

**Zeitschrift:** Pamphlet  
**Herausgeber:** Professur für Landschaftsarchitektur, Christophe Girot, ETH Zürich  
**Band:** - (2005)  
**Heft:** 4: Landschaft und Szenografie = Paysage et scénographie =  
Landscape and scenography  
  
**Artikel:** Landscape and scenography  
**Autor:** Girot, Christophe  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-965632>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 30.06.2025

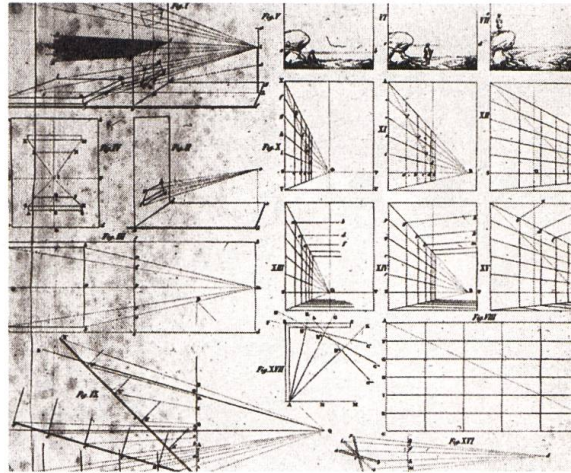
**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## LANDSCAPE AND SCENOGRAPHY

by Christophe Girot



Theatre at Segeste



Perspective methods for stage design 1800

In light of Bruno Marchand's words the relation between landscape and scenography merits reflection. Its history dates back to the dawn of man, to where the sacred and the ritual extracted their substance from the juxtaposition of man-made culture to a natural backdrop. From the epic Gilgamesh in which fallen men and trees are confused to form the first rudiment of a written tragedy, to the Apollonian rites of the theatre of Delphi intimately connected to the splendour of a site, to the 'bosquet' in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*; the man-nature relation is bound by a strong and manifest symbolism which gradually transfigured itself from an exterior towards an interior. Landscape and scenography were simultaneously supports of tragedies and comedies, reflecting the evolution of man's understanding of nature from one epoch to another.<sup>2</sup>

The coding of our world and emotions is one among many means to discuss our cultural history: the evolution of these codes thus representing the myriad of styles and periods in the

history of art. In the history of theatre, the natural scenography has, since the Renaissance, gradually transformed into an interiorized and artificial nature. Theatre depends no longer on a particular landscape frame to transmit its message. It is rather up to the artifice of the décor to produce this effect. Thus, the theatricalism of nature has been gradually reduced to a learned play of suggestions, abstractions and metaphors until its complete inversion, where the landscape once understood, as a natural support becomes itself pure artifice. What are the consequences of this topological and semantic shift in scenography on the contemporary practice of landscape architecture? To partly elucidate this question, three modes of reading the landscape allow us to grasp the wealth and complexity of the relation between a landscape and its scenographic mode. The following examples represent and affirm the landscape. They are each emblematic in their uncanny capacity to move and awaken us, as well as in their ability to reinvent new rules of play between landscape and



Gas Works Park, Seattle

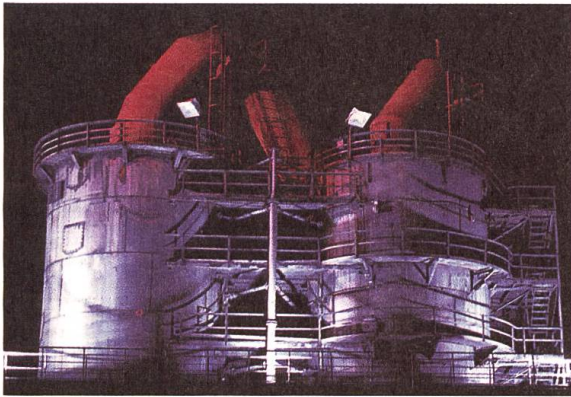
scenography. The examples chosen correspond to three well-established logics, three modes of reading corresponding respectively to irony, pathos and comedy.

### Irony

The first scenographic mode of reading the landscape is irony. Irony is complex and multilayered. It is a situation where the subject becomes amplified by its contrary. Stemming from the Greek word 'eironeia', irony means literally to dissimulate, or ignorance purposely affected. In the case of landscape, the ironic phrase would be then to produce and underline a particular idea of nature by deploying its most extreme opposite. Such an inversion is an ancient phenomenon found in landscape scenography since the Enlightenment where the art of 'fabriques' and ruins were juxtaposed to a natural context in order to amplify,

through the artifice of chaos and abandonment, the romantic intensity of a rustic nature. There are, however, profound differences in usage and meaning between these famous eighteenth century follies and the following contemporary examples. By means of a confirmed picturesque language, the follies exalted the artifice of the ruin so much so that genuine false ruins were built, for example at Stowe, the Désert de Retz and Würlitz, provoking astonishment and admiration among visitors. The contemporary examples we will discuss here are on the contrary, each concerned with literal ruins, often stigmatized, that are then transformed into positive elements of the landscape they belong to. Irony operates on an object a radical transformation of meaning and acceptance, diametrically opposed to its original and implicit 'raison d'être'.





Emscher Park, Duisburg-Nord



### Gas Works Park

The advent of the Gas Works Park on a small island in Puget Sound, Seattle in 1973 marks a decisive moment in the field of landscape architecture of that time and in the definition of the leisure park genre.<sup>3</sup> It refutes the rules of good taste and understanding of the epoch combining, in an inconceivable manner, opposites.

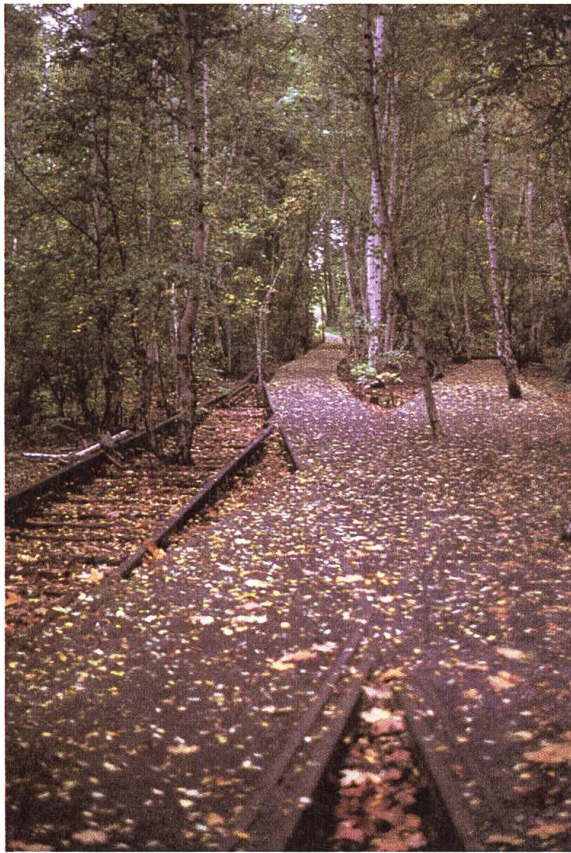
Gas Works Park announces a new genre of nature; a nature allied ironically to its worst enemy: the gas industry, to produce a landscape of leisure and relaxation for the residents. This old factory, dirty and obsolete, becomes of its own an emblematic element of the landscape. Hardly modifying it, Richard Haag neither hides nor demolishes it, but simply reworks a few outer surfaces into lawns and slopes to play on. The project also tackles the technical and economic problems of re-appropriating a polluted industrial site. Rather than taking away the contaminated materials, the soil is revitalized by mixing to it sludge and by-products of the timber industry. The project is obtained with few stylistic frills. A place considered the epitome of miasma and hard labor, antinomic to nature, suddenly becomes a haven of relaxation, anti-work and leisure. The built quality of the project is quite summary; there are almost no finished details, the only compensation is a regular maintenance of the outdoor spaces. The stroke of genius in this project does not reside in the

finished details but in the genuine invention of a new landscape genre: radical and ironic, combining nature with a ruin of hard industry. It is the invention or at least the acknowledgement of a certain 'paysage vérité'. With Gas Works Park, the 20<sup>th</sup> century ironic landscape genre is born. Other projects concerning the rehabilitation of industrial landscapes will follow in the ensuing decades almost everywhere in the world. Each more sophisticated than the other in terms of detailing and materials, they each owe their initial inspiration to the Gas Works Park as reference and precedent.

### Emscher Park

This synecdochical shift in which the abandoned factory discards the stigmas of its past like a chrysalis, becoming in a single stroke the positive emblem of a landscape rediscovered, a nature re-conquered and assimilated, is a given today. Yet this antinomic symbiosis of opposites was only made possible thanks to particularly daring scenographic and landscape inventions. How else can one explain the presence of one of the seats of the German Alpine Club at the very foot of disused blast furnaces of the Ruhr region at Duisburg-Nord? It is thanks to the ingenuity of a savant diurnal and nocturnal 'mise-en-scène', juxtaposing natural elements with strong symbolic elements of the industrial revolution, that the IBA Emscher Park begun in 1989, made the idea of degraded





Schöneberger Südgelände, Berlin

industrial landscapes retroactively acceptable. The aim is not to chastely conceal former steel factories behind a veil of greenery but to profoundly transform the meaning and the use of a region covering 8000 acres. The tall blast furnace of Duisburg-Nord becomes therefore an impressive climbing face rivaling with the most challenging natural faces. One sees appearing in the center of the Ruhr's coal flatlands, the staging of a sport normally reserved to an alpine elite. There is no kitsch pretence with false natures or ruins, rather a significant transfiguration of natural and industrial elements. The reading of the site is authentic but dual and therefore ironic. The entire weight of the mining and steel history, a theme central to the identity and the pride of entire generations of the Ruhr, becomes the main cultural lever of a landscape project. One rediscovers identification

with place. Inversely, the miracle of a flourishing 'ecological' nature emerging in one of the planet's most polluted sites provokes, surprises and seduces. The projects of the IBA Emscher Park play on the register of a new landscape genre inspired by the precedent of the Gas Works Park.<sup>4</sup> Through irony emerges a new kind of landscape where industry and nature, instead of opposing and mutually prohibiting one another, merge into the original and powerful scenography of a culture of leisure that is resolutely genuine.

### **Schöneberger Südgelände**

Another, perhaps less spectacular but nonetheless important example of ironic landscape brings us to Berlin among the abandoned train tracks of post-war Germany. The former site of the Schöneberger Südgelände situated in the heart of

the city, like the famous Kreuzberg Gleisdreieck, has for several decades protected and encouraged the proliferation of indigenous plants growing in the ballast of the tracks. Far from the conventional practice allowing use of large quantities of chemical control to maintain train tracks free of growth, a new ecological pact scrupulously implemented, enabled an unbound nature to grow spontaneously. In the space of a few seasons, new plants, shrubs and trees began to encumber the tracks. Each shoot, perfect manifestation of an anarchical botanical rebirth, sprouting spontaneously from the ballast, was recorded on precise botanical and statistical maps. This particular form of vegetation was declared untouchable and the site became inaccessible to the public. The idealization of this spontaneous, undisturbed nature, with almost sacred connotations, can be read as the expression of a scrupulous moralistic rigour fitting to post-war West Germany. Can one avoid contextualizing this fervent desire for a vulgar and untamed natural reserve at the very heart of Berlin, other than through the concurrent dramatic walling up of the city? Irony supposes that two extremes rally together to generate a completely new sense of place. After forty years of scrupulous vegetative 'laissez-faire', the train tracks of the Schöneberg Südgelände had practically disappeared under the impenetrable natural thicket composed of innumerable sprouts of birch, pine and undergrowth of grasses, nettles and brambles. Since 1952, Schöneberger Südgelände had become a favorite place for botanists specialized in urban weed science, where the succession of plant species could be meticulously observed year after year. But it was a reclusive, scientific nature, antagonistic to the city. With the fall of the Wall and the new wastelands of the Brandenburg hinterland, came into question the usefulness and relevance of such a place in the metropolis.

In 1995, a decision by the City of Berlin to bring new meaning to this site presented the unexpected opportunity for staging and re-balancing this landscape. Slightly elevated wooden walk-

ways, supported by a light metallic structure, form a network connecting different neighborhoods and reveal this 'wilderness' in a surprising manner without disturbing the fragile ecosystem below.<sup>5</sup> Following former train tracks, the pontoons evoke a double meaning in the visitors' circulation and establish a physical overlap between the remnants of the past at the visitor's feet and a contemporary park experience. This surprising scenography restored a balance between the natural and industrial characteristics inherent to the site. The decked path set on top of an old train track lends a certain theatricality to the passage of people, it establishes a distance with the natural scenography of the site. The juxtaposition of antinomic surroundings such as the ecological reserve and the urban path becomes the significant force of this landscape project. In this case, a supposedly secret and forbidden nature becomes observed; the elevated deck path serving as an urban stage. The irony in this case is not only produced by the combination of former elements of the railway with an unbridled spontaneous nature: it is the fruit of a profound inversion in the moral order of things and the unwonted manner of appreciating a mutant phenomenon of nature. The elevated path creates a linear scene that aestheticizes abandoned industry and nature which otherwise would remain formless and of botanical interest only. Schöneberger Südgelände is therefore a site of ecology, which ironically has become cultural. Steeped in history, it is a project, which takes upon itself the contradictions of its industrial and ecological past, to evolve free from any sectarianism towards a cultural and diversified experience of landscape.

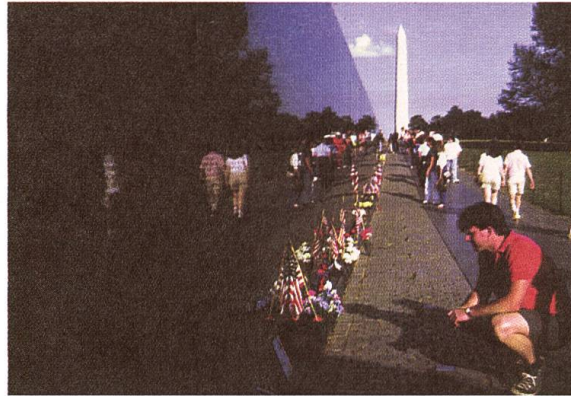
### Pathos

The second scenographic reading of landscape is called pathos. Pathos, the Greek word for suffering, referred in rhetoric to any means at one's disposal with which one is able to stir the audience. The landscape of pathos bears no relation to





Vietnam War Memorial, Washington D.C.



the landscape of irony, where the new symbolic charge lastingly inverts the meaning of a place. It plays, on the contrary, on the principle of keying into the physical and psychological resonances between the site and the visitor to create an upheaved sense of landscape. In a landscape of pathos, the given form of the terrain, or more precisely, the staging of the intrinsic substance of a place, generally brings a sentiment of sadness or discomfort. In most cases, we are speaking of places where the historical weight of events evoked or directly experienced would provoke melancholy. The question is how to choreograph such sentiments without falling into the pitfall of a pathetic narrative. Respect of memory does not in any sense guaranty a successful project. Pathos in fact, is probably one of the most difficult genres of landscape to master and express. It relies mostly on a scenography of the unmentionable, a scenography that moves and transposes the visitor in both time and place.

### **Vietnam War Memorial**

The project of the National Vietnam War Memorial located on the large grass lawn, the National Mall, in Washington D.C. is the first example of such a landscape which succeeds remarkably. Approaching this large grass field one does not suspect anything because nothing of what one would normally expect of a memorial alerts the eye. The

memorial to the Vietnam War is a landscape that merges into the ground, pulling the visitor subtly into the metaphor of burial. No visitor remains insensitive, the inclined path draws one towards the bottom of the V shaped depression imbedded in the lawn. At this point, one stands merely a few inches below ground level. Here is a literal and ritual burial that operates by mere gravitational force, provoking a deep physical and psychological feeling of pathos.

This memorial is both open and closed, depending on the approach and the point of view. Open to the sky, fully facing the Washington Mall by this large, embossed imprint rising gently to the level of the lawn, the project confers an immense feeling of peace and liberation. On the contrary, walking along the vertical wall that defines the cut into the ground, the feeling of confinement becomes progressively more real and oppressive as one moves down.<sup>6</sup> Here, streets and town disappear, while in front of us, stand a row of steles in black polished granite bearing in chronological order the names of the 58 175 service men and women who perished from 1959 to 1975. The path draws us at the bottom of the project, where the gaze of the living crosses over to the dark reflection of the dead. The strict minimalism of this work confers it power and singularity. It is a strong and simple landscape, emblematic of our epoch. This stark and singular scenography of pathos did not,





Walter Benjamin Memorial, Port Bou



however, appeal to all the war veterans some of whom vehemently protested against this abstract memorial devoid of heroic symbols.<sup>7</sup> The striking contrast between the radical nature of the V-shaped terrain and the bronze sculpture later added, attests to the degree of difficulty in manipulating such a landscape genre or deviating from traditional physical representations of grief. But, it is the use of topographic and gravitational forces, so physical and simple, that enables the visitor to engage mind and body and collect oneself in bereavement. The intention was not to portray some valiant heroic force, but rather to conjure the more poignant image of a wake of the living within the hollow V of the dead. The National Vietnam War Memorial is a place with an evocative pathos. A pathos, which makes up for the physical and temporal distance that separates the visitor from the event that is evoked. The scenography of the large V carved in the ground of Washington D.C. is enough to transpose us elsewhere into recollection. Even if a few red maple leaves wedged in the black joints of carved the steles at autumn, remind us relentlessly that we are indeed quite far from the rice fields and the sludge of the Mekong Delta.

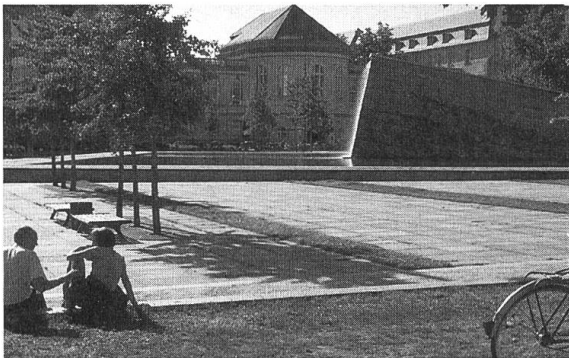
### Walter Benjamin Memorial

The second example of a landscape of pathos concerns the memorial dedicated to Walter Benjamin,

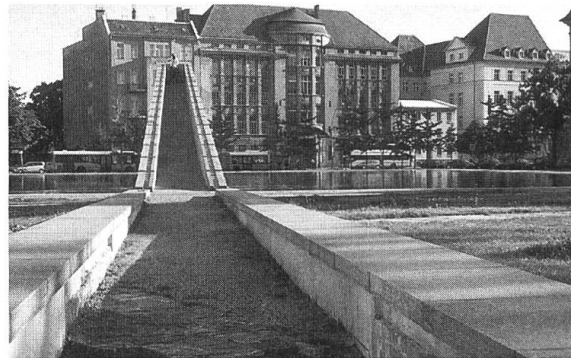
situated on the Catalan coast at Port Bou. A stone's throw from the French border, the tragic death in 1940 of this Frankfurt School intellectual as he awaited his escape from Europe, is emblematic of that epoch. The memorial does not correspond to the exact place of the writer's death. It is a more general work of art, which plays on a strong physical staging within the ambient landscape.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore not intended to replicate Benjamin's tragic death as, perhaps, the artist George Segal might have done. Here the work based on the metaphor of the fall, forces the visitor to transpose his vertigo into a sentiment of loss and death. In this particular example, the metonymic transformation is complete since we are not in the place where the tragedy occurred.

What dominate are simply the natural elements of the site; the sea and its salt, the sky and its brilliant blue and the reef of a hazardous coast juxtaposed to a steel project rusted by the salt air. At the entrance, a portico isolates the visitor, and a vertiginous stairway precipitates one's gaze towards the bottom, where the waves crash in swirls against the rocks; where a sea, even in calm, reveals a thousand jagged edges. As we come to the base of the staircase, our only protection from continuing the descent is a fragile sheet of glass upon which is engraved a quote from Walter Benjamin. One is literally pulled towards a descent that is neither pleasant nor easy, a precarious journey somewhat





Invaliden Park, Berlin



reminiscent of the stairway of the Memorial des Martyrs de la Déportation, on the Île-de-la Cité in Paris.<sup>9</sup> This is a scenography of the pathetic journey of the absurd and horror, a trajectory in which the physical force of the site, the unavoidable downward attraction and the tumultuous voyage into oblivion becomes a catalyst for emotions and questions. It is therefore the emphatic staging of this simple gesture which confers upon the landscape all its meaning. The climb back is just as difficult as the descent; this time climbing up towards the sky, whose blue has become but a blinding light, pure, strong and unreachable. Other elements of the memorial take the visitor to different places around the small local cemetery, providing distance and calm, allowing emotions to slowly settle. This project profoundly affects the visitor and sublimates the surrounding landscape in an ultimate act of transposed memory.

### Invaliden Park

The third example of pathos takes us to the Invaliden Park in Berlin. At the onset, it belongs to the long legacy of East Berlin sites where the weight and multitude of unspoken events, has become commonplace. The scenography of the new Invaliden Park does not seek to minimize this critical dimension of history but rather to resorb an overload of accumulated events, which mutually cancel one another. The project had not only to face a particular 'genius loci' of the site

but also to choose from selective representations of memory. Unlike the projects discussed above each rooted in metaphor, the new Invaliden Park is simultaneously the subject and the object of its own memories.<sup>10</sup> Among all of these, which can be the most significant for today?

I relied on the natural elements of air, water, sun and earth to extract one from the rubble of history and to provide the necessary distance. Walking on a large inclined wall of grey Silesian granite poised on a mirror of water, the visitor is therefore invited to stand above the site of the then Invaliden church and park. This inclined wall gives the impression it is sinking, making an evident reference to the recent history of this site, which was used as a parking lot for the tanks of the Berlin Wall guards. The path pointing directly southwards on the crest of the wall carries the visitor towards the Berlin skies. Most visitors ignore the history hidden in the ground. The important thing is to gain a certain detachment from this place steeped in history and suffering. The impression of lightness produced by this wall is the opposite of the oppressive vertigo orchestrated by the memorial to Walter Benjamin. The scenography of the Invaliden Park is treated in successive facets, which overlay and complete one another. The expression of nature remains minimal, a few emblematic plants such as Ginkgo biloba confer a sacred dimension to the place. The visitor skims over a few remnants of history by



Zeppelinfeld, Nuremberg

walking back down the wall towards a large lawn planted with ancient oaks where a small trench reveals the buried traces of the Prussian military church; each of these the tangible heritage of a forgone landscape. Nature therefore serves as a receptacle for many memories which rise to the surface, sometimes visible sometimes invisible, and cohabit in this little piece of green void at the heart of the city. Pathos is omnipresent in this Berlin site, making it difficult to avoid the pitfall of a stifling narrative. The metonymic play, which only reveals a few structures of a laden past, enables the project of the Invaliden Park to break free from this heritage and to recreate meaning for the Berlin of today.

### Comedy

The third and last scenographic figure of landscape, simpler and lighter in appearance, would be comedy. From the Latin 'comoedia' meaning a theatre play with a happy conclusion, comedy incites us to underscore the capacity of a landscape to be completely engrained in the present moment, regardless of its history. With comedy we are immersed in a resolutely contemporary nature where staging and technique make it possible to arrange new events, to invent new forms of nature and to create new memories of a place. It permits for new and varied rituals, be it contradictory ones, to establish themselves so that a new

form of society can be born. In this case, it is nature at the service of man, a nature full of surprises and plays that awaits to be discovered. Through comedy, nature acts as a social and historical lubricant, as a landscape for meetings and possibilities, in a word, as a contemporary place of hope.

### Zeppelinfeld

Placing the Zeppelinfeld of Nuremberg in comedy's register may surprise many. Yet this monumental landscape architecture project born in the years of mass indoctrination of the third Reich became, in the post-war period, an ideal venue for all types of human activities, from car racing to rock festivals. The aim here is not so much to wipe away the stigmas of one of the most emblematic sites of Nazi Germany, but to understand how a satirical view enables us to gradually transcend it and exorcise its horrifying past. This precise case of human comedy shows us, whether we like it or not, that a place adapts and inexorably changes with time. The perception of a perennial fascist landscape architecture as corresponding only to the ideals of the Third Reich gradually becomes relative and erroneous.<sup>11</sup> A landscape of comedy generates atmospheres that are sometimes antinomic and even if the form and scale of this monumental site prevails, both mentalities, possibilities and uses transgress. One can hardly confuse the hippy smoking a joint at a Bob Dylan concert in 1969 on the Zeppelinfeld with





Igor Stravinsky Fountain, Paris



the fanatic Hitler youth that danced, entranced upon the very same soil thirty years before. The original landscape setting in which the event takes place has not changed but the human comedy that takes place at present is hardly recognizable. This landscape is far from neutral but adapts to the uses and customs of successive times. The case of the Zeppelinfeld is therefore key to understanding the scenography of comedy in landscape design. Nature is reduced here to a space of possibilities. The satirical metamorphoses of the Zeppelinfeld, from Nazi rallies, to different trade fairs and rock music festivals raises the question of the meaning of history and of the legitimate, even if ephemeral, transformation of our past. It is, of course, difficult to imagine a major gathering of hippies before a Nazi orator, but the mixing of genres does not necessarily hinder work of remembrance. Comedy is not always light, it toys with the pathos of memory and that is precisely what procures it this seductive insolence. Perhaps for this reason alone, it is necessary to draw from our cultural heritage to understand the generating force of all human comedy in the domain that concerns us.

### **Igor Stravinsky Fountain**

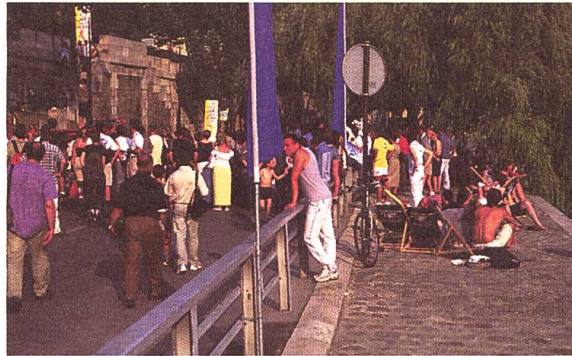
Another case in the landscape of comedy, lighter this time, is the Igor Stravinsky's fountain in Paris, which is the work of the artists Jean Tinguely and Niki de St. Phalle. It has a playful quality, which has transformed into a place of comedy, not only

the little square it is situated in, but also a part of the spirit of the French capital. The incredible lightness of the amusing figurines that dance in the large metallic basin and spray one another contrasts with the serious nature of the urban surroundings. We are a few steps from the Hôtel de Ville of Paris and its Haussmannian boulevards and in front of the famous high-tech architectural pearls of the IRCAM and Beaubourg. It may be said that the uncanny scenography of these rudimentary aquatic, almost clumsy, mechanisms transforms the surroundings into sublime ridicule. Then there are the people. The fountain is one of the few remaining places in the area where people can sit down properly without having to consume something. In return, the sculptures let off erratic salvos of water at the people seated as well as at passers-by, at times a burst of water and at other moments in the form of droplets drifting on the wind. The spindrift transports the visitors for a moment far from Paris towards exotic shores inhabited by strange, fantastical figurines where the chanting rhythm of the waves finally replaces the sound of the cogs of the machines. For an instant one is a thousand miles from Paris on the ledge of the Stravinsky Fountain. This work is one of the rare examples of a buffoonery that works at the pedestrian scale, a landscape of ridicule full of humor with the apparent nonchalance of a playful bygone era. The comedy in this case fully engages the passer-by in an urban reverie where





Paris Plage, Paris



the landscape in question seems to have come from elsewhere. Here, the expression of nature is almost dreamlike and immaterial with a subtle play of elements marking in their own way the lasting comedy of an ephemeral landscape.

### Paris Plage

The last example of a landscape of comedy concerns the temporary event of Paris Plage, held for the last three years every summer in the French capital. The embankment expressway on the right bank of the Seine is closed for a month and transformed in record time into a river boardwalk, with its promenade, lawns, beaches, changing booths, palm groves and hammocks, along with an endless list of cultural events. Here we find a completely artificial and ephemeral nature, far from the original banks of the Seine. Paris Plage is a nature entirely dedicated to the varied human events that are imagined for the day and for the night. It is a landscape where the ridicule of a beach from the south Riviera in the heart of Paris becomes a tangible and concrete reality, where the batteries of showers and water sprays are brought in as a substitute for the tarnished waters of the Seine that flow at the foot of the quay. Sand and grass cover the kilometers of asphalt to provide to all the luxury of a real sunbath: supreme privilege of summer vacations. No one forgets that one is sunbathing on the quays of Paris, facing the Île St-Louis and Île-de-La-Cité, but everyone revels

in the surrealism of this event re-inventing each day their metropolis. Immense crowds from the city and its outskirts, come each day to see the unthinkable and to experience the unreal. Above all, Paris Plage is a success because of the sheer number of people it draws day as well as night. It is a landscape of people who come to see and to be seen, where the spectator becomes part of the show. It is in a way, a Brecht theatre set at full scale where the right bank of the Seine becomes a endless comedy vacillating with each human event and encounter. The structure of the landscape is both rudimentary and stereotyped, there are none of the bathing refinements belonging to the great beaches of the world; here nothing is meant to last, its ephemeral quality enhancing its charm. The scenographed landscape of Paris Plage should serve as an example, not as a project to copy, nor even as an event to perpetuate indefinitely on the banks of the Seine, but as a contemporary approach to the urban landscape.

Nature is reduced to the strict minimum; a few squares of lawn and a potted palm trees suffice. It is the essential elements that count: wind, sky, water and people. The landscape of comedy plays against the idea of an immutable urban context, depending on the human element to catalyze this transformation. Comedy here has presented a successful example, where even the most ephemeral event can mark significantly the spirit and memory of a city.



## Conclusion

The three scenographic modes presented here show us how thinking landscape from a 'theatrical' point of view provides a rich base for discussing the role of landscape in contemporary society. We are far from a garden art in which the mastered expression of our plant world presents a unique and exclusive viewpoint. What these three distinct scenographic genres reveal is a significant lessening of the act of landscaping upon nature; each new example delivering unforeseen and different natures. There is the ironic nature of old railway lines, the emphatic nature of a simple inclined lawn and the comical nature of an event completely out of context. Yet, it would be difficult to confuse irony with pathos, pathos with comedy and comedy with irony, since each develops a different theme on our very idea of nature. The contemporary landscape is therefore, above all, the result of different juxtapositions and convergences. Out of these juxtapositions, a classic landscape tradition would have chosen the dominant one to produce a strong, clear interpretation of the site. Quite on the contrary, what emerges from these examples is a desire to seek

and reveal the multiple stratas: the physical strata of a terrain, strata of a past or of a present, in order to transform the potential of the place through the simultaneous cohabitation of meaning, interpretations and experiences. Ironically, this gesture of combining chance, of revealing convergences, errata and the scars of time, seemingly so contemporary, is in fact a gesture that is both antique and modern. One seems to hear the words of Paul Klee, "Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes visible [...] because the artist observes the things that nature places before his eyes with a penetrating gaze. And the deeper he penetrates, the easier it is for him to shift the viewpoint from today to yesterday, the more he is able to fix in his mind, in place of a defined image of nature, the unique, essential image, that of creation as genesis."<sup>12</sup> It is up to each one of us to recognize, decode and render visible the potential of each site, because in our contemporary landscapes, it is much less the allusion to a paradise lost that is key, than to refer ourselves to and accept the intrinsic characters of our contemporary nature.

- 1 Bruno Marchand, **Matiere d'Art, Architecture Contemporaine en Suisse**, Basel: Birkhauser Verlag, 2001 S.198.
- 2 The French philosopher Augustin Berque proposes with the 'écoumene', the interpretation of such a change: "This deployment of space from a certain place, is produced by each human endeavour; and namely the most general of all that is the 'écoumene'. Since the beginning of humanization it is human activity (physical and mental) that has brought the 'écoumene' out of the biosphere. It is this deployment of space that makes the 'écoumene' irreducible to the biosphere. The latter is only its substrate, its raw material. This question concerns the same principle as the Heideggerian 'Räumung'; to the materiality of the biosphere the 'écoumene' adds an immaterial dimension; which, in the same way as the space of the work of art, deploys the meaning of things beyond their material limits." Augustin Berque, **Entre Sauvage et Artifice, La Nature dans la Ville**, Lausanne: DA Information EPFL Ed., 1997, pp. 8–9.
- 3 "Richard Haag's park is therefore a critical work in the development of leisure landscape. It presents an ironic condition of play in the place of work, on the site of former industrial toxicants and in the shadow of archaic structures. If leisure is the antidote for work, this park also marks the change in our work environment. As the workplace becomes more like the proverbial garden-soft, landscape office parks – then leisure zones can become more hardedge in response." Susan Nigra Snyder, **Zones of Leisure**, Quaderns 196 (1992), pp. 52–79.
- 4 The planning of the parc around the large factory is the result of a collaborative work of the landscape architect of Peter Latz and Jörg Dettmar.  
 "The IBA is trying to find new uses for the old industrial structures. The Ruhr region contains a great many derelict industrial buildings, some now registered as historical monuments. These are being redeveloped as commercial, cultural, and leisure facilities, in an effort to find contemporary uses which also allow them to retain their industrial identity. Splendid constructions in their own right are being prepared for new use with only a minimum of alteration to the old fabric. A gas tank is filled with water and becomes home to a diving club. Youngsters are practising rock climbing on the concrete sides of a redundant furnace. International names have turned former industrial buildings into a design centre. Late at night, the landscape park Duisburg Nord fills with the voices and distant laughter of people disappearing on mysterious torch-lit guided tours of the former steel works, only dimly lit by Jonathan Park's coloured light installation."  
 Ingerid Helsing Almaas, **Regenerating the Ruhr**, The Architectural Review, (1999).  
 However, what does distinguish these two projects is the scale of the problem as well as the local habits for each of these sites. The Gas Works project is established on a limited site, whereas the Emscher Park acts on a massive scale. The problematics where so encompassing, from complex economic to environmental challenges, that a regional redevelopment approach named IBA was created. IBA is facing questions of repairing the severe environmental damage left behind by heavy mining industry while also designing urban communities of the future. One can say that the sites of Emscher Park were previously inaccessible to the public, a no man's land; whereas Gas Works Park is in Seattle, home to more shoreline coast and boats than any other American city. It was therefore entirely natural for the dwellers of Seattle to approach and adopt the industrial site as public access.
- 5 The general concept of the Park was developed by the planland/ÖkoCon team in 1995, and commissioned by GrünBerlin GmbH. The design of the raised paths is the work of the group of artists ODIIOUS.
- 6 This project, chosen in 1982 from among 1421 final entries, is the work of Maya Lin, a 22-year-old architecture student at Yale University. Maya Lin explains, "I thought about what death is, what a loss is. A sharp pain that lessens with the time, but can't quite heal over. A scar. The idea occurred to me on the site. As if you take a knife and cut open the earth, and with time the grass would heal it. [...] I wanted the names in chronological order because to honour the living as well as the dead, it had to be a sequence in time." Robert Campbell, **An Emotive Place Apart**, A.I.A. Journal May (1983), pp. 151.
- 7 A large bronze sculpture of valiant Vietnam combatants was added at the entrance of the main path leading to the steles. This bronze sculpture by Frederique Hart was unveiled in November 1984.
- 8 This work called 'Passages' by the artist Dani Karavan interprets the idea of memory and commemoration, as being an intensely human and physical effort combining the past, present and future. For the artist, "Benjamin's fate could be read in the elemental symbolic language of features in the natural landscape. He defined his task as one of making visible." Ingrid Scheurmann, "Coming Closer", in: Ingrid and Konrad Scheurmann Ed., **Hommage to Walter Benjamin**, Mainz: Verlag Phillip von Zabern, 1995, pp. 41, 42.
- 9 The Memorial aux Martyrs de la Déportation on the Ile-de-la cité in Paris was commissioned in 1961. Monumental despite being underground, it was conceived symbolically as a journey of initiation. Georges Henri Pingusson, **Le Monument aux Martyrs de la Déportation**, Constr. Mod. 1 (1963).
- 10 Winner of a competition launched by GrünBerlin in 1992, Christophe Girod, who was at the time a partner of Atelier Phusis, had to contend with a site weighed down by history. Since 1747 this site had been under military control. First of all under the command of Friedrich II who built there a military hospital and cemetery. In 1848 Joseph Lenné proposed a general plan for a park and promenade. In 1854, a column in memory of the revolution of 1848 was erected, as well as in 1869 a church for the military hospital 'Die Gnadenkirche'. These two monuments and the park were seriously damaged during the bomb raids of the Second World War. The site was one of the last major battle grounds between the Russians and the Germans troops. These two events have left such strong physical traces that the acidity of the soil has been permanently modified.
- 11 This site has a long history of change, which from the beginning has alternated between being a leisure space and a space of practical use: a landing area for the first Zeppelin (hence the name of the site), creation of a sport and leisure park in 1928, and its appropriation in 1933 for the huge Reichsparteitagsgelände project. Re-designed by Albert Speer, the Zeppelin Meadow was later renamed Zeppelinfeld. The first post-war transformation was almost immediate when in April 1945, on the occasion of a Victory Parade for the American troops, the giant golden swastika that dominated from the top of the main stand, was destroyed by a cannon blast. Centrum IndustrieKultur Nürnberg (Hrsg.), **Kulissen der Gewalt**, München: Hugendubel Verlag, 1992, pp. 156.
- 12 Paul Klee, **Das Bildnerische Denken: Schriften zu Form und Gestaltung**. Basel/Stuttgart: Benno Schwabe Verlag, 1956.