

Contested Terrain

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, there has been a resurgent interest in landscape within the fields of architectural and urban design. In 1997, the Graham Foundation sponsored a conference on "Landscape Urbanism," which centered around the idea that the techniques of landscape architecture could serve as tools for reviving deindustrialized urban spaces. At the same time, a number of high-profile architects began to explore the aesthetic potential of the ground. They designed buildings that grew out of the landscape, tessellating and folding to mimic the topography of the earth. Among the projects that exemplify this trend are Toyo Ito's Grin Grin Park in Fukuoka, Japan; Renzo Piano's Vulcano Buono shopping mall in Nola, Italy; and the Yokohama International Port Terminal in Yokohama, Japan designed by Foreign Office Architects. In the spring of 2009, Stan Allen organized a conference at Princeton University, entitled "Landform Building: Architecture's New Terrain," to examine both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical difficulties of this emerging architectural style. While these conferences, exhibitions, and building projects each had separate audiences and agendas, they nonetheless shared a common theme: shifting the focus of building design and urban planning from the figure to the ground.

This recent emphasis on reintegrating architecture and landscape has heightened the need for historical analysis of the forces that shaped our contemporary discourses and practices. While some argue that blurring the distinctions between building and ground opens up new possibilities for hybrid design practices, it may also exacerbate latent tensions between two distinct professions: architecture and landscape architecture. This tension comes to the forefront when one considers the ways in which buildings are integrated into (or isolated from) their immediate sites and surrounding landscapes. Whereas certain aspects of architectural production can be neatly compartmentalized within one profession or another, a building's relationship to its site relies on the structured coordination between several professionals, who each hold one piece of the larger puzzle. For this reason, I argue that *professional jurisdiction* is a critical frame for understanding the architecture/landscape divide. By juxtaposing theories of ground with the sociology of professions, I aim to provide a broader historical

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context for contemporary discussions of architecture and landscape design. Ultimately, the end product of this juxtaposition is a framework for future research that cuts across such diverse realms as technological innovation, public policy, and design education.

THEORIES OF GROUND

In his pioneering treatise, *De Architectura*, Vitruvius stated that the first principle for founding a city is the identification of “a very healthy site.” The Roman military engineer went on to suggest that this healthy site be “high, neither misty nor frosty, and in a climate neither hot nor cold, but temperate.”¹ Only after the proper site was found would the Romans imprint their cultural logics—the *pomerium*, *cardo-decumanus*, and *mundus*—onto the ground. Throughout the Renaissance and up until the late nineteenth century, this responsiveness to the contingencies of a particular site was fundamental to architectural practice. In the Middle Ages, the surface of the ground was an active medium in the design and construction of religious buildings. As several scholars of medieval construction practices have described, master masons would etch the geometries of the plan directly into the earth and use sophisticated systems of projection to construct the building from the ground up.² Even when the Industrial Revolution provided architects with technological advancements that made it possible to disengage their buildings from the earth, figures like Gottfried Semper insisted that architecture remain a grounded, material practice. In *The Four Elements of Architecture*, Semper described the “mound” as the architectural element that should negotiate the relationship between a building and its surrounding landscape.

Contemporary approaches to site bear little resemblance to these historical precedents. The poster that advertised the Landform Building conference at Princeton University noted that “some of today’s most innovative buildings no longer occupy a given site but instead construct the site itself.” During a public discussion with Mark Wigley at Columbia University in 2012, Peter Eisenman went so far as to question the common practice of visiting the site and conducting site analysis.

Why do you have to go see the site? I never thought you got anything from seeing sites, but that’s what they do. They have to go see the site. They take pictures of the site. They discourse on the site...When I take my students on a trip, we never go see the site. We go and see other things—anything but the site.³

Of course, not all contemporary architects and theorists share Eisenman’s ambivalence towards site. In fact, there is a significant movement within design scholarship and pedagogy towards regionalist and phenomenological approaches to site. In the 1980s, figures like Kenneth Frampton, Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre proposed critical regionalism as a method for synthesizing modern technology and local identity. Lucy Lippard further elaborated on these themes in her 1998 book, *Lure of the Local*. Additionally, the Norwegian architectural theorist, Christian Norburg-Schulz, advocated for a return to the Roman concept of *genius loci*, or “spirit of place.” However, these reactionary proposals underscore the fact that a transformation has indeed occurred within architectural production. They make arguments for approaches and considerations that were so embedded within the practices of previous societies that they did not even need to be stated. And the transformative hinge to which these studies inevitably point is the invention of Modernism.

The relationship between landscape and modern architecture has captured the attention of numerous historians and theorists. In his preface to the second edition of *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford lamented the fact that modern buildings are often designed without regard for their surrounding contexts.⁴ According to Carol J. Burns, the common practice of leveling site topography reflects the tendency of modern architects to conceive of sites as a *tabula rasae*, untouched by history or culture. She argues that “such clearing, conveying self-expression and the ‘heroic’ perception

of the modern architect as artist, attempts to conquer a territory completely in a single effort, precluding change, development, and all future planning.”⁵

While this critique of modern architecture’s ambivalence towards site is common, other scholars have interpreted the relationship quite differently. In his essay, “Human/Nature: Wilderness and the Landscape/Architecture Divide,” Joel Sanders argues that wilderness values guided the design of iconic modern houses like Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House and Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye. By elevating these houses off of the ground plane, Sanders posits that the architects intended to preserve the earth beneath, while, at the same time, framing views to the landscape beyond. Jeffrey Kipnis took this interpretation even further, arguing that the act of lifting the building off of the ground was politically motivated:

With modern architecture’s urge to democracy came perhaps its greatest experiment: to renovate profoundly the traditional relationship between building and ground. Recognizing classical architecture’s participation in a bond between power and land that dates back from feudal times, modern architecture sought the means to break that bond. Le Corbusier, for example, lifted his buildings into the air to return the land to free ground. If his idea today seems naïve, it and others like it set into motion a century of efforts to invent more poetic and psychological means by which architecture might truly disentangle buildings from land as an exercise of power.⁶

In this interpretation, Kipnis transforms the physical relationship between building and landscape into a symbol of political expression. His theory is undoubtedly informed by more recent experimental architectures that push this detachment even further, such as Archigram’s Walking City and John Hejduk’s architectural masques.

Despite the convincing poetic qualities of these interpretations, broad generalizations about the relationship between modern architecture and landscape simply do not stand up to further scrutiny. For every building or manifesto that celebrates architecture’s estrangement from landscape, a counter-example can also be identified. For instance, when asked about his prescription for a modern house, Frank Lloyd Wright responded, “First, a good site. Pick that one at the most difficult spot—pick a site no one wants—but pick one that has features making for character; trees, individuality, a fault of some kind in the realtor mind.”⁷ David Leatherbarrow has also challenged common clichés about the siteless character of modern architecture. In his book, *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology and Topography*, Leatherbarrow analyzed the relationship between building construction and conceptions of site through the work of three modern architects: Richard Neutra, Antonin Raymond, and Aris Konstantinidis. According to Leatherbarrow, each of their bodies of work displays a sophisticated interest in dissolving the barrier between architecture and landscape. In contrast to popular characterizations of modern architecture as “objectlike,” Leatherbarrow argues that during this period “the clear boundary between inside and outside was radically redefined, in order to develop a sense of uneven continuity that would both disintegrate the building as an object unto itself and reintegrate it into horizons that transcend it.”

This brief sketch of the discourses on landscape and site within architectural theory reveals unresolvable contradictions. Some scholars argue that modern architects envisioned their construction sites as blank canvases, while others argue the exact opposite. However, few of these writers contextualize their subjects of analysis within the context of broader society. Instead, they suggest that ideological frameworks alone explain the formal relationships between architecture and landscape. One of the most recent publications on the subject, Tomá Berlanda’s *Architectural Topographies: A Graphic Lexicon of How Buildings Touch the Ground*, exemplifies this decontextualized and ahistorical approach. Berlanda organizes the projects he discusses according to abstract themes, such as “gravity,” “anchoring,” and “clouds,” rather than chronology or geographical region. The resulting “lexicon” is entirely

captivating and useful for architects and students, but leaves much to be desired as a work of historical analysis. In order to fully understand the contemporary relationship between building and ground, one must consider the history of jurisdictional disputes that shaped the professions of architecture and landscape architecture.

PROFESSIONAL JURISDICTION

In his essay, “Changing Conceptions in the Sociology of the Professions,” Randall Collins discusses two distinct periods of scholarship on the role of professions within modern society: the classic and the revisionist. According to Collins, early examiners of professions, such as the American sociologist Talcott Parsons, focused on their horizontal, rather than hierarchical, organizational structure and the relative degree of autonomy that this structure granted to individual professionals.⁸ Additionally, these scholars of the “classic period,” which thrived between 1930 and 1960, described ideal models “towards which everything is evolving (or against which everything is judged).”⁹ In the mid-1960s, however, sociologists and cultural theorists began to revise these heroic theories of the classic period by emphasizing the ways in which professions use knowledge as an instrument of power.

Collins cites Harold Wilensky’s 1964 essay, “The Professionalization of Everyone?,” as a key turning point within the discourse. In this essay, Wilensky argues that in order for a field to become a profession, its practitioners must “[gain] control of their own training, admission to practice, and evaluation of standards of performance.”¹⁰ Once established through these procedures, professions can be used to obtain a privileged position within the labor market. Revisionist scholars of the 1960s and 1970s, many of whom were deeply influenced by Marxist perspectives, critically examined professions as “successful monopolies reaping the benefits of their market controls in the form of high incomes.”¹¹

The amount of power that professions actually wield within modern capitalist society is an issue still up for debate. Eliot Freidson, a major figure in the field, has emphasized the exclusionary mechanisms that professions construct within competitive markets. According to Freidson, the specialized knowledge that professionals possess is a source of power that can be used for either personal or public benefit. Elliot Krause, on the other hand, has challenged this common interpretation, arguing that the influence of professions actually declined during the second half of the twentieth century. In his book, *The Death of the Guilds*, Krause argues that the majority of power resides with capitalism and the state, rather than professional expertise. However, as Daniel Rossides has pointed out, Krause’s interpretation relies on the flawed assumption that professions are separable from the state and the structures of modern capitalism.¹² Magali Sarfatti Larson and Andrew Abbott have both suggested that a more likely threat to professional power is the competition between professions for jurisdiction on particular areas of expertise.

Andrew Abbott’s book, *The System of Professions*, is a seminal text on the issue of professional jurisdiction. Through a series of case studies, Abbott challenges the traditional conception of professionalization as an independent, linear process. The key premise of his argument is that professional development relies on the linkage between a profession and its work. Rather than thinking of professions developing in sequential stages—founding an organization, establishing educational pathways, requiring licensure, etc.—Abbott focuses on the ways in which a profession’s relationship to its work changes over time. He refers to this dynamic between professions and work as *jurisdiction*. Under this framework, competition between professions over certain aspects of practice is a critical driver of professional development.¹³

Abbott’s theory of jurisdiction provides a revealing framework for considering the professional development of architecture and landscape architecture. One of the most striking characteristics about textbooks on “architectural history” is the inclusiveness of their scope.

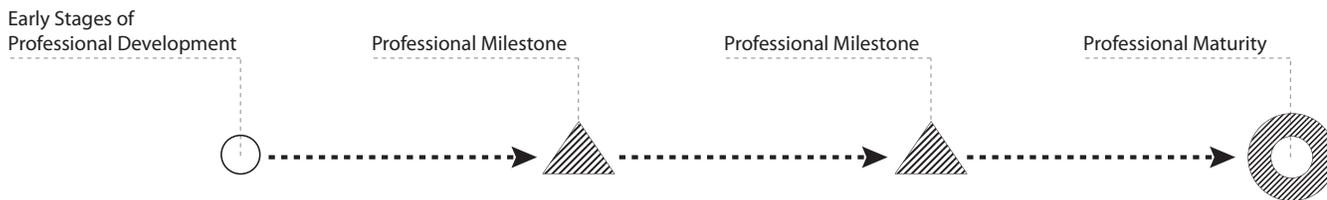
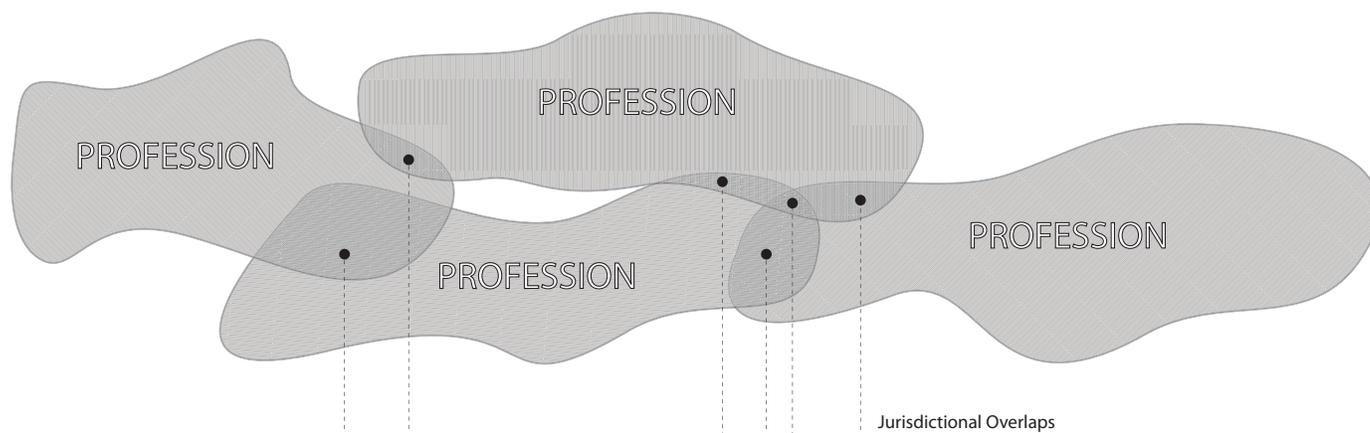


DIAGRAM OF JURISDICTIONAL OVERLAPS BETWEEN COMPETING PROFESSIONS



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These books portray architecture as an all-encompassing enterprise, which not only includes the design of buildings, but also the design of cities, infrastructures, and landscapes. Within their pages, the professional boundaries between architects and landscape architects (not to mention civil engineers and city planners) seem to disappear. This all-inclusive approach is not totally unfounded. Prior to the nineteenth century, distinctions amongst design professionals were nebulous and ill-defined. However, the forces of industrialization that swept across Europe and the United States during the nineteenth century necessitated a clearer distinction between professionals who devise plans for urban development and professionals who infill these larger frameworks with designs for individual buildings and green spaces.

Jurisdiction over the urban frame is not as straightforward as one might imagine. Certainly, city planners lay claim to the design of large urban areas; civil engineers, who specialize in the layout of sewers and roadways, also seem to be essential contributors. One might imagine that architects and landscape architects would accept the infrastructural plans developed by city planners and civil engineers and then focus their energies on infilling these urban frames. Yet, this has not always been the case. Many architects and landscape architects of the early twentieth century encroached on the professional territory of city planners and civil engineers by producing their own large-scale plans for urban development. Within the field of architecture, Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine* (1922) and *Ville Radieuse* (1924) exemplify this trend. The Olmsted Brothers, on the other hand, provide an example from the field of landscape architecture. In their proposals for parks systems in cities like Seattle and Cleveland, John Charles Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. went beyond the limited task of designing parks in order to create new forms of urban organization.

As the design professions came into formation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their shifting disciplinary boundaries often overlapped and intersected one another. American architects and civil engineers, for instance, were initially grouped together within a single professional body: the American Society of Civil Engineers and Architects. And, when city planners founded the American City Planning Institution in 1917, they elected

Figure 1: A conventional view of professionalization as a linear process.

ENDNOTES

1. *Vitruvius: Ten Books of Architecture*. Translated by M.H. Morgan. Book 1: Chapter IV, 17.
2. Paul Frankl, "The Secret of the Mediaeval Masons," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Mar., 1945), 46—60.
3. Eisenman, Peter and Mark Wigley. Columbia GSAAP, "Wobble: The Cat has Nine Lives." Last modified 2012. Accessed April 2, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu4-ErX6hDA>.
4. "The single building is but an element in a complex civic or landscape design. Except in the abstraction of a drawing or photography no building exists in a void: it functions as part of a greater whole and can be seen and felt only through dynamic participation with that whole. This seems to me to be a fundamental doctrine; but it has yet to be widely honored." Lewis Mumford, *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization*, 2nd Revised Edition (New York: Dover 1955). Mumford's critique of American architecture is perhaps even more relevant today than when he wrote it in 1955.
5. Carol Burns, "On Site: Architectural Preoccupations," 152.
6. Jeffrey Kipnis, *A Question of Qualities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 83.
7. Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Master Architect: Conversations with Frank Lloyd Wright*, ed. Patrick Joseph Meehan (New York: Wiley, 1984), 246.
8. Randall Collins, "Changing Conceptions in the Sociology of the Professions" in *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State, and Strategy* ed. Rolf Torstendahl and Michael Burrage (New York: Sage Publications, 1990), 12.
9. Collins, 16.
10. Collins, 13.
11. Collins, 13—14. While he was not nearly as invested in the project of Marxist criticism, Eliot Freidson's writings on professions nonetheless concur with the revisionist emphasis on power. According to Freidson, professions should be understood as dynamic, fluid entities that arise through political persuasion, rather than out of necessity.
12. Daniel Rossides, *Profession and Disciplines: Functional and Conflict Perspectives* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 41.
13. Andrew Abbot, *The System of Professions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 20..
14. *Landform Building: Architecture's New Terrain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University School of Architecture, 2011), 45.
15. Kenneth Frampton, "Reflections on the Autonomy of Architecture: A Critique of Contemporary Production," in *Out of Site: A Social Criticism of Architecture* ed. Diane Ghirardo (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 17.

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., a prominent landscape architect, to serve as the organization's first president. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, American architectural and urban production was characterized by jurisdictional competition and the slippage of disciplinary boundaries. By the mid-1930s, however, these boundaries had become more or less solidified, with some professions clearly tied to the operations of the growing nation-state and others providing services to the private sector.

Contemporary architects and landscape architects admit to a fair amount of insecurity about the status of their disciplines and the roles they play within the dynamics of architectural and urban development. Michael Jakob addressed this topic during a panel discussion at the Landform Building conference: "Landscape architecture has no real tradition. This may not be very politically correct to say, but it has no real tradition or history. Most landscape architects don't know their own tradition the way architects know theirs."¹⁴ Architects, of course, have their own insecurities about their position within the matrix of modern capitalist development. In an essay published in 1991, Kenneth Frampton lamented the fact that architects are involved in "only twenty percent of the total built output in developed societies."¹⁵ This percentage is likely even lower today. Unable to convince private and public institutions of the value their services bring to a project, architects often find themselves on the sidelines as passive spectators to the design of buildings and cities.

These contemporary anxieties point to an uncertainty about the linkage between each profession and its respective field of work. Were the professions of landscape architecture and city planning formed around a completely new array of skills and specialized knowledge? Or did these new professions overtake areas of expertise that had traditionally existed within the realms of architecture and civil engineering? These questions, which cut to the core of the architecture/landscape divide, remain largely unanswered even today. What is clear is that the all-encompassing architect described in Vitruvius' pioneering treatise has been replaced by an ensemble of distinct professionals, who each lay claim to certain aspects of the built environment. Studying the ways in which knowledge was codified and distributed across these professions reveals the lasting effects of jurisdictional disputes within the fields of architecture and landscape design.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary discussions of the relationship between architecture and landscape are often undermined by shifting viewpoints and destabilized terminologies. Instinctively, many critics and theorists will turn to the past for some historical grounding of the architecture/landscape divide. I argue that professional jurisdiction provides a rich framework for historical analysis of the relationship between building and ground. How did professionalization alter the task of integrating a building into its immediate site and surrounding landscape? How did architects and landscape architects accept, challenge or subvert these changes to project management? What role did education play in solidifying or blurring distinctions between professions? These questions define a trajectory for future research aimed at uncovering forgotten histories of professional jurisdiction. In the very moment that contemporary theorists are speculating on the possibility of hybridized design practices, I contend that we must also reflect upon the ways in which professionalization contributed to a split between architecture and landscape. Without this knowledge of the past, we can only have a partial and incomplete vision for the future of practice.