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A short talk by Ian Ritchie at Olympia at the invitation of the Landscape Institute.

I am not going to talk about my love of landscape, and certainly not of brick paviour palettes or the beauty of an *acer palmatum senkaki*, or my favourite species, a weed to many - *arundinaria*. I would like to address the underlying reasons why landscape is so important to everyone, and why it has always had a strong influence on me before and after completing projects.

Recently, two projects which we have designed have been defined by landscape. In Leipzig, the new international exhibition centre, completed in 1996, has an enormous glass entrance hall, 250 metres long, 80 metres wide and 30 metres high at its apex. This glass hall is set in a new landscaped valley conceived by Professor Marg of von Gerkan Marg und Partner with Hennerk Wehberg of Wehberg Lange Eppinger Schmidtke. Our decision to place the structure externally as a steel filigree was made because of the lightness within the landscape that such a move creates, compared to the opaque and reflective appearance of glass when not seen perpendicular to its surface. Despite the audacity of this proposition, it has proved technically and aesthetically very successful. Working in cooperation, our role was "to bring the sky down" and Professor Margi's role to "bring the earth up" in the inside of the building.

The other project is the Terrason Cultural Greenhouse, completed in 1995, which is but one fragment of a new five hectare garden conceived by Kathryn Gustafson as a contemporary interpretation of the major influences upon garden design from five continents. The greenhouse captures the essence of such a building by reducing it to its essentials - a wall and a transparent roof to the sun. On entering the new garden, the building appears only as a wall. At the next sighting of it, it appears as a virtual lake - in the strict physical term - a reflection. In this way it is difficult to appreciate the greenhouse as an entity, but rather as two fragments, both of which contribute as surfaces to and within the landscape.

Landscape

We have become accustomed during the last couple of centuries to man's transformation of the geological infrastructure and its topographic surface. Earlier this century, modernism's control, or apparent control over nature was epitomized by the dominance of the straight line and the right angle. This is garbage. We are not in control. Modernism was about optimism and certainty. Today the only certainty about certainty is uncertainty. Now we understand modernity as fundamentally about trying to manage uncertainty. Design in modernity has to embrace this, with intelligence, not fashion. Defining progress today is beautifully summed up in the words of Benjamin De Casseres:

"Progress is nothing but the victory of laughter over dogma."

In modernity, we should recognise that our ecological concerns are now inseparable from our approach to design.

When we place a building, or create a new landscape on the earth, we must try to make evident metaphorical intelligence - drawn from the stem of human creativity and spirituality.

Economy and efficiency are the buzzwords of engineering and industry, and industry includes the investor as well as engineers, manufacturers and contractors. The need has never been greater than now to add to these two E's three more E's: ésthetic, ecology and exactness.

We can probably all agree on what constitutes economy and efficiency - but ésthetics I doubt.

Aesthetics change through society's evolution. Pylons may have been icons of progress yesterday, but they have been replaced by the ephemeral world of the internet and information.

There is, however, an underlying grammar to aesthetics which does not change. It is this grammar which needs to be understood by all those involved in design.

Ecology

We all think we understand what the word means but I doubt if there is a real consensus of what it means in practice, in the different disciplines and industries associated with landscape. The most forgotten aspect of ecology is geology - the earth's foundation for the ecology of our planet, which with its engine - the sun - nature's own light pen - underpins and creates, in a time scale we can only vaguely appreciate, the ongoing ecological evolution of our greenhouse home.

Exactness

Without sufficient accurate facts and without the ability to understand how facts interrelate, we cannot predict. Can we ever hope to have enough facts and to manipulate them to inform our decisions so that we can design more intelligently? The information age is beginning to offer us the potential to manage facts as more and more of them become available.

Making metaphorical intelligence visible through design is vital. Wit can help to communicate this.

What do I mean by metaphorical intelligence, making it explicit and its source - the stem of human creativity and spirituality? A human being can be described as someone who knows what s/he is doing and why virtually all of the time. If we consider the 5 E's I have mentioned as design criteria, and we capture them in particular and explicit ways in our designs, we have the potential to show metaphorical intelligence. This I believe is as applicable to landscape design as any other creative endeavour. This is what my own architecture seeks to do, and it is not therefore surprising that the five E's are apparent in it, if one looks. It is also why landscape features strongly, and why, more recently, I have been thinking about, and indeed experimenting with materials which have been less processed industrially, and do more with less.

On the matter of spirituality in creativity - extensive religious belief has characterised eras of uncertainty and high levels of risk. It is not religious belief I am referring to when I use the word spirituality, but the underlying essence of loving what you do in the interests of others and not the self. Egocentricity hardly characterises one's behaviour when one is in love. Spirituality is also about moral behaviour towards others and the natural world. The presence of legible moral meaning in our work will help to communicate quality in our designs. As designers we have an obligation to imbue our practical approach with artistic aspirations which are much more than marginal entertainment or whimsy. Thought has produced everything we see in our society. It is evident we must think more deeply and more poetically and find ways to bring this into our designs. It is, to quote John Cage¹ (after Duchamp), "...the person who pays attention who finishes the work of art."

End.

¹ ART MEETS SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY IN A CHANGING ECONOMY ed. SDU publishers, 's-Gravenhage 1990