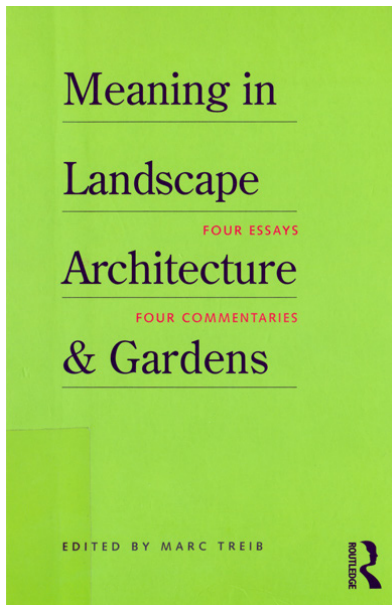


Meaning in Landscape Architecture & Gardens

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Has landscape a meaning? Can a designer express meaning through landscape? Moreover, is there a valid reason to attempt imbuing meaning into design? These questions form the core of the essay collection, in which four eminent landscape architecture theoreticians clash on the topic of semantics in designed landscapes. The essays were originally published separately in the leading American landscape architecture review *Landscape Journal* between 1989 and 2007. Having mustered the texts into one collection, editor Marc Treib wishes to present the thought-provoking, versatile debate in an easily accessible, chronological form.

Through choosing meaning in landscape as their subject, the essayists seek to further define the discipline of landscape architecture by expanding the discourse on a prior unexplored field. The three professors Susan Herrington, Laurie Olin, both landscape architects, and Marc Treib, an architect, offer a riveting debate on the possibility and impossibility of investing and discovering meaning in a landscape through altering its spatial characteristics. Jane Gillette, with her background on literary theory, answers the challenge by shifting the viewpoint on gardens instead of landscapes and criticizes the literature on design instead of the garden itself. Feet firmly on the North American soil, the authors supply every essay with contemporary landscape architecture projects as case studies. The projects, such as Tanner Fountain by Peter Walker, are discussed in detail, though illustrated only with a sparse array of monochrome photographs.

Even if the debate never approaches a halting point within its 228 pages, the collection continues fascinating the reader long after the finishing bout. Design philosophies, literary reviews and theoretical developments are advanced with flair throughout the collection, in the best tradition of a humanistic discipline. However, all the essayists have distanced themselves from the scientific means to prove and disprove hypotheses. For example, methods of social sciences, like qualitative interviews of individual park experiences, could have helped to pin down the extent of the intention-perception problem between the designer and the user, as discussed by Treib and Herrington. The next step in the debate would be to take the argument to a more practical level; to form hypotheses that can be tested in situ and used to improve the theory behind the design.

The collection is commended to those, who either desire to design or discover significance in landscape. From the viewpoint of a student or a practicing landscape architect, the first and the last essay offer most value. Despite the international renown the four essayists enjoy, the collection encourages fresh voices to wage in on the debate. Olin recognizes the need for further study of the subject by pensively saluting the reader at the end of his commentary: analysing meaning in landscapes is one of the profession's "least successful endeavours".