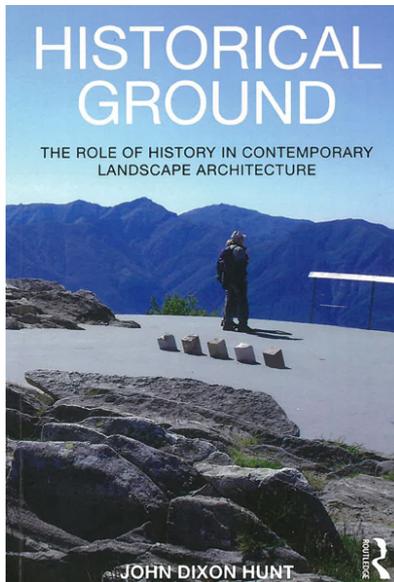


Historical Ground: The Role of History in Contemporary Landscape Architecture

Autor: John Dixon Hunt

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English-born John Dixon Hunt is an internationally renowned expert in the study of landscapes. His book 'Historical Ground' advocates the idea that history of a particular site may be invoked and used in a new intervention. Hunt informs future designers to place importance on history as a driver for design rather than a modernist approach that ignores the past and a sense of locality.

'Historical Ground' details a collection of existing landscape architecture designs and ideology reflecting Hunt's studies of continuously changing landscapes and their relationship with the past. The beginning of the book explains how geology, typography and the weathering features can provide natural history markers in a design process. 'The Geological Observatory' in Cardada Switzerland is an example that explores geology through local rock strata formations that are directly embedded in the design. The book then discusses the broader theme of the history of people to place. Some examples included are 'Parc André Citroën' in Paris and 'Invalidenplatz' in Berlin. The examples used from the United States and Europe show the designers' intentions of revealing historical connection and how individuals apply their own personal account of history to a location. Hunt writes, "Accretion of event and personal occupation, the sense that some otherwise anonymous place has a life that is longer than the moment when a visitor is there".

Hunt shows the contrast between landscapes with a rich historical background like 'Palatine Hill' in Rome and leading contemporary landscape design, Les Jardins d'Eole, Paris for example. Although they differ in form and programme, both landscapes follow a similar system of reflecting the role of history, contemporary design usually being more abstract. The various examples of landscape interventions, plants, and garden forms are all showcased with detailed descriptions and analytical remarks from Hunt and other internationally recognised landscape critics, Bernard Lassus, Peter Latz and Udo Weilacher to name a few. This gives credibility to Hunt's assertions of the need for better historical reflection and locality in the design process. Hunt uses a number of black and white images to reinforce the examples, however additional knowledge is needed to fully grasp the concept and receptive comments. Hunt leads to a coherent denouement, proving that landscape designs exhibiting historical connections portray a stronger sense of substance when in context.

'Historical Ground' serves as a reference for landscape designers, it reiterates the unwritten law of attaching importance to the past in order to create a meaningful design that can be received positively by users. Different from others with similar content, this book is short with 165 pages, a precise approach providing a sufficient amount of insight on a vast topic. Readers with a strong landscape background such as avid landscape historians and landscape students will profit from reading this.

The discussion of the history of landscape architecture is a complex endeavor as it shares much of its history with that of landscape gardening and architecture, spanning the entirety of man's existence. However, it was not until relatively recent history that the term "landscape architecture" or even "landscape architect" came into common use. For the period before 1800, the history of landscape architecture, formally landscape gardening, is largely that of master planning and garden design for manor. Historic areas typically exhibit a range of heritage values, such as social, historical, and architectural. Frequently, they also have aesthetic significance; therefore, the design quality of new insertions in a historic area is important. One of the challenges in this debate on the role of contemporary architecture in historic contexts is that design quality can be seen as subjective. Assessing the impact of new development in a historic context has also been accused of being subjective. However, increasing development pressure has pushed governments and the conservation community to provide. The emerging Historic Landscape Characterisation of English metropolitan areas provides an opportunity to address this deficiency. This contribution shows how in the Black Country the growth of what is now the country's second largest urban area has transformed an industrial landscape of distinctive character and historic importance. The role of control in assuring viability is addressed in this paper by comparing two frameworks: cybernetics and evolutionary theory. As a result, the foundation of the Viable System Model is highlighted and criticised because of its characterisation of learning as an instructional (Lamarckian) process which is incompatible with present biology.