Landscape machines: productive nature and the future sublime
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Abstract
Design and research in landscape design have yet to be balanced into a fine triad of theory, method and practice. Many practitioners worry that such academic seriousness may weaken the imaginative aspects of landscape design. Their trouble reveals a typical weakness in contemporary landscape architecture that somehow limits the understanding of design to an intersubjective acceptance of artistic patterns that celebrate a characteristic visual eloquence. In such cases, landscape design is limited to a symbolic representation of a wished-for world. This is, however, not helpful when dealing with the most fundamental necessities of landscape performance. When food production is not a mere urban fashion to redeem false consumerism and waste treatment is not only woven like a sustainable fig-leaf, landscape processes are needed to provide for human increase. Design research is facing real and annoying uncertainties because science is not as advanced as we hoped. We know only a little about dynamic landscape processes and all the inherent chemical interconnections. We take only very little advantage of surging winds, erosion regularities or wild animal behaviour. Instead we have adapted our design principles to essentially static and closed systems that provide a maximum of features is the challenge for a new generation of landscape architects. We must have been very doubtful and distrustful of the landscape regulated by natural or divine processes working with or against their wishes. From this, many routines and techniques have been developed during ages of living between plenty and disaster: watching the sky form clouds, watching the birds fly low, looking at the colour of leaves and roots to test any intervention with nature’s periodicity (Strenke & Koh 2010). Many of these rituals have not only enriched agricultural productivity but have established the culture of agriculture and thereby provided the foundations of culture in general. Unfortunately most of these interesting socio-biological rituals have been depreciated by the introduction of agrarian machines, industrial fertilizers and large-scale greenhouses. Agriculture in the Western world is at the moment hardly natural at all; it is a highly artificial method to increase food production, the scientific community (e.g., the Stockholm Resilience Centre, Rockström, et. al. 2009) agrees that no more land should be assigned to due to the need to give space to natural ecosystems. We are approaching a tipping point of climatic instability because of the disruption of several important life processes described as planetary boundaries. Scientists again seem to be embracing a kind of Gaia theory that oceans, soil, biodiversity and chemical cycles are interdependent and that each of them has its own specific safe zone in which they are resilient but beyond which they will be irreversibly damaged (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 1972). We need land to grow new rain forests, wetlands and other large-scale landscape types that are part of the regulating system of life. It is predicted that the percentage of land assigned to food production will be reduced by 8-20 percent by 2050 due to land degradation, urban expansion and the use of agricultural land for the cultivation of non-food crops such as biofuels. Within the same period, yields will be reduced by 5-25 percent due to climate change, soil erosion, increases of pathogen, weed and insect infestations and water scarcity (McMullen & Hanay 2009).

Landscape architecture today is scarcely concerned with pressing agricultural issues – is that wisdom or neglect? The profession seems to derive most of its content and motivation from leisure places that provide comfort. Farming gradually became the necessary nuisance associated with large-scale monofunctional arable fields, widespread animal diseases that endanger human health, excessive use of fertilizers that endanger water quality and biodiversity, massive extraction of precious ground water and vast animal skulls dominating the landscape. Even nature developers are reluctant to seek alliance with farmers, preferring leisure industry partners. Over the last two decades, probably the most dominant force regulating landscape development has been the nature-leisure coalescence: “What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself” (Barthes 1970). Barthes describes a public that is interested in its own projected desires and all the disportionated beautifications that are needed to maintain the projection; the moment landscapes become dead- ly and temporarily chaotic this audience will complain to the store managers that the product does not live up to what was promised. The problem with a fixed landscape is the amount of Boten needed to maintain its everlasting youth.

In many cases, landscape architects are nowadays called upon to express the narrative and symbolic richness of landscapes. The landscape architect could easily become the esteemed biology teacher / archaeologist, enthusiast and adventurer about his field and revealing what remains hidden to most of the general public. What exactly is the use of a design of landscapes? Is it to express what has happened or to express what will happen? Are landscape architects mainly expressing what is already happening in terms of landscape evolution? What reasons could they have to change the course of landscape’s evolution? If we consider parts of the landscape as living landscapes – besides the obvious museum pieces of landscape we want to keep as cultural reference points – we could consider readjusting their mechanics and inherent mutable abilities to facilitate a larger production of fresh air, clean water, healthy soils and energy accumulation. For designers who are interested in productive landscapes such as agricultural fields, brownfield sites, garbage dumps and water treatment plants, should be able to benefit directly from living mechanisms instead of imitating them in high-maintenance copies.

An encouraging thought for such designers is to imagine how early farmers must have been very doubtful and distrustful of the landscape that each of them has its own specific safe zone in which they are resilient but beyond which they will be irreversibly damaged (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 1972). We need land to grow new rain forests, wetlands and other large-scale landscape types that are part of the regulating system of life. It is predicted that the percentage of land assigned to food production will be reduced by 8-20 percent by 2050 due to land degradation, urban expansion and the use of agricultural land for the cultivation of non-food crops such as biofuels. Within the same period, yields will be reduced by 5-25 percent due to climate change, soil erosion, increases of pathogen, weed and insect infestations and water scarcity (McMullen & Hanay 2009).

Landscape architecture today is scarcely concerned with pressing agricultural issues – is that wisdom or neglect? The profession seems to derive most of its content and motivation from leisure places that provide comfort and healthy environments for increasingly stressed people, including a more symbolic representation of landscapes than extending landscape processes, do not entail a realistic concern with agriculture. Especially in the Netherlands, the dramatic post-1950 changes of rapid urbanisation, resource extraction and increasing social benefits have resulted in an ever-increasing demand for leisure and comfort. Farming graduatedly became the necessary nuisance associated with large-scale monofunctional arable fields, widespread animal diseases that endanger human health, excessive use of fertilizers that endanger water quality and biodiversity, massive extraction of precious ground water and vast animal skulls dominating the landscape. Even nature developers are reluctant to seek alliance with farmers, preferring leisure industry partners. Over the last two decades, probably the most dominant force regulating landscape development has been the nature-leisure coalescence: “What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself” (Barthes 1970). Barthes describes a public that is interested in its own projected desires and all the disportionated beautifications that are needed to maintain the projection; the moment landscapes become dead-ly and temporarily chaotic this audience will complain to the store managers that the product does not live up to what was promised. The problem with a fixed landscape is the amount of Boten needed to maintain its everlasting youth.

Introduction
This article is the sequel to Rural Landscape Anatomy (Roncken 2006) in which the relationship between design and agriculture was discussed as part of the discipline of landscape architecture. The previous article introduced some landscape designs that focused on realistic involvements by the owners, the managers and the investors to create new rural landscapes. The main message was that a living landscape could not be the projection of an urban desire to compensate for all the experiences that a city cannot provide, because such a projection also implies the bandwidth of aims and concepts that are defined within the urban realm. The discussion of alternative types of landscape design was presented in the previous article and will be revisited in this article:

A wake-up call for productive landscapes
Have you ever browsed the Internet searching for images of landscapes? And did you ponder on the collection of bright blue skies, sunny grasslands, magnificent trees, splashing waterfalls, mirror lakes, beautiful and almost toy-like animals, windmills, barns, castles, solitary villas, stone walls and wooden fences in well-managed gardens that your search terms produced? Human-built structures are part of this random and probably deeply collective image of landscapes, revealing fortunate and highly controlled circumstances and mostly solitary experiences within a perfected decorum (Waitt 1997); the sublime is no different from the beautiful, and every landscape in this selection resembles a painting.

But designers know that such landscapes are like the pandas, gorillas and polar bears that are effectively used as symbols by nature conservation organisations. A real problem with such symbolic images of landscape is the preoccupation with its projected appearance. French writer Roland Barthes mentioned an important marker of contemporary mythologies: “What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself.” (Barthes 1970). Barthes describes a public that is interested in its own projected desires and all the disportionated beautifications that are needed to maintain the projection; the moment landscapes become deadly and temporarily chaotic this audience will complain to the store managers that the product does not live up to what was promised. The problem with a fixed landscape is the amount of Boten needed to maintain its everlasting youth.

Productive nature / contemporary landscape architecture / the sublime / design education / design research
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It is a matter of a more or less involuntary imaginative exploration within a sublime process that especially distinguishes it from the expe-
rience of beauty. The inquiry through fantasy or imagination to gain in-
terpretation and instinctive awareness, aspects that are needed to gain a farm-
ner’s perspective.

...the sublime process we do not picture a type of beauty that ex-
presses a divine or eternal timeless frame of awareness. Experience of the sub-
lime, as defined by its most extensive examinations (Arthur, Longino, & Wilson 2010; Burke 1977, second edition; Kant 1790 [1843]; Wieland 1957) points to the understanding of aesthetics as block any demanding or negative form of ex-
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ner’s perspective.

In some recent student work, nature and leisure meet to re-establish a lost experience between consumers and down-to-earth food production. The effectiveness lies more on the mental plane, aiming to ac-
tivate awareness and consciousness of lost multisensory experiences. However, they do coincide with an equally sympathetic critique of the visual and formal landscape architecture discourses that have alienated us from nature and the natural world.

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ner’s perspective.

When considering productive landscapes, we deal with serious issues that could affect mankind and life on this planet very rapidly. The first im-
agination of what a landscape architect does by some who are not famil-
iliar with this profession is a tinsel exciting that these people actual-
ly can affect the environment and change the way we think about the 
earth and how they commute, what they consume, and whom they
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But these are not the kinds of machines or landscapes that are envisioned by the case studies. These landscape machines are hopeful and curious, they are neither machines with fixed parts that only produce one thing repetitively nor are they made of metals and plastics and suchlike materials. They are made of landscape features and are driven by landscape processes, and in the meantime they produce a multitude of food products, natural biotopes, clean air, clean soils and so on. They might resemble parts of the Dutch landscape, which could be considered a giant laboratory to test various interventions that relate to the control of water.

The difference between the currently dominant nature-leisure landscape and a landscape machine is the priority of the latter for landscape services not only to protect and understand nature but also to feed those processes that sustain nature’s resilience and thereby harvest all the by-products and spin-off effects that we need as human beings. In this way we can both create new types of nature reserves and harvest a vast range of new agricultural products. If we could stop longing for real-time landscape paintings repeating clichéd images (Cordell 1993), we could then explore new landscapes and evolutionary processes that demanded the utmost of our intellect and our biotechnological capacity to maintain and nurture.

Some principles for landscape machines

We will exemplify the relevance of landscape machines in relation to such important issues as climate change, energy scarcity and food production, waste treatment and the creation of complex landscape types such as islands. The interdisciplinary design and research teams involved did not intend to design machines that could be reproduced and transported but rather machines that were site-specific and therefore authentic. Two main aspects can define a landscape machine: for one, its identification as ‘machine’ should be taken quite literally. These are machines that have a certain material input and output and are driven by a critical amount of energy input. For example, in the estuaries of the south-west Netherlands landscapes machines can be related to water, salt, sediments and surplus nutrients as input, and clean water, food, blue energy and silted-up lands as output. Their fuels are solar energy, enabling photosynthesis, providing heat, and tidal forces influenced by the moon. The rationale behind the design includes coastal defense, sustainable fisheries and agriculture and nature development goals. (Fig. 1)

Secondly, the natural processes within the landscape machine are continuously interfering with each other and therefore affecting the type, shape, size and position of the resulting landscape components. The landscape machine is evolving through interaction with physical, chemical and ecological processes. Its mechanical components are natural processes or the specific behaviour of flocks of animals that themselves are affected by on-going events. This implies that parts of the machine may fade out or even vanish and that new functional parts may come into being. The landscape changes, the machine changes, but the input does not change. A key difference between conventional farmland and a landscape machine is that succession is not prevented in the latter.

The interaction between the living components and an (artificially) introduced material input can result in a cleaning process or food production or creation of a much more complex landscape structure, and may have an unpredictable or unintended output. In evaluating the efficiency of this landscape we must consider both the intended and unintended output, because this exactly defines the difference between a hard-cast machine and a landscape machine. What may seem to be unspecified and unintended at a certain moment may re-appear into something relevant. This is the miracle and efficiency inherent in natural processes, a survival strategy that results in an adaptation of the non-relevant parts into the relevant parts of processes. For now this is only a theoretical possibility, one that should be tested and monitored in [landscape] laboratory situations and pilot cases.

All of these landscape machines act according to an order of process. There is a certain moment that can be considered the start of initiation. Until a certain stage in subsequent years, the design researchers will be able to foresee the developments that will take place and how this will affect a machine’s characteristics. They interpret this as a desired type of development of the machine that will enhance its richness, diversity and interactions to a degree that no intentional design could achieve. The development will follow the sequences of interacting processes (including changes in biodiversity), optimised material cycles and increasing energy efficiency. During the succession, all transformations are either foreseen or should essentially be considered as a positive contribution to both the functioning of the machine and the spatial and aesthetic appearances, resulting in a changing landscape. The monitoring of inputs/outputs that are essential to the productivity of the machine will probably provide the indicators for thresholds to judge whether or not the machine has evolved into a landscape that is either transitory or fairly stable.

The knowledge and practical experience that is needed to study and design such machines is essentially multidisciplinary and could well benefit from accompanying experiential learning methods. No singular expert will understand the whole process or can fully predict what will happen in the newly initiated landscapes. Interdisciplinary vocabulary, collective uncertainty and curiosity will have to be managed if these are to produce models, prototypes and dynamic relation schemes that can be tested. Landscape design, ecology, and engineering are involved, but stakeholders could just as easily include livestock experts, hydrologists and plant scientists – a typical mix of the experts to be found in the life-science universities, where crossover sciences are in growing demand.

Examples of landscape machines: Dredge Landscape Park – the story is in the soil (de Vries & Herrebout 2007) (Fig. 2)

Polluted dredge has been accumulating in the water system of the Dutch delta since the 1970s and is causing a drainage and environmental problem. The need to take out the dredge will escalate because of climate change and growing urbanisation. The current solution is to store the polluted dredge in [earthwork] deposits that do not clean the pollution but at best conceal it. In this design most of the polluted dredge will be
There are three main types of pollution: heavy metals, organic pollution and a mixture of both. Heavy metals are the most difficult to treat; they cannot be dissolved and will persist. Purification consists of separation and storage of the metals, partly by means of vegetation extraction. If metals are bounded by peat or clay, additional salt water and oxygen can be used for the separation process.

Organic pollution is relatively easy to clean by land-farming, spreading this type of dredge thinly over a large area. Oxygen and bacteria supplied by vegetation that is well rooted in the dredge are able to break down the organic material. Such a process will take approximately seven years.

A mix of pollution is a challenge. If enough oxygen is added to disinfect the organic matter, the heavy metal could meanwhile be flushed with the residue water – something that needs to be avoided. Using a lot of salt water could seriously hamper the vegetation’s chances to grow well rooted. This type of pollution needs to be treated in sub-sequential steps using a diversified system of various types of water: salt, brackish and fresh. This diversification can be used to express the complexity of the system and the coinciding complexity of the natural systems that are needed in the cleaning process. (Figs. 4, 5)

Creating a large park is mostly a problem of finding a balance between investment and revenue and is not unlikely to lead to an essentially undesired amount of urban development ["red pays for green"] within the park structure. By reducing the waterway pollution of a great many municipalities, the revenue of investing in a cleaning method that is at the same time a public park could well be found. Another revenue is the surplus of clean sand that is necessary to raise the unsuitable peat soils for urban and industrial development in the Dutch delta region. The resulting landscapes are, however, not necessarily attractive in the classical sense of a park, stereotypically featuring trees, meadows and pathways. The necessary biological, geological and ecological functions that normally dictate Dutch landscape design are new subordinated to the cleaning process, creating new types of biotopes and ecological relationships and new sublime sensations. (Figs. 6, 7, 8, 9)
Theoretically this scale of pollution could be treated in 10 years, but it would take a large quantity of land to simultaneously treat it this quickly, and the growth of vegetation would only suit fast growing species. According to this densely populated area and landscape type, the designers have therefore set the time/area coefficient to 20 years/300 ha.

Examples of landscape machines: Saline Landscapes

This project evolved from a classic design assignment to implement an object in the landscape. In this case the object was a newly developed fish farming pond in a closed cycle of food, nutrients and by-products. The rather small industrial scale and the fact that it only consisted of one test farm challenged the designers to expand this innovation to the scale of a landscape machine. The given location for the project is the Dutch island of Noord-Beveland in the province of Zeeland, which is very famous for its agricultural land use and its relationship to the sea. The current economical situation of this province is partly based on crop farming that is dependent on fresh water and on tourism concentrated on the western coastlines. A contemporary and future scenario would be to adapt to the increasing intrusion of salt water while maintaining or even increasing productivity and profit, simultaneously with an expansion of recreational interest to other parts of the island by embracing historical features and scenery. Conventional farming is under huge pressure and seems to be contrary to any of these demands. There seems to be a much stronger tendency towards nature development in combination with recreational expansion – the nature-leisure coalition. (Figs. 10, 11)

The first design enlargement consisted of a collective of aquaculture farms that are part of a bigger system closing material and nutrient cycles, related to the nearby sea and the fresh water catchment areas. A positive aspect of this enlargement to landscape features is the possibility to introduce a triple dyke system containing two rows of ‘inlagen’ (low lands buffering salt water intrusion) that both protect the land from the sea and provide an essential component within the new production system. (Figs. 12, 13)

Within the research team there was agreement that the social acceptance of future landscapes would probably increase once inland saline nature compensation areas were allowed to be productive as aquaculture. The designers therefore decided to decompose the components of the new fish breeding technique. By this method they could both investigate enlargements of the industrial-scale elements and possible ways of using the natural processes and their relationship with the historical geography and recreational potential of Zeeland.

Saline productive landscape seems to be the only possibility for a large part of the Dutch delta. There is much resistance within Zeeland society (and the regional government) against nature compensation on lands that are well suited for agrarian means. Four Dutch parliament commissions have so far failed to address this problem effectively. Unless we focus on a combination of landscape development and profitable saline agriculture this impasse will persist.

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This type of new agrarian landscape can thus have six functions:
- food production with a minimum of input
- reduction and possibly even elimination of waste production
- production of various types of agrarian products: fish, algae, cockles, ragworms, mussels, etc.
- protecting the land from water threats
- appealing to a broad audience and adapting to historic features in the landscape
- containing new types of ecosystems and enriching local biodiversity [Figs. 14, 15]

The second design enlargement further enhances the landscape machine with subtle intentions. This time the landscape machine is even more responsive to a dynamic and open system besides the regulated agricultural systems within the former enlargement. The location is related to the political discussion about nature compensation due to the shipping routes to Antwerp articulated in the 2005 Schelde Verdrag border treaty between Belgium and the Netherlands (Vlaanderen, & Nederland. 2005). Six hundred hectares of nature compensation have to be allocated, again causing considerable political and social upheaval. With this landscape machine, both the nature values and the agricultural demands by the owners can be met, creating a landscape that will be accessible to visitors who seek to experience new authentic delta landscapes. (Figs. 16, 17, 18)

Discussion: the future sublime of landscape architecture research
Both the dredge landscape machine and the saline landscape machine convincingly conceptualise and visualise a yet-unexplored combination of nature development and agricultural production, and neither example seeks to create a costly and almost unmanageable large park or some pre-determined ecological list of biotopes dedicated to almost-extinct species. Both designs reveal a new optimistic hands-on approach to accelerate the potentials that are present in both nature and our century-long tradition of enhancing natural processes. Monofunctional landscapes have proven to be disruptive to life-sustaining processes despite the so-called ‘green revolution’ initiated by Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug (Borlaug 1970).

We have yet to find a second green revolution that can provide for the incredible rise in human population and cope with the inconceivable changes in our planetary equilibrium. Landscape machines could play a crucial role in this second green revolution because they are not monofunctional but rather many things at the same time that harvest food and energy and process our waste while also enhancing the intricate interconnectivity of the planet’s life support systems such as forests, wetlands, saline landscapes, floral meadows and possibly even deserts. Preserving these landscapes is from now on not the exclusive task of nature preservation but should be part of landscape creation, which includes agricultural and its rich new routines to make the difference between harvest and disaster.
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