

## *The Vital Forces of the Landscape in SLA's Oeuvre*

By Malene Hauxner

English translation by Regitze Marianne Hess,

According to the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt, the presence of a public space is essential to the sense of identity. That of stepping into the world arena and revealing one's own history sharing with others plays a decisive role in people's self-awareness. Arendt bluntly takes Thomas Jefferson's concept of the "pursuit of Happiness" from the Declaration of Independence and makes it the right that all citizens have to occupy the public realm. Because it is tyranny that banishes people from the public realm and barricades them within the domestic sphere. The American dream is thus not alone about forging one's own fortune and the pursuit of personal happiness, but is about cultivating that which concerns society at large. Identity is said to be something which remains the same over time. Being that everything changes, talk of identity may seem impossible. Identity however is not something we have. It has to be created, maintained, developed and cultivated. Identity understood as something, which to a certain extent has and will remain the same, must in Denmark be weather related; times of year, twilight and white nights, rain, fog, dew, snow, wind, temperatures suitable for work and conditions suitable for the cultivation of the land.

Photo: Stig L. Andersson. Japanese garden.



Landscape architecture is building art in terms of the creation of space. But it is also something more and different than what I tend to refer to as the art of cultivation. Landscape architecture has existential meaning, because it bears witness to our life on Earth, which can be cultivated, and that this process is a human, social act. The cultivation of that concerning society at large is one of the most important tasks of landscape architecture, a task that Stig L. Andersson and his studio has taken on.

About 10 years ago I wrote the following in Weilbach's Danish encyclopaedia of artists. *"Stig L. Andersson has an exact, yet artistically precise idiom, coupling text fragments, photographs, and poetic sketches, truly a distinct artistic approach to landscape art and garden art. With the aid of an analytical notation system he seeks to incorporate the landscape's vital, not visible forces, climate and history in a changing, visionary interaction between the terrain, building, production, science and art. This is especially evident in the landscape and site plan for Toga City Valley."*

It was liberating to be presented with this new or rediscovered method of allowing nature and history contribute to the formation of a "landscape of wind and water," which builds upon and includes motion and change and see wind of what the indeterminate concept of urban ecology might encompass. This method still applies to Andersson's projects, but contrary to back then when the only realized work was *Visionernes Bro (The Bridge of Visions)* for the Danish Society of Engineers' exhibition *Techno Vision*, created in collaboration with the architect Tage Lyneborg, there are now many works, unrealized projects as well as built; so many and with such cohesiveness that one can speak of an "body of work" or "oeuvre."

In 1993 I had the pleasure of working together with Stig L. Andersson on a master plan for the Carlsberg Breweries in Copenhagen, which like much else was unfortunately never realized. This was a situation where I had the opportunity to study at close hand a visionary way of thinking and a talent for drawing, photography and presenting ideas combined with a great responsiveness, talents which have hence benefited colleagues, students and employees alike. I have since followed Stig's career from teaching assis-

tant and employee, to both associate and guest professor, lecturer, censor, critic, consultant and head of an architectural practice. I admire his talent both in terms of dissemination of knowledge as well as scientific and artistic work and I value his respect for the democratic decision-making process, love of nature, curiosity, thirst for knowledge, wisdom and desire to discuss and share his knowledge. In 2002 I wrote about SLA's work in *Topos: The International Review of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design* and participating in nominating the studio to be the first recipient of the Topos Award. It is with great pleasure to here, be able to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge of some of the most recent works.

#### *The Cultivation Process*

Stig L. Andersson's thesis project, a landscape plan for West Amager, with the telling title "*The Programmed Landscape*", was well in keeping with the poet Alexander Pope's recommendation of conferring with the Genius Loci, the essence of place, a method advocated by the Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schultz, since the 1980's. Stig L. Andersson had however done something other and more than conserve and reestablish, as was the case with most others who followed this paradigm. He defined and articulated landscape types, such as tidal meadows, commons and reed swamps, because of what their common features had to offer in terms of barriers, breaks and openings. He turned the landscape into architecture in terms of the creation of space. The method can be traced to the competition entry purchase for the landscape and site plan for an agrarian landscape by Bramdrup in eastern Jutland. The existing structure of scattered farms surrounded by forests and hedgerows is accentuated with poplar hedgerows, which because of their homogeneity can imbue the landscape with a consistent and characteristic expression, a trait that can be seen as an aesthetically contingent cultivation of the functional field boundary hedges, that are requisite to the cultivation process. The structure renders the process visible and facilitates the understanding of the landscape's function and process of formation.

The spatial organization of the *Ulleroedbyen* development in northern Zealand is the same as that of Jaegersborg Dyrehave, the deer park north of Copenhagen, and that of Aarhus University Park. This is rooted in the Danish landscape architect G.N. Brandt's concept of the modern garden, a fixed framework surrounding a changing landscape, shaped by the cultivation process. The strength of the concept resides in that it simultaneously both closes outwardly and opens inwardly, dedicating a frame around a generic content, to use Andersson's expression. Part of the frame in Ulleroedbyen is cultivated as a forest botanical garden according to a row system, where the trees do not develop as a plant community, but as a kind of rational plant work, like what one would find in a nursery. The forests together with residential and commercial buildings form a framework around a common open landscape. It can be programmed, on an ongoing basis, for experiences of nature and activities, which take place on the cultivated greens spread out like picnic blankets in the tall grass. The designated building zones, which in terms of traffic are linked by winding roads, are situated out in the common agrarian landscape, close to at least one of the local types of natural features: a hill, a lake, a meadow or a grove.

Amidst the agrarian landscapes of the towns of Greve and Solroed along the Koege Bay, south of Copenhagen, there lie village-like enclaves in between the woods, groves, commons, meadows, lakes and rivers. The buildings as such are elevated above the immediate terrain, surrounded by grass slopes inset with steps, stairs and terraces. A scenic plane that connects and divides, shifting from marshes to grass meadows and commons to so-called urban surfaces with hard pavement. The landscape can be transformed, on an on-going basis, from efficient rationally cultivated and drained fields to more or less wet landscapes, all depending on circumstances and needs. A protective forest brim provides the areas with cohesion, scale and identity. There are no dead ends; neither in terms of the landscape, buildings nor traffic. While the buildings in Ulleroedbyen form a framework around the common landscape, there is a maximum integration of the landscape and buildings in the two other master plans. In each case the inhabitants have a

view of and access to the nature. The tradition-bound lies in seeing the concept as a clearing in the woods, the visionary and actuality of coordinating active lifestyle, urban comfort and rural amenities in a light urban context, contrary to earlier where the urban stood in sharp contrast to the scenic.

### *Weather and Water Puddles*

The weather plays a leading role in Stig L. Andersson's works. This is understandable in a country like Denmark, where we are constantly discussing the weather; whether it is windy, raining, snowing or overcast.

When rain falls in the city one does not think of it as a process which is a sheer act of nature unaffected by mankind. Seen in this light the city encompasses nature or nature is a part of the city. The popular expression "out in nature" comes into its own, even when merely going to the park or for a highway cruise, head on into the weather, as the aim itself is the act of sensing. Once the rain has hit the pavement gutters divert the water to the sewers. This sequence has to be characterized as an artificial manmade process. Systems, which according to a structural understanding of nature can not be regarded as natural, can according to a procedural one, be regarded as very natural or even as pure nature. If focus is shifted from the structural to the procedural, the reestablishment of natural relationships becomes possible. When a river floods its banks or when water gathers in puddles, it is an act of nature. When water is regulated by quay walls, bulkheads, sluices, drains or furrows finely traced in a floor it is an "unnatural" work of man, cultivated and refined through an architectonic treatment, elevating it to a work of art.

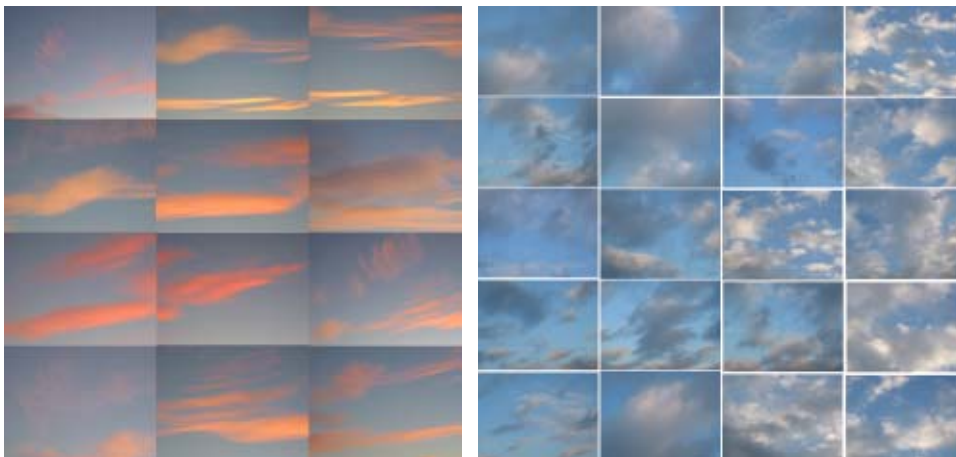
A place where, a few years ago, there was an end station for the S-train line to Valby along with a dairy by the name of Solbjerg, there now is an underground train line, shopping center, high school and business school neighboring apartment blocks, station buildings, fire station, courthouse, police station, church and main library.

Buildings of all types of materials and styles facing every which way and at differing heights, due to site topography and building

patterns. The site, which as the name Solbjerg suggests, is a hill, was populated with public institutions throughout the years 1909 to 1933. The large massive red brick clumps are almost of a medieval National Romantic style; the last building, however, the main library, being American inspired classicism.

The new Frederiksberg high school also is a large massive building. This cubic clump of grey brick closes in around its inner courtyards, only interrupted by a glass façade and horizontal bands of windows situated up high. The façades of the Frederiksberg Center are clad in red brick with decorative stripes, as was the idiom in the 1980s and the Copenhagen Business School is clad in light sandstone. The seemingly impossible task was to give this *terrain vague*, between the disparate buildings, a new identity, to convert it into a solid cast modern urban space for sensory and social experiences, gathering and activity. Just as St. Mark's Square in Venice benefits from a network of entryways and a smaller arrival plaza facing the lagoon, Solbjerg Square has been equipped with a smaller arrival plaza and an entry which widens into a kind of hall. The different squares are turned and positioned and joined together like tatami mats. The rectangle, as a figure which repeats itself throughout, helps to tie them together.

Photo: Stig L. Andersson.



The former Stationsvej (Station Street) distinguishes itself in the cityscape with the lightly foliated willow trees, sett paved traffic lanes and green demarcation lights along the left side of the bicycle paths. In the evening there is a twinkling orgy of green light specks embedded in the tactile cast iron slabs along drains with meandering grates of cast iron.

In front of three former station buildings, which house a bar and café, the entrance changes in character and becomes a distinct space with a different syntax and different materials. The water larch and white blossomed magnolias of the project – in reality crabapples, offer a light flickering shading of the tables and chairs and the concrete surface, which is brushed with a pattern of changing directions. Above the underlying subway tunnel artificial light casts leaf-like shadows from fixtures mounted on high masts, competing with the bicycle path's demarcation lights. The floor surface is folded with a strong back slope, directing rainwater to draining gutters in the folds; not out across the steps as is usually the case. A folded floor surface between the high school's glass façade and the library's monumental entranceway cultivates the great height differentiation through a stair with steps of concrete and iron. The materials are in keeping with the raw nature of the railway terrain and the stair configuration accommodates not only a functional requirement, but also young people's desire to skate and bask in a relaxed setting. The rectangular and quadratic steps of varying heights are tipped and turned. The trees are scattered nonchalantly as if dropped by birds. The red-leafed ash, hawthorn, sycamore and oak match the old red brick buildings and the stairs' rust red rises and step edgings. The tall concrete wall forms a frame and background for a sheet of water.

The vegetative nature at Solbjerg Square can be experienced in a garden laid out in a giant rectangular cast iron tub. Birch with white trunks, dove trees with blossoms like white doves, butterfly bushes with white spikes, sweet pepper bushes with white berries, apple, cherry, rowan, bird cherry, locust, lilac, jasmine, azalea, heather, hydrangea, anemone, lily of the valley, iris, crocus and narcissus with white blossoms are just an extract. The square ends

with a light grove of pine trees, slim and with broad crowns, on a soft undulating surface of closely cropped grass and edged with moss, of a contorted ribbed concrete revetment, which becomes smaller as the grove rises with the terrain towards the horizon. If one likens this with the concept for Ulleroed, the square can be likened to a common space, a fully accessible landscape. But here it is a matter of an urban space and the surface is paved with charcoal grey basalt flags, horizontally laid so that the rainwater does not spill off, but remains lying as 100 puddles in the circular rings chiseled into the stone. In this way the square changes character according to rain or sunshine. The optimal situation being when the sun breaks through after a shower and glimmers in the shimmering water filled mirrors, which pull the clouds to the ground.

### *Fluctuating Folds*

Viewing the landscape as that layer of cultivated nature which seals the Earth's core and opens toward the sky and landscape architecture as the architectonic treatment of that landscape, one can differentiate between two aspects; a biologically regulative and an artistically, socially communicative. The regulative is linked with climatic and gravitational forces. The communicative relates to experience and cognition, language and meaning. It can refer to history as an external factor and to nature, which is physically present in the work here and now. Both aspects deal with the relationship between man and nature. One way of treating this landscape is through the insertion of vertical and horizontal planes or 45 degree angle slopes, and joining the components through a system of right angles. Sharp folds can be made in plan and section, as if folding a paper ladder or lamp shade. Soft folds elicit an image of a skin or a meandering river.

The floor surface of *Kolding Banegaardsplads (Kolding Train Terminal Plaza)*, a 1<sup>st</sup> prize competition proposal, is folded in parallel strips from the train terminal building to *Slotssoeen (the Castle Lake)* thus leading travelers below the minimal water level of the lake as well as up a level to where the sky, horizon, and water surface converge at a distance and become central to the experience. The steps are utilized as seating edges above built-in lighting, wa-

ter fountains and luminescent materials for the sake of aesthetics and function to emphasize the rises.

The concept underlying *Charlottehaven* in the residential neighborhood of Oesterbro in Copenhagen is the traditional courtyard block. But whereas tradition called for a large open lawn of grass in the center with the same view in all directions, something else is going on here. The contours of the beds and plots form amorphous configurations, delineated by sinuous and angular steel edge trimmings. Viewed from above it resembles an assembled sheet of puzzle pieces. Walking along the edge there are shifts in views from long to tall grass, from the blue color tones and nuances found in blue fescue and Balkan blue grass to the green of miscanthus, bear skin fescue and ferns, from deep shadows and backlight to direct rays of sunshine. These visual effects are taken from the agrarian landscape. Regardless of whether rye and oats have become exotic grass sorts, the wind's axial play is all the same. Using simple devices of nature; light and wind, has given rise to a space of great strength and beauty.

#### *Remembrance of things past*

Landscapes are historical by virtue of the fact that they are historic in origin. They are created at a specific time for a specific place, and in that sense a legacy of the era in which they were created.

At the same time they are never mere relics, but also societal phenomena of change, in the sense that they themselves are a part of an historic process and are present in the now.

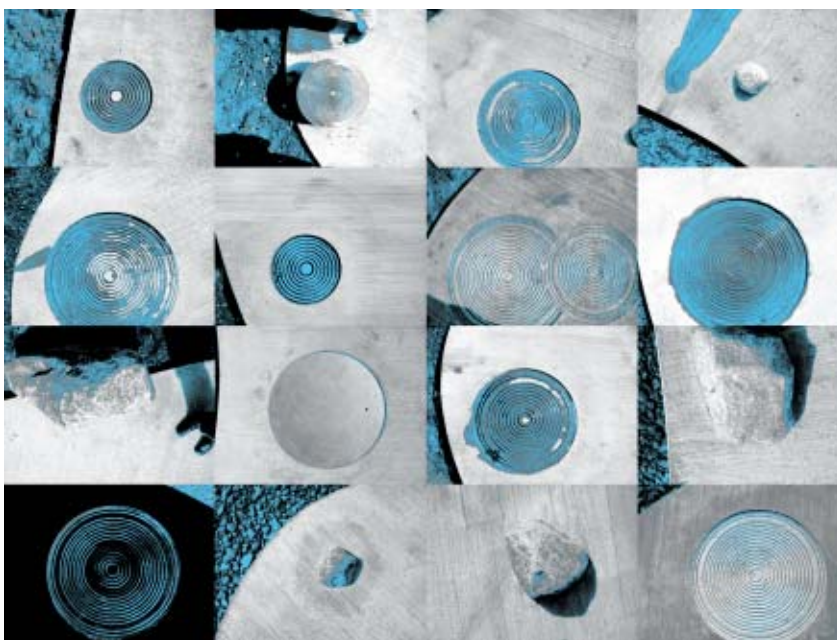
As agents of change, landscape architects are naturally involved in the conflicts between conservation and change. In dealing with renovations and renewals they are presented with the problem of how far back they should go in terms of returning to the original ideal or preserving a quality that has arisen along the way, as is usually the case as things are changed, or something entirely third. The task is to transform without losing the past, to convert historic landscapes into something contemporary and authentic without eradicating the traces that lead back in time. A conservation strategy fulfilling these goals requires a vision that builds on an awareness of the architectonic language, a process-oriented view of na-

ture, insight in terms of future use, understanding of the biological-physical regulative aspect, an in-depth knowledge of materials and techniques, along with a keen understanding of the historic communicative aspect.

The studio's conservation strategy distinguishes between an equivalence principle which stipulates the acceptance of various states and a reductive principle, which entails unearthing the most representative phase and allowing it to set the norm for the reconstruction and new construction, that is to say only rendering a single state.

Imagine a landscape where a sluice in a dam, which retains the water from a drained field, is left open for a period of time with the water filtering back in and flooding the lowest lying areas, turning them back into marshes and lakes. Only the highest hillocks are not submerged. Thus is the picture at *Moelleparken (The Mill Park)*, named after the now defunct Aarhus Mill. Hillocks of grass, raised water levels and low lying meadows flow in and out between the trees and paths in amorphous configurations, in a language which speaks of nature in the form of water's natural process and of the history of a mill and a landscape with marshes, meadows and ponds.

Illustration for water puddles milled into the paving of Anchor Park.



The park is spatially organized with groups of trees and a plateau of setts, recycled from a former park from the late 1930's, winding paths, lawns and a lake, where one can ice-skate, as was the case on the Mill Pond, from 1873, and the ponds prior to there even being a park. The hillocks, grass and planes of water are interwoven, making for a simultaneous experience, while boundaries demarcate the layers of time.

Here Stig L. Andersson is on par with the Swiss landscape architect Bernard Lassus, who has renovated the grounds surrounding the Corderie Royale ropeworks. Here in the port city of Rochefort-sur-mere, in France, one can experience the original marshy riverscape, the 17<sup>th</sup> century buildings and their environs and the overgrowth of wilderness, which has taken hold around the ruin, after the ropeworks were abandoned. Most importantly he created something new – a connection between the city and harbor with the help of a ramp along the city wall. The ramp was planted with a plantation of tulip trees, which never before had graced this site and thus entirely free of historical reference, however nonetheless have made the history and site seemingly more comprehensible and authentic. What is unique about this proposal is that it not alone preserves and restores, but through the incorporation of various culturally historic layers and eras in a modern scheme, it can also be used and interpreted by people with an interest in history and nature.

At *Valdemars Slot* (Valdemar's Castle), Andersson has frozen a specific state according to a reductive principle, specifically speaking the Baroque, because it is such a distinct characteristic of the site. Because a full re-construction of the garden as an intact Baroque garden scheme does not make any sense, emphasis has only been placed on the most significant features. This has resulted in alternating planes of water that elucidate the articulation of the terrain and the establishment of a plane of water in a two centimeter deep basin of black basalt, which not only serves as a skating rink in the winter, but most importantly extends the space of the courtyard and mirrors the sky and clouds, creating an unity between the buildings, garden and nature.

### *The Significance of Language*

We live in an urban landscape which is under constant change. Not only is its use subject to a change, but also its significance. The architectural language has to cope with architectural problems and create specific meanings.

The interwar period was distinguished by a tolerant attitude towards nature, the primordial and the infantile and an admiration of the self-sown landscape. Under Nazism and WWII the enthusiasm with nature became extreme. The indigenous plant-life and untouched landscape were put on a pedestal, and any trace of human intervention was considered vandalism, leaving behind a cultural steppe of a landscape. With the fall of Nazism and the end of the WWII one was left with a painful experience that human nature was unreliable and dangerous if left unbridled and the solution to this had to be to discipline and control that nature. At the early onset of the Cold War era it became human resolve to conquer one's nature, one's urges and bestiality, to keep nature at bay. The cultivated, processed and manmade became what was natural and thus true and beautiful. The students, who called for the return to power of fantasy, had a deep-seated belief in the spontaneous, free life and wanted to return to nature, i.e. restore and rediscover the natural way of life in all its purity and authenticity. Credence for this mentality found help in the American literary figure and biologist Rachel Carson, whose book *Silent Spring*, gave a heart wrenching account of a city where people, livestock and birds fell ill and died and the strange silence that ensued because of chemical contamination of the air, water and ground. If birds and insects had any significance for human survival, then any pesticides, pruning and curtailment of their basis for existence was catastrophic and flowers and fruits had to be left on stem and the grass grow high. The consequence being that biodiversity was beautiful. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, a picture painted itself in the Western world of a great belief in the future, in people's ability to solve problems with the help of know-how and technology. One was no longer paralyzed with fear of overpopulation, atomic war and pollution, and terrorism and fundamentalism had yet to pose a threat.

The landscape's architectonic icon reveals a new logical, pragmatic professionalism, with emphasis on the regulative aspect, similar to that of the post-war era, but with quite a different insight in terms of natural processes. But just as quickly as an icon has branded itself in our consciousness, there is a new one that pops up, this time having a biomorphic idiom, lacking any form of Euclidean geometry, without any hierarchy, no guidelines, in a fluid composition of space, as presented to us by Stig L. Andersson.

Today's society appears to be a complex society having the fundamental attribute, that it can also be different. Contingent experiences, that whereby something can always be different, leads perhaps to that fluid language which appears as if it could change form at any moment. With the development of a contingent language it becomes possible to deal with the cascade of possibilities and uncertainties of modern, complex society.

If one questions Stig L. Andersson's oeuvre as to whether the beautiful and true resides in that which mankind has contributed with or brought about, or in an inner order, regardless as to whether it is attributed to nature or inherent forces, the answer is "both – and." If one questions whether the beautiful and true is to be found in the manifold, pluralistic, complex and polychrome or in the narrow, minimal, monotone or monochrome, the answer will again be the same. In both approaches "less and more" seem to be at stake, whereas in the previous century it was a matter of "either – or." Andersson's modern urban spaces are both plaza, square, landscape, park and garden. They are both art and nature, poetry and technology, urban planning and garden art. Genre and language must, by necessity, be robust and free of categorization, when it comes to harbor and industrial areas, abandoned railway lines and overgrown parking lots, where one neither can nor need to know what the future has in store in terms of potential use.

*Wasteland and wilderness* were once synonymous with the original landscape beyond the city, a place with no value to anyone but hermits and wild beasts, writes Anne Spirn in *The Language of the Landscape*. The wilderness has now been transformed into a sacred place. The city has on the other hand become a wilderness, as a

consequence of the mentality that people destroy all what they touch.

For Stig L. Andersson that wasteland has taken on the identity of public space. It is created anew with amenity values and returned to the society. It reflects nature's weather and the courses of history in a dignified manifestation of the art of cultivation.

*The article builds on:*

Project material, lecture notes, discussions and surveys.

Malene Hauxner. Nutidig dansk have og landskabsarkitektur  
Landskab 5/1992

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communicator, teacher and practicing landscape architect. Results of this practice include a number of awarded competition proposals along with realized schemes, e.g. Skovlunde Kirkegård (Skovlunde Cemetery)

Research results appear in the dissertation *Fantasiens Have: Det moderne gennembrud i havekunsten og sporene i byens landskab* (The Garden of Imagination: The modern breakthrough in gardening and traces in the urban landscape), 1993 and *Med himlen som loft: Det moderne gennembruds anden fase 1950-1970. Bygning og Landskab, rum og værker, byens landskab*, 2002, English translation *Open to the Sky: Building and landscape, space and works, the city landscape. The second phase of the modern breakthrough 1950-1970*, 2003. Recipient of the Nykredit Architecture Award 2003 and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts' Høyen Medal 2004 for research and communication.