

There are, however, fundamental problems with this text—as there are with many academic approaches. There is a tendency for writing on theory to become impenetrable due to use of extravagant language. Many philosophical texts suggest that an advanced university course in linguistics be required to simply get through initial chapters, but for a discipline to become “intellectually” theoretical, clarity and rigor are required. Without clarity, most practitioners and students will not bother wading through the verbiage. Without rigor, the text loses its authority as valued reflection on its subject. Not using primary sources is also problematic in *On the Nature of Things*. The benefit of peer-reviewed publications such as *Landscape Journal* is that problems of accuracy are screened out—for example, the fact that Chicago is on Lake Michigan, not Lake Superior (see p. 75). Such inaccuracies lead to deeper questions about the author’s credibility and, by inference, the scholarship of the work. This is regrettable. Otherwise, *On the Nature of Things* has much to offer.

Once it has been unearthed, the essay in the middle of the book gives the reader an insight to the author’s views. Keeney discusses issues he believes have contributed to the development of landscape architecture. In the piece titled “The Language of the World,” Keeney organizes his work through “Path One: Geometrism; Abstraction and Metaphor, Towards a Grammar of Natural Landscape, Accepting the Incommensurable, Veiled Systems, and The Open Secret; Path Two: Leaping Ahead; Outside the Paradigmatic.” He weaves the works of Artaud, Benjamin, Agamben, Wittgenstein, Kant, Leibniz, Dante, Thoreau, Emerson, Deleuze, Heidegger, Bergson, Pascal, Zizek, Cavell, Richter, the composers Bruckner and Mahler, Helene Cixous, and others, into a dense, but brief journey through influences on landscape architecture. This could be expanded into a very important text itself. As Hunt, Weiss and Keeney all suggest, landscape architecture needs more critical dialogue on both theory and practice. The essay seems to be about being free—freeing land-

scape architecture from the culture or from society’s “hang-ups” and epistemological trappings. However, because the work is presented in such an entanglement of language and philosophical rhetoric, the essence of the liberation that Keeney appears to be proposing is inaccessible to most who will read it: “De-racinating forms of knowledge liberates the profound intertextual field of signifying subjects and the animated network of subconscious forms and forces that subsidize both the natural and man-made world” (p. 88). “Landscapes of resistance are formulated, against this vertical integration of publicness, on the horizontal, syntagmatic axis of difference and signification—literally on the horizon” (p. 92–93). The language distances the reader. The language is used as an instrument of power rather than as a vehicle for sharing knowledge and ideas. This is quite unfortunate, because beneath the rhetoric, Keeney has many relevant reflections on the general state of landscape architecture.

Keeney’s book is a fine contribution to the body of written work in landscape architecture. The discipline would benefit from more texts in this subject area that attempt to explicitly and critically unveil the current relationship between theory and practice. *On the Nature of Things* would be a worthy addition to the library of all who are interested in the constant shift of practice and theory; landscape architecture must participate in the important discussion of how we shape the world. Gavin Keeney has let his voice be heard.

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## CONSTRUCTED GROUND: THE MILLENNIUM GARDEN DESIGN COMPETITION

by Charles Waldheim. 2001. Urbana and Chicago: Illinois Press. 44 pages; illustrated, \$20.00 paperback. ISBN 0-252-07001-1

Reviewed by Alan Berger and Gale Fulton

With the publication of *Constructed Ground: The Millennium Garden Design Competition*, Charles Waldheim unpacks the baggage of a major landscape design competition in Chicago. *Constructed Ground* offers the reader generous descriptions along with a variety of drawings of the winning design. Rather than just making the book into a complex visual montage or seamless “flow” of graphics of the competitors’ works, Waldheim cleverly maintains a simple, if not modest, graphic layout and explanation of the process. Refreshingly, one finds a clear display of the competitors’ drawings along with a descriptive text written by each designer (presumably submitted with the drawings). The inclusion of narratives and drawings by each competitor gives the reader an opportunity to critique the verbal and visual languages used to represent landscape.

By publishing all the entries, Waldheim provides a rare and necessary reading of the languages used by designers to convey the value of their work. Closer readings of the competitors’ drawings, many of which are produced by nationally recognized landscape architects, reveal that the language used is sadly entombed in nostalgic and sentimental constructs of landscape ideas. This reveals a deep paradox in the words and images used by some of the competitors. For example, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates’ proposal calls for an “experience like Monet’s tunnels of flowers at Giverny,” Peter Walker and Partners’ design tries to “re-create prairie landscape,” and the Olin Partnership’s entry is “conceived as...three subsidiary gardens (representing) the natural landscape of Chicago.” These words hardly

match anyone's expectations for a "Millennium Garden," leaving one to wonder about which millennium the designers intend to celebrate. Through the language of America's so-called "stars" in landscape architecture, concepts of "nature" seem more like clichés than real attempts to deal with Modernist paradigms separating nature and culture.<sup>1</sup>

*Constructed Ground* and the new garden it documents is part of Chicago's Millennium Park Project. It focuses on the reconstruction and addition of culturally significant park space to Chicago's Grant Park. According to Waldheim, Grant Park was "initially formed in the nineteenth century as artificially constructed ground reclaimed from Lake Michigan." The "contested ground" of the lakefront underwent various pressures from private industry and railroad interests to post-World War II planning for accommodating automobiles. Waldheim stresses the necessary role of civic and cultural leaders to fight to maintain the public realm during the twentieth century, as many similar spaces across the United States were lost to private interests. In the past twenty-five years, however, public "parks" lost status as vital cultural projects.

The winning entry of the design competition—*The Shoulder Garden*, by landscape architect Kathryn Gustafson, Dutch plant expert Piet Oudolf, and theatrical producer Robert Israel—aims to reinstate Grant Park as an "international caliber destination landscape . . . unlike anything built in North America to date." In considering the twenty-first century landscape garden, Gustafson's entry demonstrates an eclipse of the scenic, pastoral notion of the landscape that has dominated landscape design for the last two centuries (but is still seen in a number of entries in this book). Instead, Gustafson proposes a temporal landscape of action and performance, adaptive to unforeseeable change in a complex urban environment. The park's significance as an activated open space—not just an empty container of "green" or "beautiful" land—is enhanced by two new landmark buildings: Frank Gehry's Music

Pavilion to the north, and Renzo Piano's addition to the Art Institute of Chicago to the south.

Unlike other competition publications, Waldheim's book reveals the often unseen workings of the competition: its winners and losers. From jury selection and short-listing, to descriptions of finalist projects and the typically forgotten nonplacing projects, the book gives the reader a comprehensive analysis of eleven projects. This book is organized in a hierarchy similar to the competition: It gives prominence to the highest-placing projects. The winning project is allocated ten color pages, the two finalist projects are displayed on two black & white pages, and the eight nonplacing competitors receive one black & white page each. Subsequently, the real winners of the competition are the connoisseurs of landscape—students, clients, horticulturists, and designers—as well as the city of Chicago, whose urban landscape infrastructure has deteriorated.

Finally, *Constructed Ground* furthers the role of criticism and the discourse of landscape studies. By deconstructing the verbal and visual language of the entries, the discerning reader gains a clearer understanding of landscape architecture to speculate about the potential of the landscape medium and, it is hoped, to further its capacity as a critical art form.

Waldheim is founder and chair of the Landscape Urbanism program at the University of Illinois at Chicago, one of the first of its kind in the United States. In the context of landscape urbanism, Waldheim reminds us that landscape is the significant infrastructure that extends the cultural and physical health of cities.

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## Notes

1. These opposing views of nature, as mechanical and organic, have been the subjects of many scholarly investigations. For a good understanding of the varying viewpoints of this issue see the following: Merchant, Carolyn. 1989. *Ecological Revolutions*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Oelschlaeger, Max. 1991. *The Idea of Wilderness*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 98–99. McKibben, Bill. 1989. *The End of Nature*. New York: Random House, pp. 47–91. Cronon, William. Editor. 1996, 1995. *Uncommon Ground*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Worster, Donald. 1992. "Freedom and Want: The Western Paradox," in *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 79–93. Elliot, Robert. 1997. *Faking Nature: The Ethics of Environmental Restoration*. New York: Routledge, pp. 42–62. Turner, Frederick. 1991. "A New Ecological Ethics," in *Rebirth of Value*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 51–64. Also see "Valuing Nature" in Harvey, David. 1996. *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 150–175. For another mechanistic/organic world comparison see: Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simian, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

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## PIONEERS OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

edited by Charles A. Birnbaum and Robin Karson. 2000. New York: McGraw-Hill. xxiii + 474 pages, 450 illustrations, appendices, \$59.95 hardbound.

ISBN 0-07-134420-9

Reviewed by Richard C. Rome

Comprised of 160 bibliographical essays prepared by a wide range of authors, this encyclopedic text offers an important addition to the resources available to scholars of the American landscape. Since the work was envisioned as a comprehensive survey of noteworthy individuals with supporting documentation of their contributions to the design of the American landscape, the individual essays are intentionally concise and abbreviated. Moreover, the editors chose to keep the individual authors' writing styles and approaches to the subject matter intact. This results in a very uneven collection ranging from the bright and insightful to the mundane and ordinary. Nevertheless, the overall