

location kept presenters on location for the duration of the conference and encouraged interaction among the attendees. The organization of the conference allowed ample time for people to discuss their scholarship and make friends at breakfast, lunch, and dinner over several days. Attendees toured Lake Maggiore and visited the Brissago Islands. These islands became famous, in part, because Russian Baroness Antoinette St. Léger, who owned them from 1885 to 1927, started what has become a unique botanical garden in Switzerland (today the property of the Canton Ticino), with 1500 indigenous and sub-tropical plant species. Attractions nearby include the Glacier Express (a train ride experience across Switzerland) and Otto Eisenhut Nursery (one of the great magnolia nurseries in the world).

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DESIGN ECOLOGIES: SUSTAINABLE POTENTIALS IN ARCHITECTURE

Knowlton School of Architecture,
Ohio State University, January 13–14,
2006.

Reviewed by Gale Fulton

Held in a packed Knowlton Auditorium, the Design Ecologies symposium was co-organized by Beth Blostein and Lisa Tilder, both associate professors of

architecture at Ohio State. The keynote speaker Bruce Mau set the stage for the next day's events by tracing the evolution of his Institute Without Boundaries project, and its inaugural product, the book and exhibit *Massive Change*. Mau optimistically described the potential of design to shape the future of society and the planet, an excellent way to begin in the context of a symposium on design ecologies. While Mau's project exudes a somewhat utopian aura, it undoubtedly provokes reconsideration of the context within which designers across all scales and disciplines are working. Along with an increase in the potential to shape the world, he warned, comes a corresponding increase in ethical responsibility, a situation forcefully invoked by the image of a chicken bred to featherlessness.

The remainder of the symposium was broken into three sessions or "design ecologies" including *Material Cycles*, *Landscape Ecologies*, and *Building Environments*. Participating in the Saturday morning session, *Material Cycles*, were Toshiko Mori (Toshiko Mori Architect), Anna Dyson (MATERIALAB), and Sheila Kennedy (Kennedy Violicch Architecture). Mori opened with a presentation titled *Material/Fabrication/Performance* calling on architects to expand exploration of new materials and methods of construction, particularly those outside traditional domains of architectural materiality and fabrication. Mori showed how certain textiles, capitalizing on the distributed strength of particular materials, offer architecture alternatives to the strategies of bigness and heaviness it has so often depended on.

Anna Dyson's *Biomechanical Systems* and Sheila Kennedy's *Leap Frog Technology: Re-locating the Role of Innovation in Design* outlined expanded realms of knowledge and practice for architecture. Dyson gave a visually stunning presentation which focused primarily on the question of how architects and designers can most effectively communicate or cross-pollinate ideas and practices across scales and disciplinary boundaries. Various diagrams charting the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary practice sug-

gested a shift from visual to parametric information exchange in architectural practices. Sheila Kennedy discussed a version of scenario planning (leap-frogging) in which a future goal is targeted and the necessary steps are taken to evolve current technologies and practices toward that future condition. She offered three "relocations" for design practices which dealt with the reconceptualization of existing technology towards improved performance, a shift in the "geography of knowledge" where technology adapts cultures and adapts to cultures simultaneously, and, lastly, a shift in the application of technological innovations toward more multiple and "promiscuous" distribution. In perhaps the most compelling presentations of the day, Dyson and Kennedy convincingly demonstrated how a synthetic intelligence is capable of integrating the multiple and often competing forces of any complex project into some productive outcome.

Session two, *Landscape Ecologies*, showcased work by Julie Bargmann and Chris Fannin of D.I.R.T. studio, and the work of the German landscape architectural firm Latz and Partner. Bargmann's portion of the presentation, *B.A.S.E. Line* (Biological and Social Ecologies), showed various projects such as the much-publicized AMD+Art project, a collaborative entry to the New York City Highline competition, and their work on the Ford River Rouge Plant in collaboration with William McDonough. Fannin concentrated on a project at the Philadelphia Naval Yards in which the designers attempted to renegotiate the interface between corporate and public space. Anneliese Latz's *Aesthetic Demands on Ecological Design*, showed several of Latz and Partner's works aimed at demonstrating how they engage the "ecological" in their design work. Latz's work is focused towards improving living conditions through the employment of ecological principles and techniques while at the same time creating "beautiful" environments.

The work presented by D.I.R.T. and Latz represents at least a partial break from landscape design focused

solely on the pictorial. Neither of these firms falls victim to the too-common landscape architectural misconception that “ecological” is equivalent to “naturalistic.” But the juxtaposition of this work with Mau’s project and the architects of the *Material Cycles* session proves that landscape design is not yet out of the representational woods. While both firms showed their capacities to deal with site phenomena and those ecological processes associated with sun, wind, and water—the “natural” elements—there was little demonstration of an expanded understanding of “landscape ecologies” which might include political, economic, and organizational ecologies. Today complex phenomena such as the Internet, globalization, and ecology, promote a more complex understanding of how things work and raise the bar for how such work can be conceptualized and represented.

The last session of the symposium was titled *Building Environments*. This session consisted of presentations by three architects including Jennifer Siegal (Office of Mobile Design), Mark Husser (Grimshaw), and Andrew Freear (Rural Studio). Siegal’s presentation, *Transmodern*, began with references to such twentieth-century precedents as Sant’Elia’s futurist manifesto, Deleuze’s new nomadism and the work of Buckminster Fuller and Archigram. She then showed how her work at the Office of Mobile Design seeks to engage high tech and low tech as well as the potentials for shifting architectural practices inherent in the methodologies of the building industry. Siegal’s work was interesting for the ways in which she recycled post-industrial materials as components of housing, and put the logic of production to work towards better designed, more affordable housing choices. However, the idea of “mobility,” whether upward or outward, did not seem to be theorized much, if at all, beyond the earlier precedents.

Mark Husser of Grimshaw presented the Southern Cross Station in Melbourne, the Fulton Street Transit Center yet to be realized in New York City, and the Waterloo International Terminal in London. Discussing the

work from a “first principles” point of view, Husser showed how each of the built environments created were actually innovative responses to the very specific environmental, programmatic, and economic realities of their sites. Andrew Freear, co-director of the Rural Studio, delivered the last presentation of the day—a somewhat prolonged description of the workings of the Alabama school. Showing several of the studio’s completed projects, Freear discussed the importance the school places on teamwork, students’ understanding of the workings of a rural town culture, and the continuing importance of drawing and making in architectural design. Perhaps most compelling about the Rural Studio model is how it promotes students to become advocates of their work, leaving the comfort and autonomy of the drafting table to deal with the realities of searching out materials, securing funding, and interacting with various constituencies.

Design Ecologies is a potentially limitless topic—what, if any, of the tools that we use to shape the built environment do not somehow fit under this rubric? But inclusivity has both pros and cons. A potential difficulty is that ubiquitous terminologies such as *Landscape Ecologies* and *Building Environments* border on the meaningless. This leads to difficulties identifying who should participate in such a gathering as well as to how that work should be measured. It is the job of the conference organizer to set these frames and select the participants in such a way as to facilitate meaningful and productive exchange of ideas and information between participants as well as amongst participants and audience. I do not know if there are plans for subsequent *Design Ecologies* symposia, but it would seem fertile ground for future discussion as there are many more subcategories available for exploration and plenty of work being done which investigates the potentials inherent in design ecologies.

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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
ANNUAL MEETING & EXPO
Fort Lauderdale, Florida, October 7–
10, 2005.

Reviewed by Margaret Livingston

Attendees of the 2005 American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Annual Meeting & EXPO often noted the event’s defining theme: *Winds of Change, Keys to the Future*. Placed against a backdrop of changing political and physical scenarios, the theme compelled many to reflect on their changing roles in the design and management of natural and built ecosystems. Central to the theme, and singled out as a requirement by many ASLA members, was the issue of sustainable design practices.

The theme and the issue of sustainable practices, identified by the 2005 Annual Meeting Steering Committee as a main area of concern, were evident in the opening general session and keynoted address, delivered by Joseph P. Riley Jr., mayor of Charleston, South Carolina. Riley focused his address on the revitalization of the historic downtown business district of Charleston, which is recognized as one of the most livable and progressive cities in the United States. His inspirational presentation highlighted a number of sustainable design practices that can lead to successful economic revitalization and development in urban areas. As so eloquently expressed by Mayor Riley, “Our cities should be places where every citizen’s heart can sing.”

During the first day, an attendee was overheard commenting, “I am concerned that my work is not recognized.” Reflecting on the keynote address, it appeared as if landscape architects are practicing in a time when they cannot afford to concentrate too heavily on concerns about recognition. The overall theme of the conference seemed to reinforce the idea that landscape architecture’s significance as a profession is often expressed in the type of works Mayor Riley referred to: common spaces such as public parks;