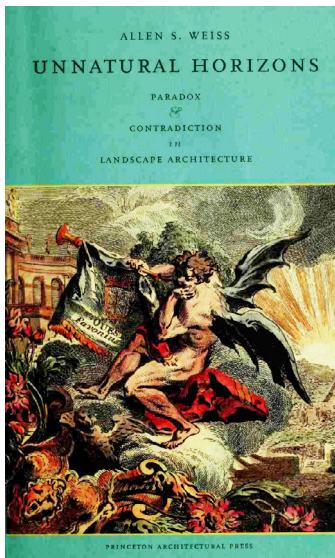


Unnatural Horizons

Paradox and Contradiction in Landscape Architecture

Author: Allen S. Weiss

Publisher: Princeton Architectural Press, New York 1998



Can a garden ever truly reflect nature, or is it always a reflection of ourselves? In his book, cultural theorist and New York University professor Allen S. Weiss offers a unique perspective, inviting readers to think about gardens as physical spaces and reflections of culture, mythology, and philosophy.

As the title suggests, *Unnatural Horizons* explores the connected ideas of contradiction and paradox. Weiss sees gardens as cultural creations rather than direct copies of nature, spaces where opposites such as chaos and order, life and decay, and art and nature coexist in fragile balance. Written in dense academic prose, the 175-page book unfolds in five thematic chapters: “Syncretism and Style” interprets Renaissance gardens as symbolic landscapes, layered with myth, religion, and philosophy; “Dematerialisation and Iconoclasm” looks at Baroque gardens as theatrical stages that impress with their wealth and creativity; “Libidinal Sublime” explores enlightenment gardens as expressions of melancholy, sensitivity and personal emotion; “No Man’s Garden” contrasts European formality with the American ideal of wild nature, demonstrating cultural values in landscape architecture design; “In Praise of Anachronism” considers modern gardens as compositions combining references from different historical periods. Instead of technical plans, the book uses sketches and photos as cultural guides, supporting its reflective approach.

The book’s complex structure can make it hard for readers to understand its topics. Its abstract style and academic language may frustrate the general audience. Additionally, the author often repeats ideas, which can weaken the main argument, making readers feel that the author focuses on the same points repeatedly instead of clarifying them. Weiss’s writing often makes the main message seem unclear. The heavy use of dense prose and multiple quotes can confuse readers and make it difficult to follow the discussion. This challenge may be especially difficult for non-native English speakers, who might find the language too complicated. In addition, the ending feels abrupt and unresolved, leaving more questions than answers. Finally, the effort required to understand these ideas may discourage readers from wanting to explore them further. Despite these challenges, the book presents crucial garden and landscape design history ideas. Reading requires particular focus, but this can be intellectually rewarding.

Overall, I recommend *Unnatural Horizons* primarily to students and theoreticians of landscape architecture, especially those preparing theses or research projects and ready to engage with the book’s complexity. The abstract style and dense academic language may be less attractive for general readers and those who are seeking practical design directions. Nevertheless, this book is helpful for those interested in an in-depth understanding of the structural and philosophical influences on landscape design.