

uates of the Yale School of Architecture, presented an initial version of his paper herein on context.

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Why Site Matters

Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn

As part of a bid by New York City to host the 2012 Olympic Games, five multidisciplinary teams of architects, landscape architects, and urban designers and planners were invited to offer design ideas for an Olympic Village. One team was led by a New York firm, three by European designers, and one by a firm from Los Angeles.¹ Proposals were requested for a particular parcel of land at the southern tip of Queens West, a waterfront area (formerly Hunter's Point) with unimpeded views across the East River to mid-town Manhattan. Publicly exhibited in the spring of 2004, all five designs were presented similarly, in three-dimensional models with graphic panels including images and text. Each team conformed to established presentation requirements, yet each nonetheless depicted their project and its urban surroundings in notably different ways. Despite common constraints regarding scale and size, the models varied widely in extent and character. One team focused on local edge conditions, conceiving the site in terms of immediate physical surroundings. In contrast, another treated the site strictly as conceptual terrain, using the proposals to engage the history of ideas about the area.² Some teams viewed it as belonging to the city at large, "opening the site as a New York City attraction" or "creating the largest urban waterfront park in New York City."³ Two teams opted to construct additional models. One focused on the design of a cluster of buildings to show the proposal in greater architecture detail. The other depicted a large swath of Manhattan Island, from the East River to the Hudson, situating the Olympic Village in relation to mid-town. The different physical areas identified as relevant to each project and the distinct strategies used to see and understand these areas prompt the question: What constitutes a site in design?

For the disciplines and professions concerned with design of the physical environment, site matters. Not only are physical design projects always located in a specific place, the work of physical design also necessarily depends on notional understandings about the relationships between a project and a locale. Given that design reconfigures the environment using physical and conceptual means, articulate comprehension of site in physical and conceptual terms should be fundamental. Surprisingly, however, the design field overall has scanty literature directly addressing the subject. This is a striking omission, one that this volume begins to correct.

As exemplified by the Olympic Village proposals, a specific locale provides the material ground for action in design practice, and ideas about site provide a theoretical background against which such actions are taken. Such received understandings of the subject—even if unnoticed, unexamined, or inarticulate—inevitably precede design action.

The word site is actually quite simple; in common parlance, it refers to the ground chosen for something and to the location of some set of activities or practices. Each specialized area of physical design—architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, and urban planning—nevertheless construes the location of its activities and practices overtly and tacitly through its own normative approaches. For example, landscape architecture treats site explicitly as material terrain. Architecture's traditional focus on buildings has led to a tacit focus on the lot as the ground for design intervention. Urban planning, given its concerns beyond the purely physical, tends to construe location more broadly, incorporating social, economic, and political concerns. Urban design, more recently established as a field, tends to borrow notions about site from the other areas of design, drawing upon the material specificity associated with landscape architecture and architecture as well as the broader, less physical concerns of planning.

The multiplicity of comprehensions about the subject of site has rarely been made explicit. Within each of the design specialty areas can be found literature on specific locales and projects. However, even internally, none of the design areas has systematically treated "thinking about sites" in a disciplinary sense, and certainly not in reference to allied areas or to other disciplines, which also comprehend this fundamental topic in different ways. Little has changed in the thirty years

since Amos Rapoport, noted the absence of this subject in design theory: "I am not certain that any consistent theory of site as a form determinant has ever been proposed."⁴ Without making claim for consistent theory, this anthology ushers the subject of site out of its theoretical and historiographical obscurity.

While consistent in its avoidance of site-related issues, the past thirty years have, nevertheless, seen substantial changes in the direction of design theory discourse. Architectural theory, in particular, has become evermore disassociated from the consideration of physical conditions, veering toward a progressively abstract array of concerns. This shift—due in part to increased contact with other disciplines including philosophy and literary theory—has both enriched and impoverished architectural thinking. In joining, and at times initiating, a shift from modernist to postmodernist thought, architectural discourse has become more rigorous, broad, and inclusive. But at the same time, the fundamental unity between theory and practice has been discounted.

Theory specialists have emerged seeking status as distinct from professional practitioners, and design discourse has suffered from contention born of hardening the line between theorizing and practicing.⁵ Stressing the fundamental integration of theory and practice, this volume engages in and promotes thinking through practices themselves. As editors we conceive of theorizing in general as "both an abstraction from, and an enrichment of, concrete experience."⁶ Methodologically, concrete theorizing recognizes theoretical activity as itself a practice and considers any reflective practice to be necessarily informed by theory. Though concrete theory might derive from (or criticize) canonical texts, it can also rise from questions posed by practical activity. Concrete theory can begin by elucidating design ideas and exploring their manifestations in practice; or it might begin in the articulation of that which practice has already appropriated in reality; or it can find its sources in abstraction in order to arrive at the "reproduction of the concrete by way of thought."⁷ In this approach, design action and design philosophy take place in the same realm, one not dissociable from the realm of political thought and political action. We agree with Antonio Gramsci that the philosophy of each person "is contained in its entirety in [her] political action."⁸

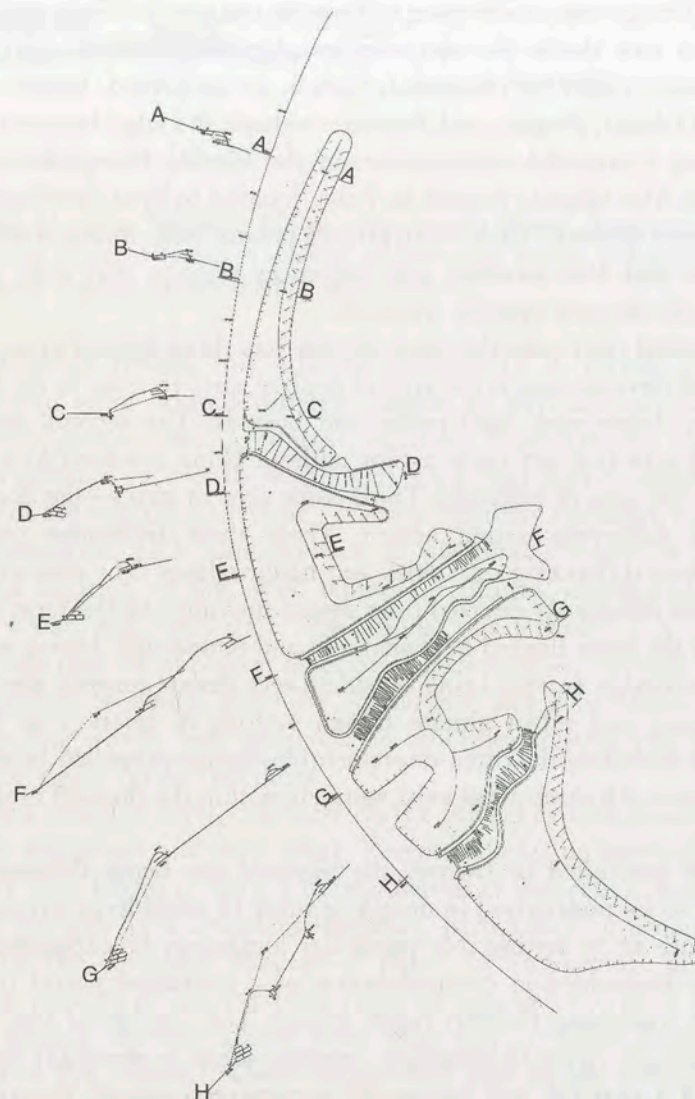
This book explores and critically discerns how sites are engaged by, and conceptualized through, design. As editors, our overall intention is twofold: to lay out what we think site means, and to explore how these meanings inform thinking about specific sites as places for design action. We tie thinking about site as a conceptual construct—"site thinking"—to the grounded site as a physical condition—"thinking about a site."

WHAT IS A SITE?

In design discourse, a site too often is taken as a straightforward entity contained by boundaries that delimit it from the surroundings. This oversimplified understanding has arguable basis, as every work of physical design focuses on spatially finite places. The great majority of professional commissions begin not only with a client, but also with a pre-designated lot owned or controlled by that client. In this sense, designers often receive a site as a delimited given entity. Design pedagogy traditionally has mirrored this aspect of practice. A majority of design studio courses, even those working with hypothetical problems, assign specific locations to students as fixed constraints, so that the locale for academic projects also seems delimited and pre-determined. Practice and pedagogy reinforce similar tacit understandings of site as a circumscribed physical area given *a priori*. Though generally accepted, perhaps for reasons of expediency, such an approach to the site in design misses much. It suggests that designers have no role to play in determining sites and, conversely, that the determination of a site does not bear on matters of design consideration. By implication, it minimizes the consequentiality of factors that inform site choice. By association it similarly brackets out the set of design concerns conventionally and misleadingly referred to as pre-design issues, including also program, financing, and other strategic factors that shape and structure a project. More profoundly, still, it occludes the fact that a site is defined by those holding the power to do so. Indeed, all other discussions of site follow from that structural certainty.

At the same time, existing physical conditions have an enormous influence on ensuing design proposals—both academic and profes-

sional—and the final form of built works. Landform and land itself can become the focus of design. Some projects—such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water or the Quinta da Conceição Swimming Pool by Alvaro Siza—gain renown for forceful, direct engagement with

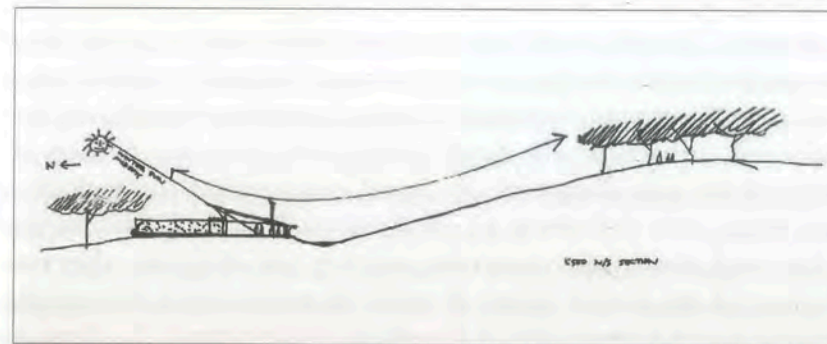


Enric Miralles/Carme Pinos, "Tiro con Arco Competition," Archery Range, Barcelona. Plan and section of entry ramp and earth berming.

geological and hydrological conditions. Such features, along with orientation, topography, and drainage, connect to larger systems that operate in various ways at multiple scales—the solar system, geomorphology, and the water cycle. Any place registers tangible certain aspects of many larger more spatially extensive patterns, orders, and systems. Design can modify site features in relation to larger patterns: vegetation can shade the sun, topographies might be altered, and watercourses might be channeled, buried, or unearthed. Cities—such as New Orleans, Prague, and Boston—reshape the edge between land and water. Channeled watercourses in the Florida Everglades create sinkholes. The *Grands Projets* in Paris, located to spur development, affect urban growth. Each built project creates new forces within its own area and also modifies and influences systems that both reach beyond the site and operate within it.

Conceived over time this way, the site has three distinct areas. The first, most obvious one, is the area of control, easy to trace in the property lines designating legal metes and bounds. The second, encompassing forces that act upon a plot without being confined to it, can be called the area of influence. Third is the area of effect—the domains impacted following design action. These three territories overlap despite their different geographies and temporalities. The area of control—most commonly referred to in design discourse by the term site—describes the most limited field spatially and temporally. Forces within it predate design action. Lying outside direct design control, the areas of influence and effect situate design actions in relation to wider processes including the often-unpredictable change propelled by design intervention. All three areas exist squarely within the domain of design concerns.

To be controlled or owned, the physical site needs delimitation; however to be understood in design, it must be considered extensively in reference to its setting. No particular locale can be experienced in isolation. Embedded in comprehension of a contained parcel is contact with something tangibly much greater. The concept of site, then, simultaneously refers to seemingly opposite ideas: a physically specific place and a spatially and temporally expansive surround. Incorporating three distinct geographic areas, two divergent spatial ideas, and past, present, and future timeframes, sites are complex.



Glenn Murcutt, Meagher House, New South Wales, Australia. Sketch showing siting of house in relation to prevailing winds, topography, and seasonal changes in sun shading requirements.

Language reflects this inherent complexity. A variety of closely associated terms address different aspects of physical location. Place, property, ground, setting, context, situation, landscape: the idea of site might embrace each of these. Though often used interchangeably, none of them are exactly equivalent.⁹ Neither mutually exclusive nor simply commensurate, each term invokes an identifiable region in the conceptual territory of site. With temporal, cultural, ideological, perceptual, scalar, and ontological dimensions, this territory is a culturally rich construct. Its abundant associative meanings—sponsored by many applications in design discourse, synonyms, and denotations—remain tightly interwoven. Site resonates on multiple registers and its multivalence yields varied outcomes.

On a practical level, discourse on the subject evolves independently within disciplines and their areas. Recent writings on landscape architecture have begun to open it to new depths of theoretical inquiry. The social sciences have abundant literature, particularly in urban geography, on the contested concept of place. In architecture and urban design, notions of context have received substantial critical attention since gaining currency almost forty years ago (as Sandy Isenstadt discusses in this volume). These efforts shed light on the subject of site, but only obliquely, as a secondary or corollary concern arising out of lines of investigation into other, already inherently complex design concepts or practices.

Important site issues likewise remain unearthed in current design movements. Though rarely framed as site matters per se, these movements nevertheless revolve around concerns relating to locale. Initiatives in smart growth, sustainable design, generic urbanism, or neo-traditional urbanism all draw upon and propose notions of place-making. Grappling with site-based issues evokes the analogy of seven blind men describing an elephant: each depicts vivid aspects within reach but none correlates to another, and altogether they miss the sense of the overall object of study. In taking much for granted, each one leaves a great deal of knowledge unarticulated. To shape an identifiable discourse that stakes out the site as an object of design concern and a subject of theoretical study requires that site knowledge and its sources become more explicit.

This call for site knowledge echoes similar calls in other fields. In science, debate and critique of scientific objectivity have led to lengthy explorations of standpoint theories, which argue that knowledge articulated from the standpoint of those excluded from ruling relations of power is particularly important, especially as a source of potential assessment, change, and renewal. In politics, critiques of the curious double-ness of the autonomous but universalist man constructed by the liberal-democratic social contract point out that the necessary isolation of such an entity obscures the situated condition of its existence. In philosophy, value-free assumptions in both empiricism and idealism come under critique because the notion of "value-free" denies history. In the social science debate regarding quantitative and qualitative methodology, the latter argues that verisimilitude, repeatability, and enumeration evade the contextual pressures of living. In each case, the obscured, evaded, denied, excluded, or situated knowledge has no authority, and indeed, often, has no words. The critiques delineate tacit knowledge of various kinds, and all recognize the need to work on words to bring those unspoken understandings into communication.¹⁰

SHAPING AN IDENTIFIABLE DISCOURSE

An inquiry into tacit knowledge about site in design, this anthology brings into evidence received ideas, embedded assumptions, and

implied formulations. Creating a framework for thinking and designing begins here by foregrounding the unexamined background knowledge on which thought figures out. For example, architects know that the surrounding physical context impacts on a site; landscape architects know that ecology cannot be ignored; planners know that sites are socially produced. But have they always known these things? When and why do concerns become site matters?

Three premises inform this book. First, site knowledge, even if unspoken, exerts a powerful force in design that theoretical inquiry should acknowledge and critically assess. Second, historiography has sanctioned particular ways of engaging with site matters, and the deleterious effects of these sanctions should be recognized and countered. Third, modes of representation construe sites, and their formative role in the production of site knowledge should be revealed and expressed.

Design does not simply impose on a place. Site and designer engage in dialogic interaction. At once extrinsic and intrinsic, a site exists out there in the world but acquires design meaning only through its apprehension, intellectually and experientially. Therefore, we claim the site as a relational construct that acquires meaning and value through situational interaction and exchange. This relational condition of the site derives from uninterrupted exchange between the real and the representational, the extrinsic and the intrinsic, the world and the world-as-known.¹¹

Site thinking provides the means whereby these exchanges are construed and comprehended. As a form of knowing, site thinking is concretely situated, more interactive than abstract, and less concerned with the semantic content of knowledge than with a concern for relationships among knowers and known. The site provides for a situation that guides what knowers do and how the known responds and can be understood. Site thinking understands knowledge as embedded within specific ways of engaging the world.

This collection does more than simply address subject matter related to site. Each essay herein treats thinking about site as integral to the design process, each provides insights on how ideas about site have developed historiographically or theoretically, based on where and when they arose. The various perspectives included here invite comparative reading. Some focus on formal and physical constructs,

some address discursive material, and others examine processes and practices, including design strategies. All deal with examples of the ways that site knowledge arises from, and applies to, physical conditions confronted in design. In so doing, they demonstrate the ways that site knowledge is derived and concretized.

Theorizing site thinking involves critically examining ideological, historical, and disciplinary frameworks to discern the sources of unarticulated knowledge and the ends to which it is put. We begin with basic questions. How are sites defined? How is value assigned to a site? How do meanings accumulate around the notion of site? Where do they come from, how are they applied, and how are they derived?

Pursuing these questions opens up and legitimizes to serious inquiry both site thinking and thinking about sites. It elevates site (long kept out of the picture, literally) to a new level of visibility. Tracing the web of constructed relationships that ties ideas to things, this critical process scrutinizes the intertwining of conceptual and material dimensions of site. At issue is the concerted operation of concepts, instruments and methodologies that influence design disciplines and practices. Which ideas associate with the concept of site? What projects enter the historical record? How do property laws evolve? In which ways do professionals establish their expertise? How is data collected and graphically represented? The accepted meanings of site and its perceived design value depend on the answers to such questions—on the sources that produce definitions of site.

In design terms, site definition is process driven. It involves detailing physical particulars (for example, itemizing material conditions, characterizing experiential qualities, and surveying topography). It also demands specifying spatial locations—delimiting the exact areas where design activity will take place and deciding upon the contexts within which actions will be considered relevant (referred to above as areas of influence and effect and by Peter Marcuse as the “physical area of concerns”). This definitional work can occur through various means. Those explored here derive from instrumental influences that shape design ideas about site: discourse, instruments of representation, physical material contact, and forms of professional practices.

Discourse provides concepts that help shape thought. The invention—or discarding—of words in any language transforms the way

speakers perceive, conceptualize, and engage their world. Language related to site continually evolves. Terminology falls out of use (as Robin Dripps points out about the Beaux-Arts term *tirer parti*) or enters the design lexicon (Kristina Hill gives the example of “resilience,” a term borrowed from ecology), marking changes in the very process of defining and therefore thinking about sites.

Instruments of representation allow developments in techniques of description. Graphic tools inform and bracket how designers think. Thought is both allowed and constrained by formats (plans, sections, maps, photography, video, and use schedules), scale and scope, and informational frames of reference (types and choices of data). When a model, drawing, or diagram that includes information from outside the bounds of the plot (adjacent structures), temporal phenomena (hundred-year flood lines), or otherwise hidden factors (subterranean toxic plumes), assimilates situational influences to the site to support relational understandings. Omitting such information has the opposite effect.

Physical material contact delivers experience and perception. Direct material physical encounter with sights, sounds, smells, and textures yields yet another body of site knowledge (haecceity, as Elizabeth Meyer calls it) bracketed through subjective experiences of phenomena. Recording seasonal or daily changes in light quality, for example, introduces into site thinking a temporal dimension. The professionalized and disciplined practices of architects, planners, landscape architects, and urbanists (techniques of analysis, data collection processes, etc.) also lends identity to a site, since design actions are themselves definitive acts.

Forms of professional practice establish horizons of operation. Working knowledge of a particular place derives from abstract concepts, material conditions, and structuring practices, which are always intercalated, inflecting on and infecting one another rather than remaining separate or distinct. For a design professional, what matters about a locale slated for design action—what will be considered useful or valuable about a site—depends on how knowledge of site is framed. Developers might apply financial models, analyzing a parcel’s potential to provide profitable returns in an economically construed context (the site defined in fiscal terms). Landscape architects might

consider ecological measures (the site defined in terms of resilience or sustainability). Architects might focus on physical forms and built patterns (the site defined in morphological terms). Each engages in different forms of site knowledge that yield site readings. In design theory and practice, the range and variety of possible readings too rarely has been made clear.

The different perspectives these essays impart on the constructedness of site, and the challenges that its relational condition poses for design, reflect differences in the various disciplinary frameworks within the broad field of physical and environmental design. A complex interplay of forces (natural and physical, discursive and narrative, and social and cultural) brings site knowledge into being. Foregrounding this interplay underscores the constructedness of site. Opening a window onto some of the other things (places, times, instruments, and concepts) that structure the relational condition of site, situates the process of site thinking itself.

Connecting sites and settings not only bears upon the consideration of physical locales, it applies equally to theorizing genres of site thinking. That ideas regarding site come from many sources provides motive for a multi-disciplinary approach. Site thinking, like thinking in general, is necessarily situationally bound. Different stocks of site knowledge derive from recognized disciplinary settings that attribute value to ideas, practices, and things based on internalized measures. Different disciplinary backgrounds ascribe significance to specific limited perspectives, bracketing thinking according to their own interests. The placement of these brackets, in turn, signals the existence of “habits of mind,” those horizons—or limitations—to imagination that *discipline* thought. The collection reaches beyond individual disciplinary confines because the subject of site is not bound to any one area, but in fact provides literal and conceptual common ground across the entire design field.

STRANDS OF SITE THINKING

The range of issues and topics touched on in this anthology reconfirms the multivalence of the concept of site. Nevertheless, three identifiable

strands of site thinking stand out. The first concerns vocabulary: the terms and concepts normally drawn upon to talk about site. The second deals with history: how site-oriented issues, design processes, and the siting of specific projects are treated by the historiographical record. The third strand investigates the manifestation and derivation of site-related design practices.

Concepts, Terms, and Vocabulary

For the most part, we do not first see and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.¹²

While site discourse would appear at first glance to consist of a rich set of terms, in fact, this vocabulary has not been sufficiently examined. The idea itself commands a wide lexical domain inhabited by synonyms that are not actually synonymous. In this sense, site discourse is largely *terra incognita*, since it offers few options to qualify site study approaches or name design strategies.

Our interest in defining site does not presume to attach fixed meanings to words. The focus on language strives instead to clarify how the idea derives its meaning in combination with a host of other concepts, each of which singly suggests a region within a larger conceptual territory. This territory, long perceived primarily in terms of obvious similarities, is in fact replete with subtle distinctions that, charted out, have the potential to order new levels of theoretical understanding and new approaches to design practices.

Examining the language of site can open up existing vocabulary and add to this vocabulary. It is more than simply a linguistic exercise. The work of unpacking received terms and parsing out their different meanings forms a crucial part of a broader endeavor to nuance the conceptual foundations of design. Historical and contemporary connotations of frequently associated terms—such as “property,” “landscape,” and “context”—vary widely; as potent and distinct frames of reference influencing design practices, these variations beg

closer examination. New vocabulary suggests new directions for future site thinking. Terms—such as “area of concern,” “site reach,” and “urban constellation”—challenge the very possibility of a site fully under design control. Qualifiers (“stealthy” versus “opportunistic” site strategies; site as “framework,” “armature,” “figure,” or “fragment”) add precision to accounts of specific design projects, site reading, and design practices. Inventive language enriches site discourse and, at times, promises a wider impact. New descriptors applied to existing built conditions (the inside-out site and site-sequencing, for example, coined by Paul Hess in his discussion of suburban settlement patterns) make it possible to identify features of the built environment previously left unrecognized for lack of adequate language. The notion of “site suppression” (invented by Wendy Redfield to evoke a repressive role of modern design historiography with respect to site matters) has potentially profound implications not only for the reassessment of specific modernist works of design, but for a broad critical re-appraisal of modern design practice and theory as a whole.

The Subject of Site Historically Considered

The politics of disciplinization, conceived as all disciplinization must be, as a set of negations, consists in what it marks out for repression for those who wish to claim the authority of discipline itself for their learning.¹³

Modernist design history, and in particular that of modern architecture, is remarkable for its sustained disregard of site-related issues.¹⁴ The written record of individual works presents countless examples in texts and graphics confined almost exclusively to the project itself or, at best, to its directly adjacent physical context. Through this extremely bracketed approach, modernist design history conveys the strong, albeit tacit, conviction that sites are simple, bounded entities.

In design history, the site has been de-natured (engaged as formal surface); mythologized (emptied of meaning); and colonized (subjected to the singular authority of design controls). This history offers few images, few tools, and few models for capturing the relationship

between a project and its locale. Such accounting—or, more accurately, “discounting”—amounts to a long-standing repression of site matters. A close look at the canon in design history shows that it largely excludes tendencies toward site thinking.

A link exists between modernist design history’s distaste for engaging with tradition and the omission of site-related ideas from the modern historiographical record. Revisiting projects *in situ* demonstrates that, in fact, the relationship between a project and its locale lies within the actual—if not historically authorized—array of modernist design concerns. Exposing the kind of data, methods and analytic tools that instigate specific ways of seeing (or not seeing) sites allows those methods to be recalibrated, making more accurate descriptions possible. New histories focused expressly on site analysis and site design practices bring to light long-overlooked but crucial aspects of the design process.

The received historical record puts forward a well-worn narrative that casts modernist design as predisposed to treat specific sites as idealized and universal; it consistently eschews the subject’s cultural thickness and conceptual intricacy. By effectively eliminating the complexity of the subject from view, this version of history suggests that positive value adheres to sites only when they can be made amenable to simple classification and control. This predilection arises not from within design disciplines, but more broadly out of post-enlightenment thought. Site thinking throws down powerful challenge to a modern epistemological framework that privileges clear categorization.¹⁵ At once a real construct (of nature), a narrated construct (of discourse), and a collective construct (socially constituted), site presents a potent example of hybridity. Any attempt to meaningfully address its many registers of significance demands a constant crossing of knowledge categories. Site thinking must continually oscillate between material and conceptual, abstract and physical, discursive and experiential, and general and specific points of view.

Between the Particular and the Universal

Local uniqueness matters...Spatial differentiation, geographical variety, is not just an outcome; it is integral to the reproduction

of society and its dominant social relations. The challenge is to hold the two sides together; to understand the general underlying causes while at the same time recognizing and appreciating the importance of the specific and unique.¹⁶

Twentieth-century views on modernity drew on arguments whose basic forms were established during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in the encounter between the Enlightenment conception of a human science and its critics. Enlightenment scholars described historical (and geographical) diversity via a de-centered, universalistic view of human nature. Critics of the Enlightenment characterized this variation in a centered, particularistic manner, emphasizing the individuality of cultural communities.

Aspects of both views were interwoven in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century social thought. (For example, German liberal theorists associated with the "return to Kant" sought, in part, to accommodate the provincialism of national culture groups to the cosmopolitanism of Kant.) The tension between a de-centered universalism and a centered particularism appears in the epistemological discussions of the historical (and situated) individual. In fact, Enlightenment scholars, including Voltaire and Hume, expressed concern that the historical individuality of cultures went overlooked—obscured, in their view, by tendencies to cast the universalism of Enlightenment thought and the particularism associated with its critics in dichotomous terms. The methodological problem is to account for individuality in terms of universal concepts. Nineteenth-century critics (as well as Enlightenment scholars) failed to resolve how "historical particulars" were "to be placed within a conceptual order without violating their individuality."¹⁷

This same problem arises in the study of physical particulars of place, site, or region. Geographers have sought to create a science of place that recognizes both the diversity and the particularity of the way in which different cultures adapt to their environments. Geographers—as well as theorists and many designers—have valued the local and made it an object of scientific study, but generally from the cosmopolitan perspective of modern science. This neat meta-level distinction between the form and the content of investigations belies a confused

relation between the universalizing and the particularizing discourses that characterize the study of places. The scientific search for universals seems to trivialize the interest in the particularity of specific sites, and the demand for universal ethical principles appears to undermine the significance of the moral particularity associated with the individual's attachment to locale and community.

Nevertheless, as agents, individuals are always "situated" in the world. The significance of place in modern life is associated with this fact of situatedness and the closely allied issues of identity and action. This aspect of human existence cannot be fully appreciated from the distant and detached viewpoint associated with scientific theorizing. To do so requires generalizing the specificity of place into a set of generic categories or reducing the richness of specific milieus as context or setting to the more limited sense of place as locations. But to understand site as context or setting forces recognition that, from the objective viewpoint of the theorist, no essence or universal site structure exists to be uncovered or discovered.

Understanding site must draw on both an objective reality and a subjective perception. From the de-centered vantage point of the theoretical scientist, site becomes either location or a set of generic relations and thereby loses much of its significance for human action. From the centered viewpoint of the subject, site has meaning in relation to an individual's (or a group's) basic worldview and social situation.

The specificity of site is understood from a point of view, and for this reason a student of site must rely upon forms of analysis that lie between the centered and de-centered view. Such forms might be described as situated knowledges or as narrative-like syntheses. Such a stance is less detached than that of the theoretical scientist and more detached than experiential or cognitive description. These distinct positions, which blend together in experience, illustrate the relative differences in the representation of site that result from the process of seeking a de-centered perspective versus one that attempts to mediate the views of the (anthropological) insider and the outsider.

Site is best viewed from points in between.

THE ESSAYS

To comprehend site requires many horizons of understanding—historical, philosophical, rhetorical, legal; analytic, formal, descriptive, aesthetic; strategic, tactical; social, economic, political. The essays included here draw upon all of these, and more. Each adopts a distinct point of departure to examine site as a culturally constructed relation. So doing, the collection provides one possible register of the range of concepts, issues, and practices that can properly be deemed site-related matters for design.

Overlapping

The book is organized around three overlapping groupings. Each functions like a lens to focus on an area of theorizing. The first addresses concepts, terms, and vocabulary; the second revisits and (re)writes history to measure the degree of importance—or irrelevance—of site matters for design; the third speaks to the relationship between techniques of representation, methods of study, and strategic approaches to design. A photo essay, curated by Lucy R. Lippard, opens the book. This portfolio of images and commentary signals the importance of creative work and critical discourse on site specificity in contemporary art. It also forecasts many of the themes developed in subsequent texts.

The opening grouping (directly following Lippard's contribution) parses the language typically used to qualify meanings of site. The first pair of essays by Harvey Jacobs and Robert Beauregard bring nuance and precision to words aligned with the most common connotation of the term site, as a localized physical entity. Hewing closely to the understanding of site as a limited place or piece of property and accepting its association with concepts of property and place, they turn attention to how the concept is constituted, and to what ends. Using history, Jacobs traces the evolving social meaning of the concept of property and, in so doing, throws the stability of property-based definitions of site into question. Beauregard problematizes the presumed synonyms *place* and *site* by interrogating narratives that set up specific locales for proposed design actions. Their examinations reveal a disciplinary predilection on the part of planning discourse to employ socio-

economic and political frameworks to construct site. Using different tactics, both authors open up contemporary discourse on site.

The next pairing augments the discourse of theory by supplementing its current lexicon with new terms. Robin Dripps revives the historical notion of *tirer parti* to qualify an approach to site thinking that assigns value to the physical ground as a font of design ideas. Elizabeth Meyer introduces notions of site as armature, figure, fragment, and haecceity. This new vocabulary, derived from close analysis of actual designed landscapes, works both as an analytical tool for interpretation and as a conceptual tool to structure design processes. Dripps and Meyer both assume a point of departure that reflects concern for the material and the experiential aspects of site, a habit of mind associated with the disciplines of architecture and landscape design. They base their respective discussions on *ground* and *landscape* in an understanding of site that reaches beyond the narrow confines of given places and legally defined property. In fact, Dripps directly challenges what Jacobs and Beauregard accept as given—that site refers to a spatially contained parcel of land. (Despite this significant difference, the attention Dripps pays to the experiential and material fullness of the ground reprises, through a different lens, Beauregard's assertion that sites are never empty.) The first set of essays concludes with two explorations of context, one from a disciplinary perspective and the other in historical terms. Kristina Hill shows how shifts in intellectual contexts shape design approaches, and in particular how recent developments in ecological sciences sponsor reconsideration of what might properly be considered the site in design. Sandy Isenstadt brings attention to what lies beyond a lot or parcel. Not primarily focused on the question of language per se, Isenstadt draws careful distinctions between context as an issue for design theory, the context as physical fabric, and, finally, the notion of site.

The six essays that examine histories of site thinking illustrate specific instances of the phenomenon identified by Wendy Redfield as site suppression (four belong as well to the first group). This second set revisits modernist design historiography to confront its depletions and expose its repressive force; this set contributes new history and new models for thinking about and acting on sites. As part of an effort to characterize sites as generative ground, Dripps retrieves a potent con-

cept for site thinking from the early-nineteenth-century French architect and theorist, Quatremère de Quincy. Meyer delves into late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century texts on landscape design to derive inventive models for interpreting, conceiving, and strategically engaging sites today. Hill writes a history of the recent past, looking at the influence of ecological science on contemporary landscape design practices. Isenstadt enlarges the historical record by tracing the lines of design debates around the issue of context, from its introduction as a corrective for the anti-historical claims in the 1960s of modernist architecture and urban design through to the 1990s. An architectural historian, Isenstadt illuminates the temporal dimension of site thinking. Both Wendy Redfield and Paul Hess (the last to focus directly on modernist history) interrogate its repressive effects with the conviction that close attention to the built historical record can bring into visibility what the written historical record obscures. Redfield takes on one of the most commanding figures in modern architecture. Her site-based readings of *Atelier Ozenfant* and *Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret*, early projects by Le Corbusier, offer a sharply contrasting view on the received knowledge of modernism to that presented by Isenstadt. Redfield raises a significant challenge to normative assumptions about Le Corbusier's self-proclaimed and historically inscribed disinterest in site-specificity. Similarly debunking a historically construed understanding of site, Hess challenges the presumption that post-war American suburban settlement fabric should be understood as comprised simply of single-family houses.

Hess and Redfield can also be read as belonging in the final grouping in the anthology, that ties a theoretical concern about site theory to the material fact that all physical design projects are situated in particular locales. These five essays consider site thinking in methodological terms, examining tools, instruments, and modes of representation through studies of specific design projects, site analysis methods, and site design processes. All the essays share a project-based approach to re-thinking site, elaborated through close attention to actual drawings, buildings, and settlement patterns, again spanning historical and present-day examples. Redfield's careful analysis of two Le Corbusier houses—the architecture, construction sites, and fabric of the urban surrounds—proffers a revised understanding of the buildings them-

selves, and demonstrates the substantial influence of site conditions on the process of their design. Hess makes a critique of conventional methods of census data collection as the information base that grounds received ideas of suburbs and, so doing, foregrounds the role of representation as a mode of site knowledge. Peter Marcuse examines the highly charged development site of the World Trade Center disaster. Carol Burns probes the notion of the *high performance site* to examine the site as a medium and as an agent of performance. Andrea Kahn draws on New York City to examine processes of site definition in the field of urban design, arguing for situationally derived models of site thinking.

In his Afterword, "Engaging the Field," William Sherman talks to the timeliness of a volume on the subject of site. Why does site matter now? In this era, epistemologically, knowledge is emerging with particular force in a frontier between well-established fields. Energetic scholarship today finds material in the thresholds that have, in the recent past, distinguished and separated areas of specialized knowledge. Within the modern university, new institutional structures to support emerging research between departments are called, revealingly, centers. The design fields today are undergoing such transformation, and boundaries have begun to blur between well-defined disciplinary subspecialties. Sherman describes and advocates for potential institutional innovation, drawing on initiatives at the University of Virginia to combine academic departments. Many types of new academic programs are being formed—including innovative hybrid, merged or double degree programs—that open fresh perspectives for research and teaching.¹⁸ As new allegiances are forged, new kinds of design practices are developing.

In this context, site provides a potent locus for the production of knowledge and the redefinition of disciplines. The common ground that it affords—materially and intellectually—prompts a recalibration of relations between all whose work concerns the physical environment. Within the more specialized arena of architecture, foregrounding site as a subject of inquiry and a domain of action becomes part of a larger contemporary critique of the isolated, autonomous object in design.

The site knowledge presented here can shed new light on the past as well as provide frameworks for future developments. It also necessarily points to how much about site remains to be explored. This collection only begins to deal with the full range of ideas and things that might rightfully be deemed site matters for design. It encompasses material, conceptual, and methodological concerns to convey the complexity of site thinking. It comprehends site on the levels of theory and practice simultaneously, to abstract from and enrich concrete experience in the design field as a whole. Starting with design, these explorations reach out to encompass the world beyond design.

Notes

1. The five exhibited teams were led by Henning Larsens Tegnestue A/S (Denmark); Morphosis (Los Angeles); MVRDV (the Netherlands); Smith-Miller + Hawkinson (New York City); and Zaha Hadid Architects (London).
2. See Herbert Muschamp, "Let the Design Sprint Begin," March 11, 2004, Section F, House and Home *New York Times* http://www.nyc2012.com/village_finalists/zaha.html.
3. Descriptions from the official NYC 2012 Website http://www.nyc2012.com/village_finalists.
4. Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 28.
5. Separation of theory and practice may also be accompanied by classism, even if perhaps unconscious: "It is essential to educate the educator himself. [Their] doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts one of which is superior to society." Karl Marx, "Theses of Feuerbach," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 121.
6. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion and Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Rowe, 1987), 9.
7. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, tr. M. Nicolaus (Middlesex: Penguin Books 1973), 100–101.
8. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, tr. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 324.
9. See Carol J. Burns, "On Site" in ed. A. Kahn, *Drawing/Building/Text* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991).
10. Lynette Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing: Situated Textualities in Science, Computing, and the Arts* (London, Routledge, 1999), 2.
11. This idea of uninterrupted exchange comes from Bahktin's work on the dialogic imagination: "However forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary line between them, they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction, uninterrupted exchange goes on between them..." M. M. Bahktin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, tr. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 254.
12. Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (1922) as cited by Stanley Aronowitz, "Is a Democracy Possible?" in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. B. Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 78.
13. Hayden White, "Historical Interpretation," *Critical Inquiry* 9:1 (September 1982), 119.
14. For a clear omission of site as a design concept, see the "Index of Concepts," in Sigfried Giedion, *The Eternal Present Volume II: The Beginnings of Architecture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).
15. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, tr. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 6.
16. Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labor: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 299–300.
17. Steven Seidman, *Liberalism and the Origins of European Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.)
18. For example, at the University of Virginia, the separate departments of Architecture and Landscape Architecture were restructured in 2003 to form one faculty; at Washington University, in St. Louis, an urban design program dating back to the early 1960s has, since 1999, undergone a significant reorganization to integrate courses in landscape, architecture and infrastructure in order to establish a curriculum dedicated to the study and design of the Metropolitan Landscape; and, since the late 1990s, students can get degrees in Landscape Urbanism at various institutions, including the University of Chicago and the Architectural Association in London.