscape Architecture’s Core?” as it opened up a question—an invitation to enter an exploration into the “core” of the discipline as it continues to evolve, deepen, and diversify.

Here, the core sample offered a relevant framework: A process where a study area is identified, an auger is driven into the ground, and a sample of material is removed to be analyzed for its physical makeup, its essential elements.

After a series of discussions with Harvard GSD faculty, landscape critics, theorists, and practitioners, it quickly became clear that in identifying the study area, the target should not be to define the “core” of the discipline, but to define the discipline itself. What is landscape architecture and what is not? Where are the boundaries of the field? What scales and territories of engagement fall within “landscape architecture” and which do not? This survey of the breadth and depth of the discipline, allows us to identify an entry point—a representative sample of the field—through which we can extract and analyze the essential elements.

With this in mind, the introductory sequence of essays sets out to define the operating territory of the discipline today, collating an assemblage of practices, operations, and ideas that we might call “landscape architecture”—how that has changed over time, and how that will continue to change in the future.

In “Immanent Landscape,” Christophe Girot challenges our assumptions about nature in the city as he navigates the line where “landscape ends and landscape architecture begins.” In “Landscape as Architecture,” Charles Waldheim traces the etymology of the name “landscape architecture” itself, and its relationship to the evolution of the urban commitments of the discipline. In the first of two photo essays, “Scales of Engagement,” we examine the immense range of scales that landscape architects engage in their research and practice. Progressing in scope from the texture of a leaf up to the spatial realities of climate change, these images challenge readers to zoom in (or sometimes out) to gauge what it is they are really looking at.

In “Territories of Engagement,” we discuss questions of scale, approach, and tools of design through conversations with a selection of design practices around the world. This collection of ideas and images offers us a clearer picture of the broad operating territory of contemporary landscape architecture and the ongoing thickening of the field. Critic Ian Hamilton Thompson takes this exploration one step further in “Essence-less Landscape Architecture and its Extended Family” as he combs the boundaries of contemporary practice in search of “family resemblances”—loose clusters of approaches to landscape architecture that reveal not necessarily an “essence” but “a network of overlapping but discontinuous similarities.”

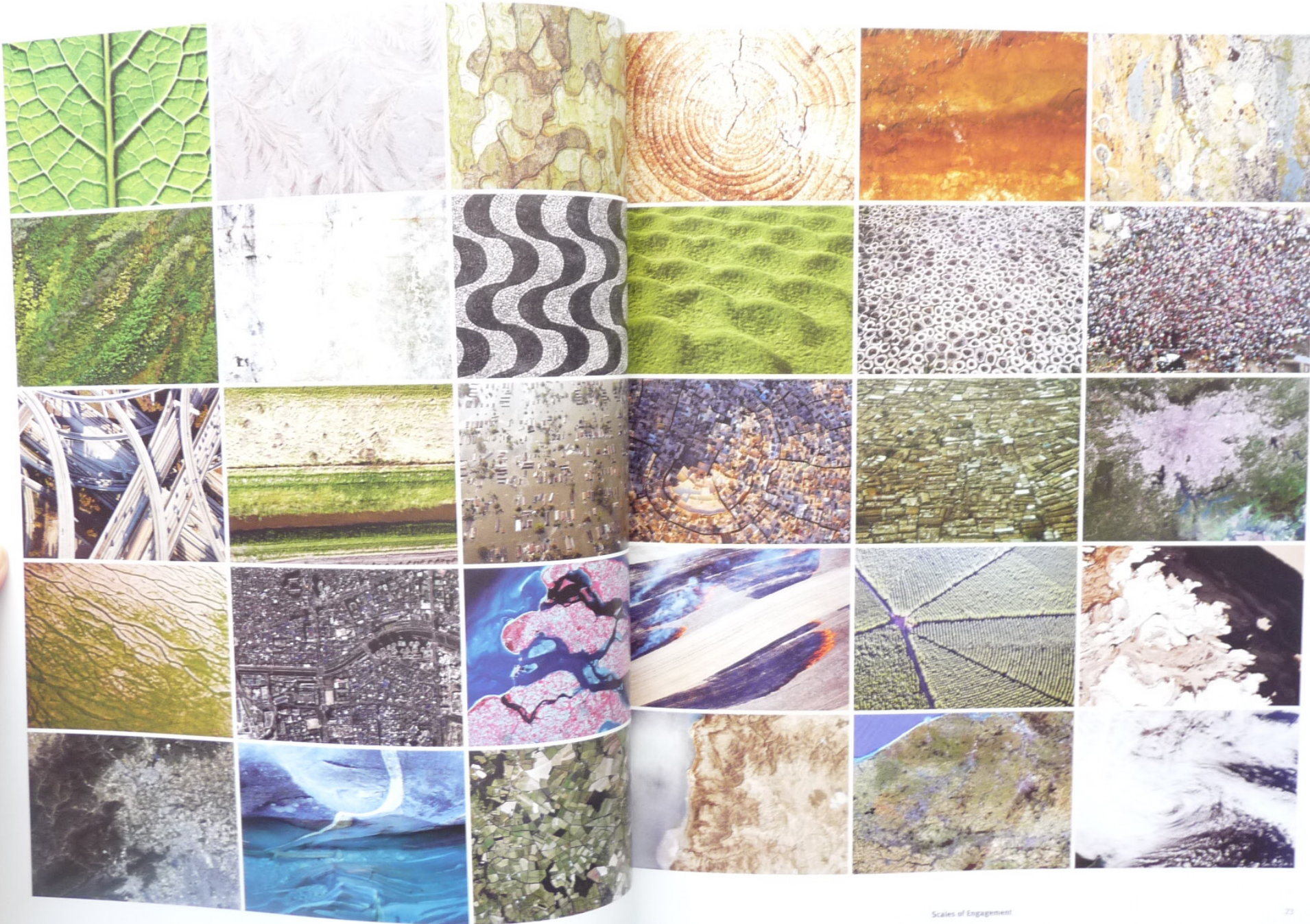
A survey of ideas and practices found within this defined territory begins to reveal patterns in the types of questions that landscape architects (practitioners, critics, and theorists) are engaging in their work and, if we look back, have been considering since before the discipline formally emerged as modern-day landscape architecture. Each of the subsequent features in this issue reflect on contemporary expressions of these fundamental (or could we even say core?) questions for the discipline: the cultural role of the designed landscape; the relationship of landscape to time, dynamic processes, and layers of history; the ongoing tension between culture and nature in the constructed landscape; creating spaces with a palette of living (and dying) materials; engaging ephemeral phenomena; and perception of space and place.

In “Why Not Cultural Systems?” Charles A. Birnbaum examines the cultural value of the designed landscape: What is its role in the city? How can we measure its value? In “Envisioning Hyperlandscapes,” Sébastien Marot—in search of a new operating metaphor for landscape—questions the fundamental relationship of landscape

architecture to site, meaning, and layers of time. This conversation about the essential relationship between landscape and time continues with “Shifting Landscapes In-Between Times,” as Jacky Bowring and Simon Swaffield grapple with the inevitable certainties and uncertainties of working with and within dynamic systems. Our second photo essay, “The Altered Landscape,” from the Nevada Museum of Art’s Altered Landscape Photography Collection, further questions this exchange of cultural structures with (and sometimes against) natural environments. This selection of images evocatively documents the effects of the Anthropocene era, where the impact of human alterations on the landscape has begun to surpass that of natural disasters. In the first of our two-part discussion on “Substance and Structure,” Jane Hutton examines “The Material Culture of Landscape Architecture,” describing the essential tectonics of structuring sites out of the earth and the temporal nature of living materials. In “The Digital Culture of Landscape Architecture,” Antoine Picon furthers this discussion through a critical look at the implications of the ongoing digitalization of the making of landscape. Finally, Günther Vogt and Mitchell Schwarzer address the fundamental questions of perception of space, phenomena, and experience that are embedded in both the designed and the natural landscape. In “Shadows of Landscape,” Vogt examines the cultural and conceptual challenges of spatial perception, while in “Landscape Navigator,” Schwarzer analyzes how that perception changes with physical modes (and speeds) of engagement with the landscape.

In the final sections of the magazine, we feature a selection of specific viewpoints on contemporary landscape practice. In “Conjectures,” Julia Czermiak takes a critical look at criticism (or the perceived lack of it) in landscape architecture today, and Frederick Steiner challenges us to move beyond sustainability as a goal for design. In “Books,” John Dixon Hunt treats us to a comparative review of more than twenty recent publications in landscape architecture revealing trends both in design publishing and in the discipline itself. A new section, “Excerpts,” features ongoing research, publications, and events at the Harvard GSD highlighting our engagement with these core questions of landscape architecture.

The question “Landscape Architecture’s Core?” has led us to the rich and diverse collection of work featured in this issue of *Harvard Design Magazine*. We hope you will enjoy it, question it, and be inspired by it as much as we have.



CHRISTOPHE GIROT

IMMANENT LANDSCAPE

In "Immanent Landscape," Christophe Girot challenges the fundamental relationship between our understanding of nature and our definition of landscape. Citing examples from contemporary urban projects, Girot calls for a renewed relationship to nature that will foster a new practice of landscape architecture.

Uncertainty is a state that generates an oscillation of emotions between fear and hope. This fluctuation of sentiment impacts our definition of landscape and our understanding of nature, fostering strong reversals of position and even intolerance. To pose the question "where does landscape end and landscape architecture begin?" without sufficient grounding and explanation, reflects no doubt the vacillations of our times, prompting distortions that are characteristic of great uncertainty. The situation calls for articulation and determination; from the onset landscape should be considered as a sedentary cultural construct. The derivatives of nature produced by it have always been unstable and changing. Landscape, just like morality, has been continually transformed throughout the ages, and shifting interpretations of nature have always been the subject of strong societal concerns. Landscape architecture can in this respect be understood as one of the fundamental motors of a society, in a world in perpetual transformation, each epoch mirrors the existential expression of evolving cultural practices on the land.

The word landscape finds its roots in the Old Dutch word *landskip*, which designates a stretch of cultivated land.¹ The word *paysage* in French stems from the Latin word *pagus*, which simply means an extent of land made by the peasant.² In other words, landscape is the

belabored making of the peasant, and has nothing to do with the ideal of untouched wilderness. This plain definition of the word helps us better frame the potential field of action for landscape architecture with respect to a long tradition of form giving on the land, and is essentially about bringing new symbolic expressions of nature back into focus in this age of uncertainty.

Contemporary attitudes toward a rapidly dwindling nature have never been so murky, not to say apologetic. Nor has this foiled any kind of urban expansion or planetary destruction whatsoever. It prevails in our conversations as a form of wishful thinking replete with the best of moral intentions. It is my belief that we have reached a point of intellectual no return in landscape theory, one where uncertainty about nature has become the main characteristic of our times. The key to solving this uncertainty resides less in a discourse on the materiality of nature to be saved hypothetically by mankind, than in the deeper and more immediate question of the attitude we embody toward it on a day-to-day basis, call this immanence if you will. We must in all lucidity respond to this subjective challenge. We must develop a concept of landscape that is truly immanent; where the seven billion individuals we now represent would strive to establish a stronger bond with nature, albeit symbolic, rather than a persistently grinding opposition toward it.



The Sigirino Mound by Lugano, designed by atelier girot as an ecological hill made out of 4.5 million cubic meters of tunnel rubble for the Ato Transit company Switzerland.

CLAUDE CORMIER + ASSOCIÉS

Founded 1995, Montreal, Canada
Interview with Claude Cormier

Scale and Scope

Our practice started right away with urban projects where we were engaging the public realm, and we were interested in paying attention to details and the design process. The more it goes, the more we are integrated within the master planning and with the architecture and with the urban planners and urban designers. Everything is blurred more and more, and it gets bigger and more complex, but I think it makes a very healthy methodology.

Approach

Each project has its own approach that is interested in history, but not in the sense of duplicating history. It's interested in creating something that always has a personality and its own story, as well as trying to be extremely contextually fitting. There is no recipe, per se. Each project has its own sense of place and intensity. In certain cases, we bring tension by blurring ideas together and creating new types. In others, we reveal aspects by not covering them. And that's done sometimes by highlighting the contrast between two realities. And also bringing a kind of playfulness to places that connect them very strongly to their context. It is always idea-driven.

Tools

Of course, we have taken into our practice the notion of color. We realized early on that color is actually extremely loaded, and we challenge that aspect within each project. I like to challenge preconceived ideas of color. For example, a swimming pool is always blue and a school bus for children is always yellow, right? It's challenging those conventions and sometimes tipping them. It's amazing when you open up that possibility and try to bring a kind of magical element within it. When you start playing with this, you realize how much potential it has.

But the notion of mood and character precedes this, and somehow to define the persona of the project and then the materiality of the place comes very quickly: the mood, the character, and the kind of ambience that make the experience. It's all based on experience. And the way that you build experience is by being able to

create something that when a person is in it, they are able to describe it. It has a spatial quality with the notion of foreground, middle ground, and background, and then, by how you juxtapose these, you can create a series of moods. As you walk through a park or through a city, that kind of ambience is evident, and that helps quite a bit to define what you're going to do. That's why I don't think we can work in this middle landscape, in the suburban world where everything is the same. There is no notion of experience; it has no personality. I don't know where to start.

Everything has a possibility
to be reinvented. And it is
a fantastic possibility.

Challenges

I think the more constraints you have, the better. The more difficult, the better it gets. But now, I would say the main challenge is that the bigger the world gets, the more we are working with bigger firms. It seems that we always have to fight for everything, every idea, to prevent it from getting flatter and flatter. It's amazing how things get flattened. You could be in a room with twenty-five people, and 90% of them are there just to flatten the idea.

How do you fight for your own ground and sense of identity? How do you protect it? And how do you feed it? That's a big battle.

We should be more forceful about what we believe in. The only thing we have to do is to push and to be very honest, bold, articulate, and smart. Everything has a possibility to be reinvented. And it is a fantastic possibility. So it's a positive attitude and being strategic, intelligent, and respectful. I think there's room. I have hope, total hope.



Claude Cormier + Associés, Pink Balls, installation for Montreal's Aire Libre festival, Saint-Catherine Street East, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 2011. Photo: Marc Cramer