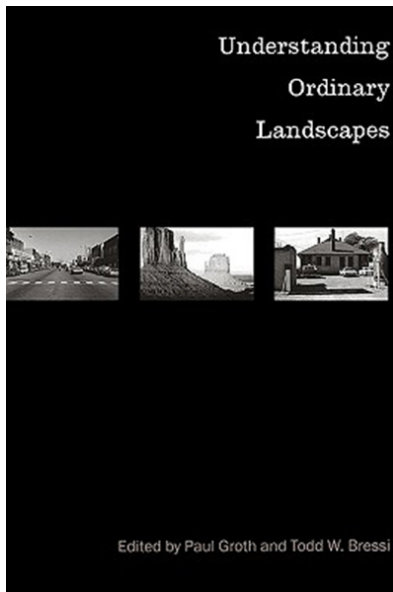


Understanding Ordinary Landscapes

Edited by: Paul Groth, Todd W. Bressi

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Are visible structures in landscape only a scene or is there a deeper meaning beyond them? The book deals with this particular question and the interpretation of American cultural landscapes on 272 pages. It contains 16 essays, each written in English by a renowned author, regarding history, geography, architecture, landscape and environmental design. These essays were originally presented at a symposium in 1990, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the landscape architecture program at the University of California-Berkeley. This collection provides information about the contemporary issues of the social stratification of suburbs and its consequences, compares native to federal environments, describes battlefield monuments, vernacular houses and more.

The introduction is written by the editor Paul Groth, who is professor of architecture and geography at the UCB. He argues that the term landscape »denotes the interaction between people and place« and claims that not only rural settings but also the cityscape, represent the cultural landscape. Everything made by human is a way of establishing identity and articulating social relations among people.

First chapter presents ten examples of research projects. The work by J. B. Jackson, an influential writer, serves as initial point as well as a continuing reference point within cultural landscapes. He describes fundamental epochal changes in the American meaning of house and property and their relation to the land. A theme of ethnic and cultural diversity is best clarified by the Mexican sculptor R. Swentzell. She explains the importance of designer's understanding of client's culture and habits to make a successful, functional design, giving two examples from New Mexico. The next chapter offers a critical review over the research approaches from the first part. Authors discuss what has been done in the past and what ought to be done to improve living conditions in the near future. British geographer J. Appleton visually expresses the idea of landscape interest being a minor part of many scientific disciplines. But in order to understand the relationships in landscape, we should observe and examine landscape in a cross-disciplinary view.

This book is not easy to read because of the diversity of topics and philosophical interpretation of thoughts. To fully understand the background and meaning of cultural landscapes, parallel research is necessary. The essays seem like pieces of a puzzle, various thoughts put together, but not drawing up the whole picture. Some chapters are written very detailed, while others are only giving a glimpse into the topic. There are only a few black and white pictures in the book, sometimes very poorly equipped with text, so it is difficult to establish the connection with the essay's content. Still, the publication represents extraordinary topics on several urban subjects and cultural identities, class and subculture, which reminds us that there is more to the landscape than meets the eye.