Nature by Culture – From „Romantic“ to „Organic“

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1 Introduction

The confrontation of „nature“ and „culture“ within the title provokes a professional and personal consideration of the values of nature and culture. It seizes the theses that “nature” might be to be made or renewed by “culture”. The attribute “from romantic to organic” provides an outlook onto the enfolding of a position about philosophy and history, which overcomes the history of the human desire for a counterbalance of burdens through “nature” since the Romantic period and which finds a contemporary approach through the making of open spaces by means of design. This approach is called “organic”. A design method “organic” is herewith introduced. The name indicates its origins on organic forms as well as its generation by form-giving. Open spaces build the context as a resource for the establishment and the transformation of “nature”.

We know and we feel that our highly technological and dynamic societies with daily increasing demands for the use of energy exhaust any kind of “nature”, i.e. what has been left from it after many centuries of cultivating. We know that this “nature” needs increasingly to be strengthened, preventatively and also counterbalancing the already caused damages, in contrast to the more and more intensive attacks of “civilization” – as a basis for the survival of all of us.

We guess that – only by means of a new culture – we can recognize, feel and enrich the old conditions of “nature” in a way which allows that we protect relics of “nature” for our survival and, furthermore, can initiate new perspectives for “nature” in the social space of our divided everyday lives by means of collective action. Which leading ideas may help, and what this might mean today and practically for landscape architecture and for the role of design … we want to ask.

2 Responsiveness towards Sensual Perception

The task of landscape design seizes the understanding of the framing conditions of „nature“ in society and in the economy and looks, building up on this, for an answer to those people for whom we form landscape and “nature” in rural and urban spaces for the everyday life of living and working.

Open spaces are resources for designing landscape and “nature”. They offer places, which may become cells of gaining value and which can be connected as systems of “nature”. They are – in place and time – the source for settling, the medium for action in society, in the economy and in nature and are, consequently, the expression of what might characterize the production of spaces by design: Quality in use, image and concept.
Long- and short-term action of those ones who produce spaces, searches for answers to regional and local conditions for a user-friendly and pictorial organisation of space-building elements, – an organisation which can create atmosphere, an organisation which can – more than fulfilling function – activate all the senses and can make spaces become places of experiencing meetings or niches of retracing from everyday life – an organisation which provides spatially precisely appropriate offers for new perspectives in perceiving and acting towards the ways of producing space and life in place and region.

Human perception is the exchange between the external nature of the physical world and its rules about renewing working and living and the internal nature of a person. The senses of human beings complete each other concerning the perception of conditions and signs. They lead with a clearer orientation than any reflection towards feeling well in or refusing spaces. The responsibility in designing spaces towards sensual perception is, accordingly, comprehensive and far reaching for the tasks of conceptualizing landscape for the benefit of renewing „nature“.

Environments of everyday life, mostly distant to “nature”, dominate in appearing to mankind as a hardly over-lookable layering of different elements, be it material, be it sound, smell or taste, competing with each other for attention. In order to prevent any resulting irritation of the senses, in order to counterbalance and to avoid disturbances, and in order to orient the human perception constructively onto positive effects, comprehensive concepts for designing open spaces are needed.

Those ones can define the opportunities to perceive space and its conditions in a new way by a theme of design and by creating atmosphere through structure, texture and materiality, and can make “nature” in a new way accessible by artificial means.

Time makes human action readable in space. Culture becomes evident in the reflections of human influences on structure, texture and material of space. Open spaces are the “business card of a town or region”. They are the proof of a culture which determines space, uses it and feels it – physically, mentally and socio-economically. Valid is: “Space is a socio-technological biotope of culture”.

Thus, use, image and concept of open spaces are – in their perception by the human senses – always results of collective or individual adaptation to forms and materials of spatial offers, i.e. to the framework conditions for perception and action.

The wider the offers are defined, the more space is provided for processes of adaptation. “Nature” can be created for this artificially, can be reminded in its meaning or can be made accessible by new means in reality.

Action is carried out in relationship to the offers within the reach of framework conditions, by realizing the offers and incorporating them intuitively and rationally as options for action. Intuition plays a big role herewith and determines finally the orientation in behaviour and their patterns in space, concerning offers and restrictions.

Offers cause encouragement, are strengthening, support the harmony of mankind with themselves and with the environment. They support also and above all the active searching of people for being unified with nature. They support, this way, “nature” in mankind and also in the material surroundings. This happens on public and on private ground.
serves for enfolding different private and public interests: concerning the use of open spaces as a resource for “nature” in the short-term perspective as well as the renewal of space and “nature” in open spaces through cultures of the production of spaces and “nature”, in the long-term perspective:

Offers for the human perception of space do always meet short-term activities in space as well as long-term effecting elements of „nature“ in space. These ones are. Individually as well as in their working together an expression of historically meaningful identities, bound to

- Geographical origins: “Heimat”/family
- Territory: Area within administrative boundaries
- Ways of production: pre-industrial, industrial, late industrial
- Ways of communication: Dialogue societies – to date\(^1\).

A responsibility towards human sensual perception for the production of spaces can be called to be fulfilled, if the intervention by design allows the expression of these continuously emerging and each other overlaying identities in a way that the over-layerings in space may always find new expression through action.

Open space is also considered as being subordinate to the principle of responsibility towards the human senses, and is furthermore, independently from the options for the expression of identity in time and space, artificially generated or renewed for the experience of “nature”.

Open space is artificially maintained open towards the rules of land markets and built as the social ground for different realities of the economy which are supposed to become enfolded innovatively.

This is referring to the range of social and economic realities from individual entrepreneurs towards the public welfare in neighbourhoods, communities, regions …

This orientation towards economic interests relates in its range equally to the addressees for the production of space for perceiving „nature“ through culture. Production and reproduction find their cultural synthesis specifically in designing open spaces, as the space which has been maintained open reflects the cultural understanding of “resource” in the respective society and economy.

### 3 Role of Design: „Control“? … Through Offers for Perception

Since the culture of the public spaces of late medieval times we are, relative to the different period and direction of design differently, used to experience the open space, specifically the “urban public” space and its design as an expression of “control”.

This refers to the public spaces of the „Founder-time“, to those of the time after WWI, and – in a specifically restricting way of course also to the space of the Third German Regime.

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\(^1\) This distinction refers to a lecture of Patrick Schumacher at Bauhaus Foundation, Dessau, in the beginning of the 2000ies.
The tasks of designing open spaces served – until at about the time of the break after the industrial crisis (1985 in West-Germany/1995 in East-Germany) – only within this framework. i.e. by means of subdividing areas and accessibilities, for offers of sensual perception and for their expression by action.

This was accepted as long as the industrial ways of production needed the public space as “controlled space” on one side, and – on the other side also allowed, as families and neighbourhoods still provided for sufficient differentiation in different spaces. This is different today. We are living in a society of individualization, not at least because of new ways of production and their technologies. The open and public space is immediately confronted to the individual privacies. Late industrial ways of production and technologies cause, more intensively than the industrial ways of production, long-term irritation through masses of visual/audial impacts on the human senses. They increase the individualization and generate equally demands for its dissolution, for endurance and continuity of healthy living conditions in/with „nature“. The desire of mankind for counterbalancing disturbances through experiencing nature corresponds in principle to the desire during the period of “Romantic”, however, is much more intensively and in a multi-layered way burdened by disturbances of the senses. Landscape architecture provides, under these conditions, for design the role, to oblige different environments with their dimensions in time and space to “nature”, and equally to mediate towards mankind new perspectives of perception, of use and – tackling space – of offers for the experience of “nature”. This mediation takes place by bringing together philosophy, arts, technology, planting knowledge, knowledge about materiality. – fields of knowledge and of making, which only by working together allow for a comprehensive landscape design with varied approaches and good results for different topographies.

We know: The more efficient a framework for action in open space has been established for feeling and using the open space, its elements of “nature” and the effects of “nature” in people, the less this framework causes restrictions, the more the “control” by design speaks to the senses, affects innovatively by enriching, calming, counterbalancing, orienting, finally being productive… This insight makes us question planning in its well known sense of guiding processes by restricting perception and action in principle and, above all, for the aims of designing open landscape and “nature”. Consequently, non-planning is the idea, to support perception and action in space by determining the „columns for freedom“ in space spatially, socially and economically by appropriate concepts and their appropriate implementation in everyday life. The appropriateness for implementation and their materiality build the proof for the quality of the concepts. Means of „control“ by design are also and especially existing in informally established spaces (s. informal settlements from different periods with rich gardens, including fruit and vegetable cultivation, in urban areas in Istanbul). We take these ones for illustrating the widely defined frameworks of “control” through “non-planning”. Herewith, control” is understood as a framework of socio-aesthetical and material qualities for perception and for individual/collective action, which in their orientation and frequency reflect the spirit of time and the meanings given by society to place. Today dominate, in consequence of ongoing private and professional situations of individualization, needs for meeting others as well as for a dialogue with oneself through contemplation and through incorporation as well as through taking a deep breath in the open spaces and in “nature”. The active relationship with „nature“ experiences also and specifically in urban conditions a renaissance of the demand, mainly
where the forces of “civilization” become evident most intensively, where economic and
social conditions look in most intensively for a counterbalance of personal burdens.

There, garden-work and related recreation of the forces of body, mind and senses turn very
suddenly and intensively into the centre of needs for perceiving space. These needs again
mark the demands on the land-markets. Residences with immediate access to open space
are traditionally the „runners“ of demands. Have these demands in times after WWII in
Germany, East like West, mainly been related to the single family houses in one side and
on the allotments of the big settlements on the other, thus, you can find these demands
today in modified forms in all urban locations.

Roof terraces, terraces and balconies are expression of the search for contact with “nature”
on available areas; “urban agriculture” is an idiom of our time which even puts the growing
of food into the context of “nature” by culture in highly densified spaces. The open spaces
reflect the remaining resources of “nature” in spaces of densification and of demands for
nature there, on private and on public ground. The social awareness and the emotions of
people for values and resources of (re-)production come, this way, back to being closely
and productively in touch with establishing families of plants and caring for them, for the
soil, for its appropriateness and its materiality for uses and its compatibility for rain water
retention and energy production. Landscape and open spaces can mediate multi-facet
images for these values. The affect three-dimensionally through structures, textures,
materials … and build sentences of a space-become language – which is to be read, to be
spoken and to be danced. What is essential? Space – to be felt and to be used. Qualitatively
high-value means and concepts dissolve „control“ accordingly completely as a restriction,
and initialize – instead – experience, contemplation, movement, meeting …This impulse is
by means of designing the open spaces, via the perception of messages and towards their
implementation, in a multi-layer way, sent to the senses and in a multiple way reflected
there. Feeling of happiness and fulfilling can ideally be results. This would relate to the old
wisdom that people are happy when they can harvest, – when they can carry home at night
or in the end of the week or at specific times the fruits of their work, i.e. when care and
economic use or cultivation of their worked-on “fields” show materially fruit …

4   From „Romantic“ to „Organic“

The desire of mankind, that the forces of „nature“ might counterbalance and heal the socio-
economic and technological progress by culture, has so far been strongly expressed by the
philosophies of the “Romantic”. This desire has generated during the period “Romantic”
the imagery and the establishment of landscape parks. Such a desire has the social and
economic power, to generate in principle new design approaches. Since Vitruv, and in the
New Age since the Enlightenment, there has been a comprehensive philosophical approach
from the “making professions” to envisage the human scale…

The „Romantic“ has become since a philosophy which had the practical aim to re-establish
conditions for sensual experiences, establishing in a new way through setting-into-scene by
artificial means “nature” within the remaining nature. The Modern Movement continues the
theme “nature” within its three phases beyond new premises. Nature was reconsidered and
determined, relative to the orientation of arts, structure and/ or ornament.
Nature by Culture – From „Romantic“ to „Organic“

Roots of Modern Movement (from 1800-1910): Structure and ornament were inseparably linked by the structure. Nature was the theme if units in materiality and space-building. Built form was looked at as part of “nature”.

Flourishing of Modern Movement (from 1918-1930): According to the complexity of the emerging technologies and the serial production, answers arose, which the spatial organisation of conditions separated functionally. Structure and ornament became opposites in the game of forces about power, which has been – in the basic ideas about the blood-and soil-ideology from the 1920ies – still comprehensively conceptualized. Styles arose, f.e. “youth-style”, “Heimat-style”, which expressed the separation of functions.

Re-establishing the Modern Movement (1950-1973/ 1973-to date): This period continues. It was, with influences like New sculpturalism/ Post-Romantic-Urbanism, still for a long time in the field of tension under the functional requests of mass production. The structure was freed again for incorporating the ornament, but the structures were differently sculptural, geometrically abstract or metaphor-like. A synthesis of structure and ornament became again mature with structural offers for perception and action.

A direction of science, called „Bionic“, founded the application of „structural“ patterns in architecture, landscape design, street art. It led during the 1990ies by means of computer-aided design-methods (Parametric design) to a new synthesis between ornament and structure in building space. The functionality of the Flourishing of Modern Movement was replaced by contents, like telling stories, and their values for opening up through design new angels of view. Patterns of communication and structures of building space, three-dimensionally building up on these patterns, set the columns of concepts. They are exposed in materiality and planting and are made perceivable as “living environments of nature”. This method fulfils – with individual compositions – the phenomena of architecture as auto-poietic systems. It prepares for action, processes, communication by open frameworks for occupying spaces structurally.

Organic forms became only in the period after the industrial crisis and its break (in West-Germany around 1985) new „racing horses“ of comprehensive approaches of the “making professions”. Structure and ornament gained impulses from organic forms and their artificial materiality in architecture and building space. The relationship with “nature” was the new search for findings about the stream of forces in the structures of nature (flora, fauna, topography). This went along with applying the found patterns in architecture, landscape design, street arts and building space and led there during the 1990ies the conflict of the Modern Movement towards a new synthesis („The ornament is the structure“). In my work, a new design-method emerged: „Organic“.

The „organic“ has been evoked as an updated meaning and materiality of the desire for being close to nature during the „Romantic“ period, – counterbalancing the forces of re-production) according to its time –, by holistic concepts of design, which can be experienced as relief from the burdens of living and working. The „organic“ plays, this way, a role for creating structural offers for perception which make „ratio“ merge with „intuition“.

This position comes from architecture and is, in its time, not totally uncritically introduced: „There is a global convergence in recent avant-garde architecture that justifies a new style Parametricism. ... It is a style rooted in digital animation techniques, its latest refinement
based on advanced parametric design systems and scripting methods. ... Parametricism finally brings to an end the transitional phase of uncertainty engendered by the crisis of Modernism and marked by a series of episodes like Post-modernism, Minimalism, Deconstructivism ...  

This statement indicates that the quality of applying methods and their implementation determine whether a new episode and a new style might be replaced potentially by real qualities of design. Style is then positively understood as direction. Zaha Hadid comments on the tasks of producing qualities in the space of different topographies: “I have always believed that a formal repertoire is critical in urbanism. I am particularly interested in shaping the ground plane by carving, imploding and exploding; not just as a formal gesture, but as a way of dealing with the complexity of the programme – the social component in architecture. We have to go back to the ground, study it, learn how to programme it as an event space. It is not just a formal issue but a programmatic one. Form and programme cannot be separated from each other; topography brings them together.“ ...  

5  Parametricism and nature

Let us summarize the central statement/question for the method: The open and public space is immediately confronted to the individual privacies. The design of open spaces has to integrate under these conditions the uses of individual people, to incorporate them into different dimensions of space and time and equally to oblige them to nature in a new way. Aims of the “organic” are to mediate new perspectives of perception for experiencing “nature” to people and, thus, to establish “nature” in a new way. For Landscape design remains the question: How is the style of design Parametricism, to be applied conceptually for supporting “nature”?  

The design method „organic“ finds – as an answer to the question – impulses in architecture concerning the three dimensions of the essential patterns for structures, for building cells and connections, for implementing concepts for the use and the image of open spaces – this is based on the understanding of “landscape urbanism” (s. a. Charles Waldheim).

Nature is often misunderstood and inadequately simplified as „enduring“, differently to contemporary ways of living, to communicating, to realize changes of structure, texture, materiality ... The new design approaches “organic” apply organic forms for elements of structure and texture. They enrich, this way, functional spaces with meaning and equally with the structural and textural materiality of the “in-scripted nature” of environments (people/ their movement in spaces, flora and fauna).  

In order not only to reflect but also to renew „nature“, design needs to know the rules of “nature” as far as being able to make sure that, by “in-scripting methods” of the software of  

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information technologies, the design of vernacular transformation and equally for global progress can be seized in an appropriate way, calculated and applied as parameter.

Herewith, the ethnical differences of people who experience and understand „nature“ are to be considered. We distinguish occidental and oriental positions relative to the understanding of “nature”4

5.1 Nature is changeless

a. Nature as a snap-shot of an organism with vitalistic functions and teleological purpose

5.2 Nature as a constantly evolving whole

a. Nature reflects Western philosophical and cosmological thinking in science
b. Nature fulfils some form of teleological design – as a universe evolving between a finite beginning and a finite end.

5.3 Nature is god-given

Synthesizing natural and supra-natural realities and distinguishing the different fields of influence on nature relative to the understanding “God is nature, nature is god” finds:

- Unities of creation, of humanity, of truth and knowledge, of life;
- Spiritual worlds (roh, arab.), physical worlds (dunyia, arab.);
- Intermediate worlds (barzakh, arab.), after worlds (akhirat, arab.).

This understanding is as comprehensive as to frame any holistic approach to the Organic!

Valuating the approaches to the understanding of nature means to take the oriental approach as a starting point for the widely defined approach of „control“ in designing open spaces and for supporting „nature“ by culture: It is about, to give space to people and cultures for bringing together different meanings and realities of “nature” in space, physically and spiritually. This needs the holistic appliance of Parametric tools, in order to lead starting points for this, f.i. vernacular ornaments of locally and regionally specific topographies, towards open frameworks for use and image of space.

6 „Organic“ as Method

How is „nature“ by means of culture to be advanced to a new culture? The answer on this question is based on many levels of professional experience, of the generation of creativity and of the management of resources in the offices. The practical results are always witnesses of all these levels and their working together. Essential, however, is: Without qualified resources of labour and without sufficient financial means for implementing the concepts, the path towards the result is difficult. These difficult paths, however, are the

ground on which many tasks for projects operate. The temporary positioning about the location is consequently closely linked with the temporary position to the own working situation and to the framework for performance of the client, to the cooperation with colleagues and employees and – last not least – to the own anchoring in private life, family and friendship. And: both the sides have a long-term effect. The real quality of the establishment and of the daily usability of created gardens and landscapes are, thus, the expression of position towards work, implementing the idea in the context of working and living and finally the implementation of the idea in form of structure, texture and material.

The success of the own projects starts with the classical appliance of the rules of proportionality and materiality of spaces to be felt and used – above all by the three-dimensionality of the set effects of hedges, shrubs, trees and completing artificial elements in modelling topographies in garden and landscape and their view connections in near and far perspectives: The “Romantic” was the biggest challenge for this. Because the movement towards the experience of “nature” in space was contemporarily the pre-step for the development, to synthesize “nature” with the tools of forms and colours of the Modern Movement.

„Organic“ leads together the heritages of „Romantic“ in a new way. Informal patterns of natural growth are made transparent for informal processes of the space-building occupancy of spaces.

Fig. 1: Theme Gardens, Parkstadt-Schwabing, Munich
The heritages of „Romantic“ are f.i. reminded by setting into scene regionally typical landscape. In the Park-city Schwabing, Munich, this happens in Form of a strictly arranged park, established with view connection from the framing buildings towards the Alps, and enriched by “organic” niches (theme gardens) beside “pavillons” (s. Fig. 1): The planting creates the spatial effect which invites rot he individual/collective occupancy of the spaces within the „pavillons“. “Organic” uses here the form-giving language of contrasting and builds sculptures by means of structures and planting. Large-spatial theme gardens are object of „Organic“ at the BUGA 2005, Munich. Places are interwoven with the network of paths as “cells” of an over-dimensional horizon of experiencing “nature” and become sensually perceivable by staying in the “cells” (s. Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Theme Gardens, BUGA 2005, Munich

Also small-spatial parks, like the garden of the Leonardo Hotel, Munich, are taken by „organic“ to new dimensions of „nature“. The arrangement of space-building planting leads via paths towards places for staying.

Built form arrangement becomes a self-standing place in a suburban location. The arrangement and the movement of grasses in wind tell stories about the origins of this place and its offers for contemplation (s. Fig. 3). “Organic” generates implantations by means of materiality and planting within the existing “nature”. The user is demanded by staying in
space to be sensually active. The design has the maturity of arts and equally allows openness for the experiment of perception. The forms become an invitation to dive into a new world of use, image and concept – as deeply as the third dimension of the open spaces is perceivable.

Fig. 3: Park area, Hotel Leonardo, Munich

Fig. 4: Killesberg-Park, Stuttgart
This relates in specific ways to the park „Killesberg“, Stuttgart. There, by means of elevating the surface of the area and crossing paths in there, the visitors are left with the fact that they are only visible between the artificial hills. They appear to be smaller in the new landscape, as only their upper bodies can be seen from path to path (s. Fig. 4).

The widely arranged new creation of organic forms for city and landscape expresses „organic“ in Arabic and Asian countries, thus, with the masterplanning Hangzhou, where the landscape builds spaces (s. Fig. 5). The interchange between materiality and perception replaces the open space as “object” of the restricting design by the open space as „medium“ of a challenging design for contemplation, dialogues, settings into scene.

**Fig. 5:** Masterplanning, Hangzhou

Main contributions to arts and space building consist in total of

- Sculpturing of locations within the specific context of topology and climate, i.e. enriching “nature” by nivelling, levelling, contouring (f.i. Killesberg, Stuttgart)
- Over-dimensioning of symbols of „nature“ as „cells“ of contemplation within the context of interlinked paths and fields for exploring new experiences of “nature” (f.i. BUGA, Munich)
- Contrasting of built form and open spaces for expending the variety of experiences within the limited space of a plot (Hotel Leonardo, Munich)
- Complementing heights by depths in the arrangement of high rise towers over a surface of a water pool serving for energy production (Gateway City RAK)
- Pointing of the locations of a building in a park (Garden of the Villa Kranz, Munich, Park St. Gilgen Österreich …)
In all these works, organic forms as artificial implantations have gained importance for the new experience of “nature” by means of building space, lighting, planting, etc. … “Control” by design goes along with the widely set offer for perception and occupancy of newly created spaces.

„Control“ does not contradict to the organic structures, but these ones become, in the abstraction of artificial elements, an invitation to dive into a new world of use, image and equally clearly recognizable concepts – as deeply as the third dimension of the open spaces is perceivable.

7 Conclusion

Most of the content of this lecture has been taken from the very many lectures and publications of the author. The theory of Jacques Ranciere about “The division of the sensual. Politics of arts and their paradoxies” was considered, discussed and carefully put in relationship to the creative work of the author.

The result of the consideration is the position:
Open spaces are of high quality, when they
- contribute to the spirit of time in place counterbalancing the effects of technological progress by means of therefore appropriate concepts (from “Romantic” to “Organic” – by culture)
- are daily used by people who value highly the range of options for movement in space and for the perception of space for action,
- carry responsiveness towards the purpose to enjoy a healthy living (within the framework of “control” – for the benefit of “nature”).

Sources of literature


