MANIFESTO

SUSTAINING BEAUTY: THE PERFORMANCE OF APPEARANCE

Can landscape architects insert aesthetics into our discussions of sustainability?

By Elizabeth K. Meyer, FASLA

LANDSCAPE DESIGN practitioners and theorists understandably focus on the ecological aspects of sustainability; this seems reasonable given that the site and medium of our work is landscape—actual topography, soil, water, plants, and space. It seems imperative given the growing consensus about the impact of human action on the global environment. Beauty is rarely discussed in the discourse of landscape design sustainability, and if it is, it is dismissed as a superficial concern. What is the value of the visual and formal when human, regional, and global health are at stake? Doesn’t the discussion of the beautiful trivialize landscape architecture as ornamentation, as the superficial practice of gardening?

I find American landscape architecture’s limited discussion of sustainability curious, especially given the profession’s history. In the 19th century, one of its leading practitioners, Frederick Law Olmsted—a former farmer, journalist, and director of the U.S. Sanitary Commission during our Civil War—was moved to make urban public parks and landscapes because of their perceived agency as spaces of urban social and environmental reform. For Olmsted, parks performed in two ways: First, they were environmental cleaning machines, open spaces of healthy sunlight, well-drained soils, and shady groves of trees reducing temperatures, absorbing carbon dioxide, and releasing oxygen. Landscape architectural works such as urban parks, promenades and boulevards, public gardens, parkways, and suburban residential enclaves were cultural products that responded to, and then altered, the processes of modernization and urbanization.

In Olmsted’s estimation this urban environmental function was equaled, if not exceeded, by the second function—or in contemporary theoretical terms, performance—of the designed landscape’s appearance. He cared about what those landscapes looked like as well as how they worked. Based on his readings of psychologists, art critics, and philosophers, Olmsted believed that the experience of that appearance—the combination...
of its physical characteristics and sensory qualities—altered one's mental and psychological state. In other words, a particular form of appearance, the character beauty, performed. Examples of this are found in the recuperative, transformative power of aesthetic experiences in nature. Olmsted developed his theories on the psychological effects of landscapes as early as the 1850s, before he had started to design, according to Charles Beveridge, Honorary ASLA, the historian most closely associated with Olmsted's archives. During his career as a landscape architect, these theories were embedded in the firm's annual or official reports for park boards or clients of projects such as Prospect Park, Brooklyn, the parks and parkways of Boston, and Mount Royal Park, Montreal. And when asked to lecture on parks, Olmsted concisely summarized his ideas, as in his conclusion to his 1868 address to the Prospect Park Scientific Association: "A park is a work of art, designed to produce certain effects upon the mind of men."

For 19th-century American landscape architects such as Olmsted, urban landscapes were experiences as well as environments. In Olmsted’s view, they sustained civilization and culture as much as they sustained the biophysical environment. And yet, contemporary theory and the practice of sustainable landscape design have little regard for the performance of appearance, particularly beauty. Instead, the literature describes and analyzes ecotechnologies for constructing rain gardens and green roofs or daylighting streams according to quantifiable ecological and hydrological processes. Sustainability has three legs, we are told: ecology,
social equity, and economy. The ecological operates in relationship to social justice and capitalist profit but not aesthetics.

Here, I will make a claim for reinserting the aesthetic into discussions of sustainability. I will make a case for the appearance of the designed landscape as more than a visual, stylistic, or ornamental issue, as more than a rear-garde interest in form. I will attempt to rescue the visual by connecting it to the body and polysensual experience. I will try to explain how immersive, aesthetic experience can lead to recognition, empathy, love, respect, and care for the environment.

The discourse on aesthetics and beauty in landscape architecture precedes Olmsted’s beliefs, of course, and continues to the present. An aesthetic appreciation of the designed landscape emerged in the 18th century with explorations of somatic experiences moving through picturesque landscape gardens. Criticism of the landscape shifted from a focus on the creator to the

When in the Dell, above, at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, visitors cross a small bridge, below left and bottom left, where a stream flows into a stone rill. The water falls from the rill’s scupper, aerating and cleaning it as it moves into a fore bay, and then falls a second time through a weir into a pond, below, that is part of a larger campus stormwater management system.
Oxford English Dictionary, beauty was “that quality or combination of qualities which affords keen pleasure to the other senses (e.g., hearing) or which charms the intellectual or moral faculties, through inherent grace, or fitness to a desired end.” While some early-21st-century readers, this author included, might find accounts of grace a bit odd, I do find intriguing the idea that the sensuous perception of beauty could charm, as in influence or persuade, one’s intellectual and moral position. Can landscape appearance perform in this way? Can landscape form and space indirectly, but more effectively, increase the sustainability of the biophysical environment through the experiences it affords?

Both Catherine Howett, FASLA, and Anne Whiston Spirn wrote about these issues 20 years ago in short essays that have the ring of a manifesto in them. In 2000, I wrote in the book Environmentalism in Landscape Architecture about the significance of these key articles for providing conceptual bridges between aesthetics and ecological design. Two brief excerpts, one from each author, ground my understanding of how appearance differs from aesthetics, how performance can include ecological function and emotional or ethical revelation, and how a concern for beauty and aesthetics is necessary for sustainable design if it is to have a significant cultural impact.

Allegheny River Park in Pittsburgh, above, is a dynamic, resilient landscape constructed to create habitat for riparian plants and humans within a narrow space between the river and city streets. These trees, grasses, and vines, below right, are as enduring as the hardscape, below left; their beauty is perceived in relation to their resilience and their ability to regenerate.
"The domain of aesthetics," wrote Howett in 1987 in Landscape Journal, "must come to be seen as coextensive with the eco-sphere, rather than narrowed to its traditional applications in art criticism, so that aesthetic values may no longer be isolated from ecological ones. Thus every work of landscape architecture, whatever its scale, ought first of all to be responsive to the whole range of interactive systems—soils and geology, climate and hydrology, vegetation and wildlife, and the human community—that will come into play on a given site and will be affected by its design. In the measure that the forms of the designed landscape artfully express and celebrate that responsiveness, their beauty will be discovered."

Spinn adds in a 1988 Landscape Journal article, "This is an aesthetic that celebrates motion and change, that encompasses dynamic processes rather than static objects, and that embraces multiple, rather than singular, visions. This is not a timeless aesthetic, but one that recognizes both the flow of passing time and the singularity of the moment in time, that demands both continuity and revolution. This aesthetic engages all the senses, not just sight, but sound, smell, touch, and taste as well. This aesthetic includes both the making of things and places and the sensing, using, and contemplating of them."

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From writings of landscape architects such as Howett and Spinn that were written before the Brundtland Commission's popularization of the
term sustainability, we can already see how key beauty and aesthetics are to an ecological design agenda. They argue that the act of experiencing designed landscapes polysensually, over time, through and with the body, is not simply an act of pleasure but possibly one of transformation. Through their writings, we can infer that new forms of beauty will be discovered as new techniques and approaches for reclaiming, remaking, and reforming a site’s natural processes are invented. These new types of beauty will be found through the experience, as well as the making, of landscape. They promise to expand public and many designers’ conceptions of sustainability beyond the ecological health realm and into social practice and the cultural sphere.

New York City’s Teardrop Park in Lower Manhattan, above left, a small neighborhood park and playground inside a city block, epitomizes the effectiveness of “hypernature,” a distilled and amplified sense of nature. The sublime, uncanny mass of the more than eight-meter-high, 51-meter-long stone wall, below right and in the background below left, is a threshold between the lawn, above right, and the children’s playground. Its particular yet unexpected beauty is challenging and recentering, shifting visitors’ attentions to the unseen, underground natural world.
This is not to say that there is widespread recognition that mine is a widely held argument. Beauty is not a word that was used in my design education, or at least not used in a positive sense. This is not a discipline-specific problem; it extends to other visual arts as well. One has only to think of the fact that the Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum’s 1999 exhibition, Regarding Beauty (written up in a book of the same name by Neal David Benezra, Olga M. Viso, Arthur Coleman Danto, and Hubertus Gassner), self-consciously reflected on this rarely discussed topic. In fact, at a recent end-of-semester studio review at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design, I felt compelled to correct a younger (and otherwise quite talented and articulate) colleague’s dismissive use of the terms beauty and aesthetics. Like many landscape architects, he equated beauty and aesthetics with the visual and the formal, and in doing so rendered them inconsequential. His fascination for the performative blinded him to the distinctions between beauty and beautification or ornamentation. He did not think that beauty mattered or realize that appearance could perform.

Yet I have come to believe that the ex-
Berrizbeitia's interpretation of Robert Burle Marx in her 2005 book, *Roberto Burle Marx in Caracas: Parque del Este 1956–1961*, and partially through my knowledge of designed landscapes by firms as disparate as Julie Bargmann's DIRT Studio in the United States, Peter Latz and Partners in Germany, and Kongjian Yu's Turenscape in China. My realization of the importance of beauty has been extended and enriched by reading ecocritic Lawrence Buell, geographer Denis Cosgrove, philosopher Elaine Scarry, and sociologist Ulrich Beck. Buell's book *Writing for an Endangered World* is instructive in this regard. He suggests that American environmental policy is missing "a coherent vision of the common environmental good that is sufficiently compelling to generate sustained public support." Drawing on the writing of Beck, he argues that what is needed is not more policies or technologies but more "attitudes, feelins, images, narratives."

I believe that works of landscape architecture are more than designed ecosystems, more than strategies for open-ended
processes. They are cultural products with distinct forms and experiences that evoke attitudes and feelings through space, sequence, and form. Like literature and art, images and narratives, landscape architecture can play a role in building sustained public support for the environment. Cosgrove underscores this in his book *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* when he argues that cultural products such as works of landscape architecture can change human consciousness as well as modes of production such as the neoliberal capitalism that characterizes late 20th-century and early 21st-century American society and that is so at odds with human, regional, and global health. So, while I do not believe design can change society, I do believe it can alter an individual's consciousness and perhaps assist in restructuring her priorities and values.

I could make this case in many forms.
but have chosen to do so through a personal and rhetorical form, a design manifesto. I will introduce the manifesto with a brief account of the current state of thinking about and acting on sustainability in the United States. The manifesto is a work in progress, delivered for the first time in London and Beijing in 2007. I have included a few images to be suggestive of key points in my manifesto, realizing that it is impossible to capture aesthetic experience—versus the look of things or appearances—in images. Several projects over the past 20 years, designed by colleagues who might not have used the term “sustainability” in a description of their work but who do care about conserving ecosystems, reveal site processes and remediate sites through design. I could refer to other projects designed by these landscape architects as well as others, so the projects illustrated here are intended to be suggestive of this manifesto’s tenets and not exclusive examples.

**Context: Sustainability in North American Landscape Architecture**

What does sustainability mean within the American culture of landscape architecture? The United States government’s resistance, if not outright opposition, to environmental initiatives adopted by most of the developed world (and increasingly the developing world) over the past two decades demonstrates that sustainability is perceived to be outside the mainstream and at odds with predominant American conceptions (neoliberal, free market) of
capitalism. It is not surprising that landscape architects were not much different from the population as a whole. Granted, some understood sustainability as an extension and broadening of Ian McHarg’s environmental agenda codified in his manifesto, Design with Nature. But others perceived it as a threat to their service-oriented practice of doing whatever a developer wanted on a site, of deploying the McHargian method as a tool for maximizing a site’s capacity. Still others considered it as yet another attack on design “with a capital D.” With such ambivalence, it is not surprising that the first article about sustainability in Landscape Architecture, the United States’s professional journal, was published in 1994, 11 years after the United Nations’s Brundtland Commission convened.

So, we have to remind ourselves that sustainability’s current meaning and usage are relatively new, having evolved over two decades, often in tandem with significant global convocations. Many American landscape architects link the phrase sustainable development to the 1983 United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development chaired by Norway’s Prime Minister Gro Brundtland, and the commission’s 1987 report, published in book form as Our Common Future. This commission offered the definition that continues to be the most quoted and debated: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

But like many Americans, landscape architects perceived sustainability as entering popular usage, if not mainstream acceptance, when Vice President Al Gore, Honorary ASLA, attended the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro. Its Declaration on the Environment and Development contained 27 principles intended to guide sustainable development. These are broad in scope, covering topics from the role of women and indigenous peoples to the negative impact of war on global sustainability. Several of the principles tie directly to the activities of landscape architects.

**PRINCIPLE 1:** Human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

**PRINCIPLE 3:** The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet the developmental and environmental needs of the present and future generations.

**PRINCIPLE 4:** In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.

The following year, the American Society of Landscape Architects Board of Trustees adopted its own version of a Declaration on Environment and Development. It endures deeply embedded on the ASLA website and consists of five objectives and five strategies, none of which addresses the
In their introduction to *Landscape and Sustainability*, John Benson and Maggie Roe speak of an odd silence in the landscape architecture literature since the ASLA declaration on the environment. They note that few books about landscape architecture and sustainability were published in English between 1992 and 2000 that are not primarily technical manuals. Two of those were published in 1994, on the heels of the Rio Summit: John Lyle’s *Regenerative Design for Sustainable Development* and Robert Thayer’s *Gray World Green Heart: Technology, Nature, and the Sustainable Landscape*. They are key texts for landscape architects interested in ecological design and sustainable development. Of the two, Robert Thayer, FASLA, speaks most directly to the appearance of sustainable landscapes by calling for aesthetic legibility through the direct revealing of ecological processes at work on a site. Lyle’s book introduces the term regenerative into landscape design theory. This shift in language is key to changing cultural conceptions of beauty, and I will return to it in the second tenet of my manifesto.

An abandoned system of 19th-century drinking water reservoirs on Mount Tabor in Portland, Oregon, was conceived as a new public park by Stoss Landscape Urbanism and Taylor & Burns Architects.

form or appearance of a designed landscape. Many of them focus on specific construction technologies or lofty ethical values.
Outside the scholarly literature, the evidence of interest is mixed: What is one to make of my finding 729,000 Google results when I searched the terms "landscape architecture" and "sustainability" during the same month that Bill Thompson, FASLA, the editor of Landscape Architecture, wrote an editorial titled "How Green Is Your Magazine?" in which he asked, "Is it time for a green issue of Landscape Architecture?" Perhaps all I can say is that sustainability is one of many concerns evident in contemporary practice, but not all members of ASLA or landscape architecture practitioners would say they are committed to increasing the knowledge base for sustainable landscape design or creating new forms of sustainable landscapes. Based on my review of the literature and my knowledge of the field, and realizing the traps of characterizing a profession of unique individuals, I would categorize current American attitudes toward sustainability as follows:

1. **Yawn: Acknowledge and Continue On**
   Sustainable design is what we do, so what is the big deal?
   Sustainability is considered nothing new by many in the profession. A concern for social and environmental urban reform practices was at the basis of landscape architecture emerging as a profession in rapidly
A particular, sustaining beauty is imagined to evolve through the strategic insertions within the waterworks that recharge groundwater, create wildlife habitat, and allow for recreational swimming.

urbanizing 19th-century North America and Europe. This perspective sees sustainability as a new name for an enduring set of values and practices. While not antithetical to sustainability, this group is suspicious of this term being used as a form of greenwashing or opportunistic marketing on the part of other design and planning professionals who just a decade or two ago were dismissive of landscape design and constructed nature as feminine, informal, soft, unstructured, antiprogress, and nostalgic.

The ASLA declaration falls into this camp, as it states that the concepts behind sustainability are not new to the profession and that they "reflect the fundamental and long-established values of ASLA." They are right, of course. These values are embedded in key texts and projects such as Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace in Boston, an 1880s urban constructed wetland and park system. They can be found in 1950s to 1960s works and texts by Lawrence Halprin, FASLA, and Ian McHarg, whose manifesto Design with Nature was key to the increased visibility and growth of the profession of landscape architecture during the decade after the first Earth Day. Since that time, the number of American graduate programs in landscape architecture has increased from around a half dozen to more than three dozen.

That mid-20th-century concern for
environmental issues was continued and synthesized through research by two of McHarg’s students. Michael Hough’s *City Form and Natural Process* and Anne Spiri’s *The Granite Garden*, both published in 1984, expanded environmentalism into the realm of urban landscape design at the site scale. And while there were intense debates in our profession about the relationship between environmentalism and design, these were integrated by the late 1980s and early 1990s through mediating theories/practices of phenomenology and earth art, as I have documented in my 2000 article in *Environmentalism and Landscape Architecture*, “The Post Earth Day Conundrum.” I might note that these explorations into the space between, and beyond, environmentalism and formalism in American landscape architecture occurred while most architects were entrenched in historicist postmodernism, arguing about what type of historicist facade to add to their highly unsustainable buildings. In many ways, this group of Yawners has every right to do so.

2. Embrace: Adapt and Proselytize

*Sustainability = Ecotechnologies*

For this, the largest group of landscape architects, sustainability is a technical challenge. How can ecological processes be constructed? What are the best management practices for reducing rainwater runoff, for increasing rainwater percolation and filtration, for paving roads, for reducing construction waste, and so on? These are admirable practices, as they have updated construction techniques for planting and earthwork, paving, and material selection that often depleted natural resources and polluted off-site ecosystems. I would place the invaluable applied research of James Urban, FASLA, or Meg Calkins, ASLA, published in *Landscape Architecture* and the admirable work of the Sustainable Sites Initiative in this category. And yet I would argue that this type of work is not enough, especially if a designer’s hand is not legible, if our contributions are invisible infrastructure. We are different from restoration ecologists and civil engineers.
3. Dismiss: Avoid and Denigrate

*Sustainability = No Design*

Sustainability is so concerned with ecology, process, and environment that there is no room for design, form, and expression. This group believes that form and appearance are more important than ecological performance. Landscape architecture is an art. Twenty-five years ago, when American landscape architecture had strong, opposing camps—the environmentalists, those who admired McHarg, and the artists, those who admired Dan Kiley and Peter Walker, FASLA—this would have been a large group. As I have argued elsewhere, this is not the case anymore, as the generation of designers and educators that gained prominence in the 1980s such as Catherine Howett, Michael Hough, Anne W. Spiri,

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Michael Van Valkenburgh, FASLA, and George Hargreaves, FASLA, sought to bridge the divide between art and science, aesthetics and environmentalism. Today, the fact that most students of landscape architecture cannot imagine such debates speaks to the extent of this cultural shift within the profession and those attracted to study it.

4. Disdain: Adopt in Private and Distance in Public

*Sustainability is not to be spoken; it is a form of reductive ecological functionalism.*

Many in this group are “big name” designers who speak of performativity, process, and the operations of ecology as a base for their work, or who refer to process as a
metaphor and analog. They might adopt and deploy ecological processes in their work, but they distance themselves from sustainable task forces and advocates. There are many reasons for this, including those mentioned already in the first group, the Yawners. But I suspect there are two others: Part of this group finds content and method in contemporary theories of ecology, in comparison with some advocates of sustainable design who are tied to pre-1980s conceptions of environmental ethics and ecological theory (I will return to this later), and another part, unlike the Adapters and Proselytizers, does not reduce sustainability to technical metrics. American landscape architects such as Hargreaves, Bargmann, and Van Valkenburgh, and especially self-identified landscape urbanists such as James Corner, ASLA, Charles Waldheim, and Chris Reed, ASLA, would fall into this category.

The Disdainers were well represented in the 2005 Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). This was a seminal event, the first collective exhibition on landscape architecture since MOMA opened more than 75 years ago. The critical essay that accompanied the exhibition written by Curator of Architecture and Design Peter Reed was replete with language about ecology, process, and temporality, but the text does not mention sustainability. This is typical of the ambivalence about the term within the elite of the profession and within design criticism in America. Serious design, powerful form, and sustainability are seldom mentioned in the same breath.

Is there an alternative to these four sensibilities and practices? Yes, it already exists, but it has not been described as such. I have experienced it in certain sensibilities and projects such as Hargreaves and Associates’ Crissy Field in San Francisco, where a hybrid program of bird habitat and human recreation results in the formal and functional juxtaposition of two landscape types, marsh habitat and recreation promenade. This close juxtaposition of human and wildlife program space without
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the in-between buffering or visual separation that would be the norm suggests another approach. The city residents, like my brother and nephews, who frequent the park on bicycle, notice the extreme contrast between the accessible playfields of grass and the sometimes inaccessible, constantly changing tidal wetland marsh. Just as the habitat for park visitors is accommodated with sculptural landforms that change prevailing winds away from picnic and gathering areas, the habitat for birds and other wetland species is accommodated with gates to the marsh that close during mating and breeding periods. Through this simple act of juxtaposition and the combination of adjacency without access, even children as young as my nephews figured out that the park was not just for them, that it was designed for all forms of wildlife, two- and four-legged, mammal, amphibian, and avian. They did not need interpretive signs to tell them this. These lessons were revealed through their experience of moving through the park over the course of the seasons.

This fifth approach, Sustaining Beauty, exploits the aesthetic experience of landscape as a tool in the sustainable design tool box. Here, I refer to more than pictorial landscapes and pleasant, idealized pastoral scenes. Instead, I am recalling somatic, sensorial experiences of places that lead to new awareness of the rhythms and cycles necessary to sustain and regenerate life. These depend on immediate apprehension of new, unexpected forms, spaces, and sequences and the simultaneous memory of former experiences and conceptions of landscape space and form. Between these two ways of experiencing and processing, cognition occurs, and a new understanding and empathy toward species and niches around us may be possible. Arthur Danto referred to this role for beauty in 1999 in Regarding Beauty when he wrote, “Beauty
is at the intersection of sensuousness and truth.”

This approach already exists, but it has not been recognized for its potential agency within the range of practices contributing to a sustainable city. It is found in many projects and across regions. I believe that it has currency and should be added to the many tactics used by those who care about sustaining our cities, regions, and planet through landscape design. And I hope it can be given credence by designers who are seeking sustainability in metrics and criteria, as well as by social scientists and natural scientists who discount the ethical agency of a designed landscape’s aesthetics.

**MANIFESTO**

1. **Sustaining Beauty:**
   **The Performance of Appearance**
   Sustaining culture through landscapes.
   Sustainable landscape design is not the same as sustainable development, ecological design, restoration ecology, or conservation biology.

   Sustainable development requires more than designed landscapes that are created using sustainable technologies. Design is a cultural act, a product of culture made with the materials of nature and embedded within and inflected by a particular social formation; it often employs principles of ecology, but it does more than that. It enables social routines and spatial practices, from daily promenades to commutes to work. It translates cultural values into memorable landscape forms and spaces that often challenge, expand, and alter our conceptions of beauty.

2. **Cultivating Hybrids:**
   **Language of Landscape**
   Conceptualizing sustainable landscapes requires new words as well as new technologies and new languages as well as new techniques.

   Sustainable landscape design flourishes when fixed categories are transgressed and their limits and overlaps explored. This is a familiar trope in post-structuralist theory; it is a pragmatic imperative in landscape architecture design. Our profession is still hampered
by the limited language of formal and informal, cultural and natural, man-made and natural. How does such language allow us to capture the strange beauty and horror of a forest polluted by acid-mine drainage caused by coal mining that has been transformed through bioremediation into a park? Is that natural? Man-made? Its toxic beauty, a phrase I borrow from Julie Bargmann of DIRT Studio, is a hybrid.

Through hybridization, these and other paired terms have the potential to open up new conceptual design approaches between and across categories that restrict our thinking: social and ecological, urban and wild, aesthetic and ethical, appearance and performance, beauty and disturbance, and aesthetics and sustainability.

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These conceptual and experiential hybrids can occur within designed landscapes on disturbed sites across geographies, whether in the coal fields of Pennsylvania in the Eastern United States, in the vague terrain of swooping highway interchanges in Barcelona, or among coal and steel processing plants in the Ruhr River Valley in Germany.

3. Beyond Ecological Performance
Sustainable landscape design must do more than function or perform ecologically; it must perform socially and culturally. Sustainable landscape design can reveal natural cycles such as seasonal floods and regenerate natural processes by cleaning and filtering rainwater or replenishing soils through arrested erosion and deposition, and it can do so as they intersect with social routines and spatial practices. This intermingling of ecological and social temporal cycles—seasonal floods and human
activities such as holiday festivals or sports—links the activities of everyday life and the unique events of a particular city to the experience of the dynamic biophysical aspects of the environment. Nature is not out there, but in here, interwoven into the human urban condition. Hydrology, ecology, and human life are intertwined.

4. Natural Process over Natural Form
Ecological mimicry is a component of sustainable landscape design, but the mimicry of natural processes is more important than the mimicry of natural forms.

Natural-looking landscapes are not the only genre that performs ecologically. This is especially true in constructed urban conditions when there are no longer spaces of the scale that might support a natural-looking landscape. In these extreme conditions—in narrow, remnant strips between city streets and rivers, on compacted sites with no organic matter or topsoil, along abandoned postindustrial infrastructure such as railroad rights-of-way and factory sites—nature must be constructed in new ways, in different configurations, deploying technological and ecological knowledge.

Where space and soil are limited, plants can be opportunistically inserted between and along the ramps flanked by chain-link scrims and cantilevered walks, hardy species can act as hosts and create habitat for other species of plants and wildlife, spontaneous vegetation can be facilitated with soil trenches and mounds, and wetland grasses can be planted in floating planters instead of on terra firma. This is an example of what Joan Nassauer, FASLA, has described as framing messy landscapes—another form of hybrid—so that ecological design aesthetics can be recognized as art.

These types of projects—part technological construction, part ecological process—won’t be confused for natural landscapes. This may contribute to their longevity. Natural-looking landscapes may not be sustainable in the long term, as they are often overlooked in metropolitan areas. They are assumed to be found, wild conditions not needing care. Most constructed nature in the city needs care, cultivation, and gardening, especially constructed wetlands. In my experience, natural-looking designed landscapes quickly become invisible landscapes and neglected landscapes.

5. Hypernature:
The Recognition of Art
The recognition of art is fundamental to, and a precondition of, landscape design. This is not a new idea: Nineteenth-century landscape design theorists J. C. Loudon, A. J. Downing, and Olmsted advocated such when they were making the case for the inclusion of landscape design or landscape architecture as one of the fine arts. More recently, Van Valkenburgh and his partners, Laura Solano and Matthew Urbanski, expressed their interest in exaggerated, concentrated hypernature—

Sustainable landscape design should be form-full, evident, and palpable. an exaggerated version of constructed nature. Creating hypernature was prompted by pragmatic acknowledgments of the constrictions of building on tough, urban sites and the recognition that design landscapes are usually experienced while distracted, in the course of everyday urban life. Attenuation of forms, densification of elements, juxtaposition of materials, intentional discontinuities, formal incongruities—tactics associated with montage or collage—are deployed for several reasons: to make a courtyard, a park, or a campus more capable of appearing, of being noticed, and of performing more robustly, more resiliently.

Sustainable landscape design should be form-full, evident, and palpable so that it draws the attention of an urban audience distracted by daily concerns of work and family or the overstimulation of the digital world. This requires a keen
understanding of the medium of landscape and the deployment of design tactics such as exaggeration, amplification, distillation, condensation, juxtaposition, or transposition/displacement.

6. The Performance of Beauty

The experience of hypernature—designed landscapes that reveal and regenerate natural processes/structures through the amplification and exaggeration of experience and that artistically exploit the medium of nature—is restorative.

A beautiful landscape works on our psyche, affording the chance to ponder a world outside ourselves. Through this experience, we are decentered, restored, renewed, and reconnected to the biophysical world. The haptic, somatic experience of beauty can inculcate environmental values.

As Elaine Scarry wrote in On Beauty and Being Just, “Beauty invites replication… it is lifesaving. Beauty quickens. It adrenalinizes. It makes the heart beat faster. It makes life more vivid, animated, living, worth living.” Furthermore, Scarry suggests that when we experience beauty, it changes our relationship to that object or scene or person. She continues: “At the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering. Beauty, according to Weil, requires us ‘to give up our imaginary position as the center… a transformation then takes place at the very roots of our sensibility, in our immediate reception of sense impressions and psychological impressions.’… We find we are standing in a different relationship to the world than we were the moment before. It is not that we cease to stand at the center of the world, for we never stood there. It is that we cease to stand even at the center of our own world. We willingly cede ground to the thing that stands before us.”

Scarry’s account of the experience of beauty resonates with that of art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto. He argues that beauty is not found or discovered, immediately, through the eye and in relationship to known tropes. Rather, it is discovered through a process of mediation between the mind and body, between seeing and touching/smelling/hearing, between reason and the senses, between what is known through past experiences and what is expected in the here and now. As Danto, drawing on Hegel
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and Hume in his article in Regarding Beauty, writes, “We arrive at the judgment of beauty only after critical analysis—which means that it is finally not subjective at all, since it depends on the kind of reasoning in which criticism at its best consists.... Doubtless the critic should look. But seeing is inseparable from reasoning, and response to a work of art is mediated by a discourse of reasons parallel entirely to what takes place with moral questions.”

The experience of beauty, a process between the senses and reason, an unfolding of awareness, is restorative. By extension, the aesthetic experience of constructed hypernature is transformative, not simply in 19th-century terms or practices known to Olmsted. Rather aesthetic experience can result in the appreciation of new forms of beauty that are discovered, in Howett’s terms, because they reveal previously unrealized relationships between human and nonhuman life processes.

7. Sustainable Design = Constructing Experiences

Beautiful sustainable landscape design involves the design of experiences as much as the design of form and the design of ecosystems. These experiences are vehicles for connecting with, and caring for, the world around us.

Through the experience of different types of beauty we come to notice, to care, and to deliberate about our place in the world. In phenomenological thought of scholars such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Arnold Berleant, these participatory environmental experiences not only break down the barriers between subject and object; they change us, and, at times, have the capacity to challenge us, to prod us to act. Many environmentalists speak of their early experiences in the wild or the countryside—some nearby woodlot or creek where they learned to revel in the exuberance of successional plant growth in unlikely places and the adaptive shelters of insects, birds, and animals—as the reason they became environmentalists.

Designed landscapes can provide such experiences as well if they afford experience of the wild, when the abundance, the
excessiveness, and the tenacious persistence of plants, wildlife, and water are uncovered in the most unexpected places—city drainage ways, urban plazas and gardens, and above and below elevated rail lines and highways.

8. Sustainable Beauty Is Particular, Not Generic

There will be as many forms of sustainability as there are places/cities/regions. These beauties will not emulate their physical context but act as a magnifying glass, increasing our ability to see and appreciate the context. Sustainable landscape beauty can find the particular in the productive as well as the toxic, the transposed as well as the transgressive, the found and the made, and the regenerative as well as the resilient. Sustainable beauty may be strange and surreal. It may be intimate and immense. It will be of its place whether it is an abandoned brownfield site, an obsolete navy shipyard, or a lumbered forest. And yet it will not simulate its place. It will be recognized as site-specific design, emerging out of its context but differentiated from it.

9. Sustainable Beauty Is Dynamic, Not Static

The intrinsic beauty of landscape resides in its change over time. Landscape architecture’s medium shares many characteristics with architecture, dance, and sculpture. Our medium is material and tactile; it is spatial. But more than its related fields, the landscape medium is temporal. Not only do we move through landscape, the landscape moves, changes, grows, declines. Beauty is ephemeral; it can be a fleeting event, captured once a year in the mix of a specific light angle, a particular slope of the ground, and a short-lived drop of a carpet of brilliant yellow leaves. Or it can be created by the long processes of stump and log decay and regeneration in a forest garden.

These changes are multiple and overlapping, operating on numerous scales and tempos: the spontaneous, successional vegetation growth on slag heaps; the tidal
rhythms of water ebbing and flowing in a rocky, tidal channel next to a smooth, constant, gently tilting lawn; or the seasonal changes of temperature and plant growth. Landscape historian J. B. Jackson wrote in an article in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* that the act of designing landscape is a process of manipulating time. Since sustainable landscapes reveal, enable, repair, and regenerate ecological processes, they are temporal and dynamic. Sustainable beauty arrests time, delays time, intensifies time; it opens up daily experience to what Van Valkenburgh, drawing on Gaston Bachelard, calls “psychological intimate immensity,” the wonder of urban social and natural ecologies made palpable through the landscape medium.

10. **Enduring Beauty Is Resilient and Regenerative**

Antiquated conceptions of landscape beauty as generic, balanced, smooth, bounded, charming, pleasing, and harmonious persist and must be reconsidered through the lens of new paradigms of ecology. Projects that are dynamic, and not static, can be designed for disturbance and resilience. Floods that are anticipated are not disasters but natural events that are part of a regular disturbance regime. Plants that can sustain spring’s extreme high water are planted. Knowing that ice flows damage tree trunks, we specify species that regenerate with numerous new stems when damaged. The beauty of this type of landscape lies in the knowledge of its tenacity, its toughness, its resilience.

This sense of beauty, not as a set, unchanging concept, but one that evolves over time in response to different needs or contexts, is accepted in many fields outside
landscape architecture. This changing conception of beauty, based on the resilience of a designed landscape’s materials and not on an a priori set of forms or types, resonates with contemporary concerns as well as the early theoretical foundations of our profession. In a post-September 11 context where American urban space is subject to increasing standardization and surveillance due to a culture of fear and security, the adaptation and resilience of plants and paved surfaces to the disturbances of extreme weather, flooding, pollution, and low light levels evoke hope and inspire alternative models for coping with the uncertain.

In one of his prescient articles that outlined many of the conundrums to be faced by American landscape architecture as it emerged as a discipline, Charles Eliot Jr. established a position within the formal and informal debates of the 1890s by arguing in an article in *Garden and Forest* that beauty was not intrinsic to either formal type. “The fact may not be explicable, but it is one of the commonplaces of science that the form which every vital product takes has been shaped for it by natural selection through a million ages, with a view to its use, advantage, or convenience, and that beauty has resulted from that evolution.... Whoever, regardless of circumstances, insists upon any particular style or mode of arranging land and its accompanying landscape is most certainly a quack. He has overlooked the important basal fact that, although beauty does not consist in fitness, nevertheless all that would be fair must first be fit. True art is expressive be-
Stoss Landscape Urbanism's landscape framework plan for the Silresim Chemical plant in Lowell, Massachusetts, is a form of "performance practice" that envisions the remediation and reuse of a polluted industrial site over time, opposite and here.

Before it is beautiful." Eliot recognized that changes in need, in society, and in the sciences would alter cultural conceptions of beauty.

Closer to our times, paradigm shifts in the ecological sciences have influenced cultural conceptions of what is fitting and beautiful in the natural world. Since the publication of McHarg's Design with Nature in 1969, scientific theories about ecosystem dynamics have changed considerably. Resilience, adaptation, and disturbance have replaced stability, harmony, equilibrium, and balance as the operative words in ecosystem studies. Conceptions of stable, climax plant and animal communities have given way to an understanding of disturbance regimes, emergent and resilient properties, and chaotic self-organizing systems. These theories have enormous implications for landscape design, and yet 20 years after their general adoption in the sciences, many landscape
architects and our clients operate on outdated, even romantic, conceptions of nature and its beauty. Just how beautiful is a green residential lawn maintained by pesticides and herbicides that are harmful to children, pets, and songbirds?

Recent ASLA conference themes are a case in point. During the 2006 conference there was little talk of brownfield sites: instead, “Green (not brown and gray) Solutions Only for a Blue Planet.” This past year’s theme was “Designing with Nature: The Art of Balance.” That sounded like a retrospective glance at landscape ecology and design from the 1950s to the 1970s. As a professional organization, ASLA needs to be more cognizant of contemporary ecological theory, especially given the recent UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report’s findings on global climate change and its implications for the future form of cities and settlements. Our adaptive designs must be part of resilient, adaptive, and regenerative urban form.

The biophysical processes of groundwater remediation and soil/plant regeneration at the Silresim Chemical plant occur in the public realm and are facilitated or witnessed by the neighbors, here. A montage of images depicts people interacting with the site, opposite.
Twenty-first-century associations of resilience are as much cultural as ecological. Three American landscape architects, each committed to the concepts of sustainability, if not the rhetoric, have recognized the limitations of the word sustainable and the potential of conceiving landscape architecture as regenerative and resilient: John Lyle, FASLA, Julie Bargmann, and Randy Hester, FASLA. In Design for Ecological Democracy, Hester’s account of the principles that support enduring settlements underscores the importance of replacing stability or balance with resilience: “...design of nature or mimicry of nature that allows human habitation to maintain itself efficiently and compatibly with its surrounding environment through often dramatic changes that threaten survival. Such design is the basis of resilient form that is fundamental to sustainable urban ecology.... This ability to endure is based on, among other things, having an urban form that continually provides what a community needs, even in times of temporary crises. Resilient urbanity has the internal ability to persist—to recover easily without significant loss from illness, misfortune, attack, natural or social disaster, or other dramatic disturbance. And it can readily absorb change. A resilient city is able to retain the essence of its form even after it has been deformed. In this way, resilience seems a better word than sustainability for design goals for the city. Resilient form maintains itself efficiently and seamlessly with both the landscape and the cultural networks of which it is a part.”

11. Landscape Agency: From Experiences to Sustainable Praxis

The experience of designed landscape can be
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a spatial practice of noticing, wandering and wondering in, and caring about the environment. The experience of landscape can be a mode of learning and inculcating values.
The final tenet of this manifesto underscores the multiple discourses and practices where sustainability resides. Sustainability is a position within environmental ethics, as well as techniques or tactics grounded in the natural sciences. Sustainability, as an ethic, is decidedly a middle-ground position between an egocentric and ecocentric worldview. It straddles the human and nonhuman, attempting a hybridity that sees the interconnections between and across a homocentric and biocentric worldview. I believe that the designed landscape can be built through various tactics, using sustainable ecotechnologies, but it can also be an aesthetic experience that changes people’s environmental ethics. And from my perspective the latter is the most important reason to care about sustainable landscape design. The apprehension and experience of beauty, especially new, challenging forms of beauty, can lead to attentiveness, empathy, love, respect, care, concern, and action on the part of those who visit and experience designed landscapes. It will take more than the estimated 15,000 registered landscape architects or 18,000 members of ASLA to make the United States—the most energy-consuming, waste-producing, environmentally challenged developed country in the world—a sustainable culture. But multiply those numbers by the number of peo-
DiCaprio shared the cover of the May 2007 *Vanity Fair* magazine with a small polar bear, the Republican governor of the state of California twirled a small globe on his finger as if it were a basketball on the cover of *Newsweek’s* “Leadership and the Environment” issue, *Time* magazine published a special double issue titled “The Global Warming Survival Guide: 51 Things You Can Do to Make a Difference,” and a *New York Times Sunday Magazine* cover adorned with an American flag made out of green flower blossoms, moss, seed heads, and leaves examined “The Greening of Global Geopolitics.”

Design and shelter magazines run regular columns and issues on the greening of the design fields. Even *Dwell* magazine, dedicated to perpetuating modernist design, has run an article on sustainability in every issue since 2000. In a recent issue, “A New Shade of Green: Sustainability Is Here to Stay,” editor Sam Grawe captured the culture’s reaction to a year of green journalism in the wake of the unexpected popularity of Al Gore’s 2006 documentary.
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film and book, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and his 2007 Nobel Peace Prize award (shared with the UN’s IPCC for its analysis and synthesis of global research findings). “I have to be honest with you. I am getting tired of sustainability,” said Grawe.

Are these forums the only effective means to change values and practices? I think not. For as Grawe’s editorial attests, media saturation can as easily lead to cynicism as to environmentalism. Especially when it appears that every product and industry is now ecofriendly or environmentally friendly, from oversized SUVs and “McMansion” houses to oil companies; when the sustainability obsessed become ecobloggers monitoring their daily impact on the globe and patrons of ecochic nightclubs who party in a space made of recycled, renewable, sustainable, and not dangerous materials; and when the biophysical world is depicted in ads for The Home Depot hardware store as if it were a toy or pet to be befriended and hugged.

We need multiple forms and forums for caring and learning about the impact of our actions on the planet, some visual, some textual, and some experiential. As Lawrence Buell noted in *Writing for an Endangered World*, we need more than reports and data; we also need products of culture, narratives, images, and places to move us to act.

In this regard, design matters and beauty matters. It moves something in our psyche as the experience of a winter snowfall on the imprinted concrete waterfront promenade at Allegheny River Park in Pittsburgh demonstrates. In the absence of vegetation, water settles and freezes in the linear marks left by imprinting native grasses in the concrete, and icy shadows form, reminding us of what is absent. These ground marks intermingle in mysterious ways with the motion of river water and the light from nearby streetlights. Where are man and nature there? Formal and informal? Ecology and technology? Aesthetics and sustainability? All are superseded by the fleeting, yet memorable, recognition of and experience of a place known in, and over, time.

It is not enough to design landscapes that incorporate best management practices, follow LEED (USGBC’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) criteria, and look as if they were not designed. It is not enough to emulate the admirable design forms or practices of our colleagues from afar. Designed landscapes need to be constructed human experiences as much as ecosystems. They need to move citizens to action. The designed landscapes of the world take up a small amount of the globe’s surface. Yet they are visited and inhabited by people who have great impact on the environment in everything they do—where they live and how they commute, what they consume, and whom they elect to public office. The influence of designed landscapes might be much larger than their immediate influence on a local ecosystem or watershed, as worthwhile as designing a rain garden or a green roof that reduces stormwater runoff may be.
Many professions and disciplines will contribute to our understanding of sustainability. Landscape architects who are designers do so by making places that are constructed, performing ecosystems and constructed aesthetic experiences. We are sustained by reducing, editing, doing less bad. But we are also sustained, and regenerated, through abundance, wonder, and beauty. The performance of a landscape’s appearance and the experience of beauty should have as much currency in debates about what a sustainable landscape might and should be as the performance of its ecological systems. I think, I hope, such a shift might be one of the tools that jolts our clients and neighbors out of their complacency and inaction, transforming them into a new generation of environmentalist citizens.

Stoss Landscape Urbanism’s landscape framework plan for the Silesim Chemical plant site takes a long view.

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