08. DIFFERENCE

One

The objects and processes with which landscape architects design, change through time. A key concept when considering this is that of difference, developed by Deleuze in his *Difference and Repetition* of 1968. Difference relates the notion of emergence to the idea that everything that exists always becomes and never is. The changing dynamics of the natural, the social and the urban worlds can all be conceived as things differing continually from and in themselves. The human beings who encounter this unfolding difference in the world are also continually differing from themselves. We have, therefore, a becoming different of many diverse conditions, so that each encounter between these conditions is a novel encounter – unscripted, unpredicted and always open to further novelty. Deleuze does not mean by difference that some things are dynamic and ever-changing and some other thing – a substratum, underneath it all – persists, or remains identical to itself. The concept of difference does not entail a version of the one and the many, a multiplicity that bodies forth from an unchanging unity (be that God, self, nation or nature). Instead there is only difference. Everything is transforming itself – recreating itself – all the time. All things are engaged in an ongoing genesis of themselves. It is important to understand that morphogenetic processes produce the conditions of the here and now, and that it is these local processes that landscape architects deal with when designing open systems such as urban precincts, waterfronts, parks and other constructed landscapes.

Two

The great beauty of this theorizing of change is that designers no longer have to ask what something is. Instead, and this is echoed by both Latour and Serres, the questions become "Where ...?" or "How …?" or "When …?" or "How many …?" or "In which case …?" or "Under what conditions …?", or (mobilizing our own human enframement) "From what viewpoint …?" In other words it extends the exhortations of Allen, Corner and others who draw on Deleuze, to find out what things do rather than how they look. "How does this urban stream silt the flood plane? When?" "How many species of fauna inhabit this edge condition? Under what conditions does the species count change?" "From what viewpoint do these residents consider this tract of open undeveloped terrain to be waste land?" People, birds, soils, trees are not understood as having identities or essences. "Things are constituted by virtue of the differential relations they enter into, both internally and in relation to other things" (Patton 1994: 152). Change and difference, then, are not simply happening *out there*. Nature is in constant flux and humans are part of this flux. Human activity contributes as much to the development - the self-differentiation - of nature as nature does to human development. Thus, human beings are in a constant state of productive practice: the production of the concrete, physical open-ended world understood as a composition of forces in which other forces (including us) are always intervening, contributing and participating.

Three

The world, that is, what is given to us in experience, is a difference-driven process. Many phenomena, in geology, biology, economics and social theory - whatever - emerge from the interplay of differences. Matter itself processes its own imminent resources for the generation

of form. Material systems are continually traversed by strong flows of matter and energy, and it is these flows that enable systems to self-organize. The field of our endeavors as landscape architects, then, is a spatio-temporal aggregation of people and things that are continually being brought into relation with each other. In his discussion of affect in the *Ethics* the 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza suggests that humans are always seeking to combine their relations with others in order to empower and enrich their capacity to become themselves. We get better at this by developing our capacity to relate our feelings, conduct and intentions to different modes of being. The tasks of the landscape architect are both to develop milieux that enable this to occur in multiple ways, and to present different modes of becoming to all members of the republic of organic and mineral life. The landscape architect is engaged in a continuous experimental process of composing or constructing qualitatively different modes of existence and relating them to each other.

Four

An especially critical aspect of the concept of difference, and the ongoing self-differentiation of things, is its overturning of the representational order of being. Plato initiated this order with his Theory of Forms that sought to understand the world as a copy of an ideal "heaven" in which the true forms of things dwelled. The worldly idea of beauty, for instance, could only be understood with reference to the ideal form of beauty. Courage in a human being was a copy of the ideal model of courage, and so on. This model-copy theory has characterized most thinking about how we know and value things since Plato's time. The notion that things self-differentiate does not require the model-copy order. Instead all things simply become different from themselves on the basis of the matter-energy flows that course through them. A particularly interesting aspect of Plato's theory was what he called the simulacrum. This was the case of the bad copy, or the copy of the copy of the model. The person who pretends to be courageous, for instance, to serve their own ends, rather than to serve the ideals of courage – rather than copying courage.

Five

Deleuze argues that the simulacrum destabilizes the reign of representation. The simulacrum exists in and of itself, without grounding in or reference to a model: its existence is "unmediated" (Deleuze 1994: 29). Each simulacrum is its own model. This analysis helps us reframe or reinterpret "artificial" landscape conditions such as a culverted or canalized river. The Los Angeles River, for instance, can be thought of as not a "not-river." That is to say, a natural river system is not a model that the LA River imperfectly copies; the LA River is not a river that is "in error" or "inferior" to a natural river system. Understood as a simulacrum the LA River exists in and of itself as a condition to which a range of attributes and functions can be ascribed in terms only of the performative parameters of the canalized river itself. (Do not ask what it is, but how it works …) Once we depart from the model-copy dialectic, we can begin not only to reinterpret, reanalyze and revalue the Los Angeles River as a functioning system in its own right, but we can also focus more clearly on its capacities. In this way, considering it as a prosthesis or artificial device, we can address inadequacies with respect to its own productivity as an organizational and distributive regime. We should attend more precisely to the becoming-different of the prosthesis itself. We should affirm, rather than negate, its individual condition.

Six

The model-copy dialectic occasions a profound delimiting of the power of the prosthesis to inhabit and reorganize the forces with which it deals. If the LA River is regarded as a unity, as an entity that achieves and embodies a static condition it is very difficult to understand it as a process that continuously differs from itself in multiple ways. The denial of difference implies an a priori conceptualization, a telos, a meaning, and through these a logic of landscape architectural practice that crushes open practice under an image of the same, or similar, and betrays what it means to practice openly. Any kind of modeling of nature enters the orbit of the simulacrum. This is the problem, as yet seemingly not addressed, with biomimicry, which seeks to use nature as a model for design solutions. Biomimicry asks for any design problem, "What would nature do?" and then seeks a solution based on an animal or plant. This apartment building models a termite mound; this one is like a wasp's nest. In nature, however (wherever that is), a kingfisher is not like a mussel. The termite is not like the dolphin. Faced with a piece of unpalatable urban territory the model/copy landscape architect says "revegetate." Make it like nature.

Seven

Part of the point of emergence theory is to get away from the "re-," from the model/copy enslavement. The notion that things self-differentiate does not require the model/copy order. Biomimicry asks us to accept a representation of nature projected through the models and codes of science. Should planet Earth be neatly divided by science into two types of being, two types of knowledge, and two kinds of reality? As suggested in Naturecultures, the problem of science has been how to represent nature to social beings. Landscape architecture joined in the game: its problem was how to construct a world for humans from the realm of objects. Nonhumans were not regarded as part of the collective for which landscape architects worked. Are we not trying to find an alternative to this, the two-world problem that biomimicry supports? Considering the world as a natureculture assemblage enables us to communicate in terms of a single republic of humans and nonhumans, instead of a continual transmission back and forth across a dividing line. Andrea Brennan writes:

> Biomimicry re-enforces an overly-simplistic distinction between "nature" *over there* and us [humans, designers, architects, etc.] *over here*. If you read between the lines, the over-arching assumption is that "nature" is pure and logical and balanced and good and we are, well, somewhere in between *not* and *less so*, depending on your personal environmental politics. The implication is that as humans, we are flawed; therefore, we ought to look to "nature," the ultimate teacher, in an effort to understand and replicate the "right" [i.e. "natural"] way of doing things…you know, all of the things we have ignored and overlooked over the past few hundred years of our mis-guided modernity.
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> (Brennan 2010)

Eight

Perhaps the most interesting parallel between biomimicry and emergence theory is to be found in the application of its principles to the development of new urban systems. It is important not to see the city as *like* an ecosystem. A city *is* an ecosystem, or a set of them (if we wish to see a city as anything other than a city). This way we can start to work with what cities already offer. We can respect them for what they are, and find in their perverse and ambivalent processes the conditions that, through careful and informed intervention, can become different from what they are. Even from this perspective, however, it is difficult to use biomimicry as a model, a measure or a mentor. The Biomimicry Institute says that the key to using the biomimicry taxonomy is forming a question. Instead of using high pressure and temperatures to manufacture tough, lightweight building materials, an engineer can "ask" a toucan how it manages impact with its strong, light beak.

Nine

The problem is readily provoked when turned into a landscape architectural challenge. How would nature formulate some unproductive, ambiguous terrain (regarded as "wasteland") under an elevated freeway into a habitable urban landscape that connects two disparate parts of the city? How would nature remodel this homeless people's campsite into a terrain that does not patronize or marginalize them, much less remove them, at the same time as enabling opposing social forces to negotiate and collectivize it? How would nature marshal and activate new orders of communication here? How would nature deal with this territory, which is so denatured, so ambivalent, so *institutionalized*, that it cannot be discovered "in nature?"

Ten

Thinking of design as already ethical, already inhabited by a moral purpose highlights a concern we should have that this conception of design – as a force for good – is in the service of political and moral forces that themselves require examination. These forces lead us away from design as a practice that responds to its unmediated encounter with the world, a practice that must create openly in order to cope with the violence and force of these encounters, their randomness and disorder. Design should be seen not as a bearer of moral purpose but as a self-engendering act of creation. This is design without image, without purpose. How should such design operate in the world?