CAROL J. BURNS

ON SITE:
ARCHITECTURAL PREOCCUPATIONS

In architectural design, the demands of relating a building to a physical location are necessary and inevitable; the site is initially construed and finally achieved in the architectural work. The problems attendant to siting have a pervasive and profound impact on buildings. Nonetheless, architectural theory and criticism have tended to address siting issues with descriptive or analytic references to specific exemplary projects. This approach exclusively reveals through circumstantial strategies the lack of a clear conceptual basis for the notion of site within architecture.[2] Because of its intrinsic importance and generative potential, the conceptual content of site must be made available for study and opened to question as a means to disclose and, ultimately, to challenge the motives and precepts of the discipline.

I suggest a twofold consideration of the site in architecture: in terms of theory or knowledge (what we think site is), and in terms of the impact of theory on action (what we make of a site, or how it informs constructions and is formed through them). This emphasis on thought and action poses fundamental questions: What is a site? How is it constructed? And how can a site inform building and architecture? These obvious but remarkably resistant questions stem from a conviction that architecture is not constituted of buildings or sites but arises from the studied relationship of the two and from an awareness that site is received as an architectural construct, even if unconsciously. Historically the notions of site and architecture have shifted from the sacred to the profane (churches to institu-

tions), from the specific to the general (premodern to modern), and from the unique to the nostalgic (prototype to type). Considering the site in terms of theory and siting in terms of architectural activity outlines the insistent intersections of architecture, site, and construction and also illuminates design thinking in architecture. The topic here is not simply the site; it is equally the architectural understanding of the site. This inquiry is comprised of a survey of the changing status of site, certain applications of the concept, and a reading of the terms by which site is construed. It is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive.

The emergence of "site" as a concern in areas other than architecture underscores its importance to theoretical constructions in economics, politics, and sociocultural conditions. The term's nuance has been expanded by its appropriation in divergent discourses, although, as Desa Philippi has noted, it has not been given definition in these disciplines: "[This] is signalled by the ubiquity of the notion of site across the discourses that constitute the domains of knowledge in the Western World, from sociology to philosophy, from political science to the arts . . . Indeed, 'site' threatens to become a free floating signifier, attaching itself to an astounding number of objects: the artwork has become a site itself rather than existing in relation to one; the body is a site; as are even its organs."[3] The text is called a site, so are discourses. Texts are constructs, and discourses are contexts in which texts are read; site applies to both, indicating its simultaneous and multiple scales of reference.

The present status of site as a shaping force within architecture is a reaction to the mainstream ideology of modern architecture. Called "the International Style" or "functional modernism," the names given to modern architecture betray a concern for universalizing issues unrelated—even opposed—to those arising from the specificity of a given place. Motivated by technological developments, the possibility of producing widely available quality goods, and a social program with utopian aspirations, the modernist program in conjunction with a developing global economy led to standardization of environments and cultures. Reactions against the resulting widespread homogeneity are evident in diverse architectural responses of the last twenty years: attempts by environmental planners to search out and involve local community groups in decision-making processes; the identification of specific practices within defined geographic or cultural locales (for example, the Ticino or Southern California); academic ideologies based on methodological response to specific built contexts (such as the Cornell school); and the articulation of a theory of regionalism in architecture.[4] Vittorio Gregotti summarizes the arguments this way: "The worst enemy of

modern architecture is the idea of space considered solely in terms of its economic and technical exigencies indifferent to the idea of the site."[5] Admittedly, the concern for site is only one of the reactive developments that have become initiatory, contributing to widespread alteration in the perceived hierarchy of forces shaping architecture today. As the awareness of the relationship between cultural production and the local circumstances of material practice has come to the fore, attention to site has begun to frame the problem of making and interpreting architecture.

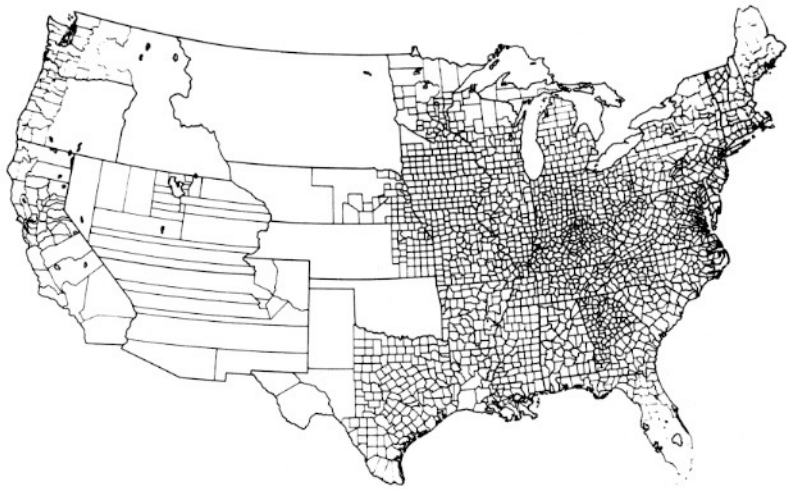
At present, site is frequently seen as a synchronic phenomenon, irrevocably divorced from other times. The history of a setting is acknowledged only insofar as the forces acting upon it have affected its present visible form. " 'Site' has come to mark a particular conjunction where the temporal is eroded by the spatial and where history becomes the isolated image of its residue."[6] However, local circumstances cannot be considered simply in terms of space; they also require a diachronic apprehension of time. As Kurt Forster has said, "No understanding of a site is conceivable without a communal history, or conceivable with a substitution of that history . . . We may very well suffer from a curious historical impatience. The expectation that meaning can be generated instantaneously seems to have become, partly, a surrogate subject of contemporary projects."[7] Traditionally, the exclusive object of site planning is space; the potential to plan or "plot" time is not pursued. The principle of the (so-called) master plan is to design the space of a terrain over an extended time; there must exist a similar, perhaps paradoxical, potential for plotting the time of a terrain over space, which would differ from an architectural narrative or promenade by specifically accounting for growth and change in time.

Architectural Preoccupations

The Cleared Site / The Constructed Site

In order to focus on the site within architectural thinking, two opposed conceptions (resulting from the reactive processes outlined above and representing positions that have currency) will be examined: the cleared site and the constructed site.

The idea of the cleared site is based on an assumption that the site as received is unoccupied, lacking any prior constructions and empty of content. It posits space as objective and "pure," a neutral mathematical object. This assumed neutrality fosters the impression that the land and the space of a site are independent of political motive.[8] This attitude prevails most strongly over undeveloped land, which is perceived as void of architectural context even though



County boundaries of the United States, 1860, Line drawing

replete with natural constructions—vegetation, drainage systems, wind patterns, animal habitats, and so forth. Natural constructions are considered secondary to human constructions by architecture and the planning disciplines; only landscape architecture recognizes their status insofar as the disciplinary means and methods are developed around them. The disregard for natural constructions betrays the presumption that they are politically and ideologically immaterial. The cleared site conception, which is apparently nonpolitical and nonideological, implies that the mechanisms adapted by the planning disciplines are equally neutral in ideological terms, equally unengaged with issues of power. As a stratagem, it offers great latitude by fostering an illusion that planning is apolitical.

The cleared site argument depends on the mathematicization of land, a technique fundamental to the basic comprehension of the environment. "In Western societies the first step toward control of an environment usually is the assigning of tracts as grants of property—done by drawing lines on paper, although little may be known about the tract that is to be colonized."[9] To rationalize land is to objectify it profoundly. For example, the so-called Jeffersonian grid—inspired by precedents as old as Ptolemy's map and centuriation, the Roman system of land division—has been applied to 69 percent of the land in 48 American states. Taken for granted and generally accepted as an advantage for settlement, its application was explicitly motivated by economic and governmental control: "Congressional townships of thirty-six miles were created by federal law for the sole purpose of making available easily identifiable and saleable tracts . . . The Land Ordinance Act of 1785 [has divided

land] into rectangles of sections and townships by whose lines the settler has been able easily and certainly to locate his farm and the forester his forty. In the local organization of the Middle West these lines have played an important part."[10] The pervasive presence of the federal rectangular grid has rendered it, for most Americans and Canadians, inevitable or even natural. Nevertheless, the grid has the effect of making real differences in sites invisible; it presumes equal access to all land; and it denies specificity to each parcel. As an embodiment of the human effort to conquer space, surveying has enormous impact on the understanding of land use, the perception of landscape, and the ensuing land development; it shapes the outline and content of any piece of land available as a location for architecture. Far from being objective or neutral, geometry and mathematics are constructions that occupy sites.

When applied to land, the abstract clarity of geometry becomes "invisible."[11] The rationalism that objectifies the site via geometry masks itself by virtue of its uniformity and masks the site's topographical irregularities, flattening the land and the perception of the land. Ernst Cassirer has said:

> Cognition devises symbolic concepts—the concepts of space and time [and geometry]—in order to dominate the world of sensory experience and survey it as a world ordered by law, but nothing in the sensory data themselves immediately corresponds to [the symbolic concepts] . . . The logic of things cannot be separated from the logic of signs. For the sign is no mere accidental cloak of the idea, but its necessary and essential organ . . . No form of cultural activity can develop its appropriate and peculiar type of comprehension and configuration without, as it were, creating a definite sensuous substratum for itself. This substratum is so essential that it sometimes seems to constitute the entire content, the true 'meaning' of these forms."[12]

Geometry, laid over land, providing it with content, is one such substratum. Invisible and immaterial, it cannot be extracted from land because it emplaces and encloses the land: one cannot divorce the site from the way it is known.

The technique of the cleared site depends on the map and the plan, organizational constructs that help to level the ground, presenting it as a supporting platform or foundation of no important matter. The debased ground plane is abstracted so that ensuing planning operations may introduce content to the cleared site. For the architecture of the cleared site, buildings form that content—visible superstructures imported onto and overriding the demoted terrain.

Mies van der Rohe, Project for Chicago Convention Center, photo collage, 1939

The most notable designs founded on the cleared site are of a scale massive enough to clear and rebuild the setting literally. Projects conceived on a podium—such as United Nations Plaza, Albany Government Center, or the Acropolis—convey the requisite power to claim, "flatten," and build powerful sites. However, the ensuing architecture need not carry such weight symbolically or literally; residential structures, the most commonplace of architectural commissions, without programmatic "weight," can also use the cleared site to convey monumentality. Mies van der Rohe's large urban complexes on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago and Westmount Square in Montreal place buildings with ideal plans into contradictory city fabrics, which are rendered ideal by clearing the immediate premises. The Farnsworth House, elevated above the high-water mark in a flood plain periodically cleared by nature, is built on land that might be considered "unbuildable" were it not for the strategy of the cleared site.

Such clearing, conveying self-expression and the "heroic" perception of the modern architect as artist, attempts to conquer a territory completely in a single effort, precluding change, development, and all future planning. In aiming to determine definitively the life of the place, the cleared site strategy undertakes to isolate architecture from time. The past is denied and the future is deemed powerless to change the situation, much less improve it. Denying any relationship to existing conditions, the architecture of the cleared site presumes a power to initiate and finalize the site in both spatial and temporal terms.

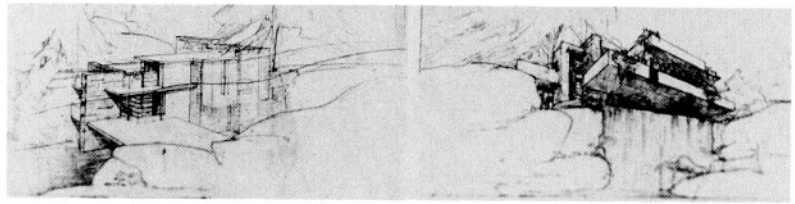
However, a real site cannot be removed from human time. The space of the site is made by humans and is by necessity political; any piece of land subject to human attention becomes charged with power and its mechanisms. This is the meaning or content that

Terraced hillslopes of surface mine, Appalachian Mountains, aerial photograph

humans bring to nature, that architecture must bring to the site. The cleared site exists only in eternity. It is a fantastic, poetic, or mythical character, a fiction invented by humans for the conquest of space and time. By presuming to arrest time and condemn physicality, the cleared site tries to deny its origin in human construction; it is a veiled attempt to remove itself from the human condition.

Opposed to the idea of the cleared site is that of the constructed site, which emphasizes the visible physicality, morphological qualities, and existing conditions of land and architecture. Connecting the earth as natural form to the building as constructed form, the notion of the constructed site implies that the resulting architecture is meant to be understood in physical terms—building and setting are seen to be shaped through obviously physical processes.

The constructed site argument depends on the visible layers of landscape phenomena: first, the prehuman or prehistoric landforms resulting from chthonic forces; second, that which remains of the efforts and projects of the period when agriculture was dominant, in other words, rural landscapes, districts, and regions; third, a layer of transformations that occurred primarily during the industrial period, including increased settlement densities afforded by the invention of transportation systems such as railroads and canals; and, finally, the present processes, which are more diffuse but of a



Frank Lloyd Wright, Edgar J. Kaufmann House ("Fallingwater"), Bear Run, Pennsylvania, Perspective, 1936

larger scale of operation and include, for example, highway systems and suburban and exurban development. These natural and human forces have shaped land, and any situation available for building has already been somehow physically constructed by these agencies.

Though these layers are constituted of physical material (in contrast to mathematical abstractions) they are also difficult to see. The layers, accumulated over time, are not seen as distinct strata, nor do their phenomena appear as discrete. They are visually obscure because they are physically and spatially coextensive, which leads to interruption, simultaneity, discontinuity, synchronism, fragmentation, coincidence, and disruption; they cohere only in abrupt juxtapositions. As the abstract overlay of mathematics masks topography by systematizing it, the physical phenomena, in apparently incoherent conjunction, effectively mask the systems—natural and man-made—that determine their present form.

The technique of the constructed site depends on the section as a composite device. Conveying the topographic qualities of both building and setting in the base line, the horizon line, and the profile line, the section also presents the visual character of the vertical surfaces beyond. It shows the visual construction of the setting in phenomenological terms and the conceptual or structural use of the visiblesetting in design thinking.

The method of the constructed site singles out particular visible phenomena to provide a generative concept, which is then used as a literal basis of construction. Several opportunities are lost in this approach. By valuing visible material, what is not immediately present is not addressed (for example, the history or the poetics of a place). The architecture devised for the spot is conceived as a constructive extension of the conditions of the location itself; it thus provides a further construction of the already constructed site. Though it may mediate between the landscape and the building, such architecture uses the site for its own support and extension. Therefore, though the situation is seen as generative, it is not intentionally shaped or designed by the architect; it is simply appropriated. But because building architecture necessarily entails building a site, even this apparently passive appropriation necessarily changes the situation. Therefore, rather than attempt to maintain a neutral stance, the architect must take responsibility for the site and assume its control for a limited passage of time.

Conceptions of the site—cleared and constructed—can be compared to certain attitudes about designing an addition to an existing work of architecture or construction.[13] One strategy for addition is the extension, which hides the new work by reproducing the forms and materials of the existing structure. As a pure strategy, this is obviously impossible in thinking about architecture as an addition to the (already constructed) site because the physical requirements of architecture are not satisfied by the forms of materials in nature. The other obvious strategy for addition is to design the new without relation to the existing structure as analogous to the model of the cleared site, which brings imported content to a situation conceived as without meaning. Yet another possibility is to investigate the existing situation—building, city, or native land—to discover its latent qualities or potential; inherent conditions can motivate the ensuing construction so that the new participates in the existing. This allows both a criticism and a release from the received conditions and, reciprocally, a reverberation of them so that the boundaries between the conditions as received and as renovated become blurred; both may be productive because both are aggressive with respect to each other.

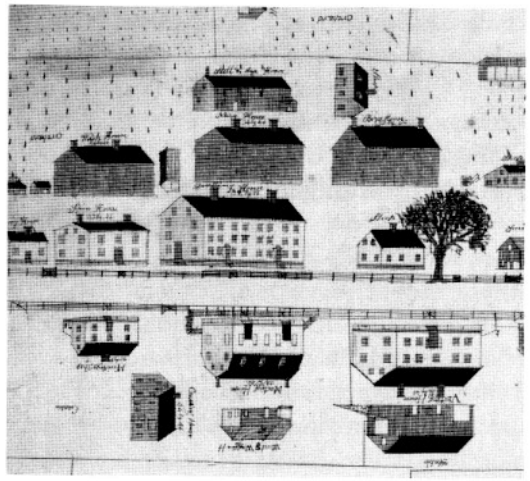
In arguing that a site, as a result of human action, is always already conceptually and physically constructed prior to building architecture—which is to say, preoccupied by the way it is known and by its history—the apparent opposition of the cleared site and the constructed site are thrown into question. The site as received is never cleared or empty; indeed, it is not possible for the architect to clear the site of its own constituent formal content. Therefore, a cleared site model reveals itself to be a strategy for adding over and against the received site. The cleared site and constructed site are thus only ostensibly opposed. By denying or erasing the site, and by reducing its physical and temporal dimensions through a limited appropriation, the cleared site and the constructed site circumscribe the productive potential of the site.

ARCHITECTURAL PREOCCUPATIONS: CONSTRUING COMMON LANGUAGE

In every series of real terms, not only do the terms themselves and their associations and environments change, but we change, and their meaning for us changes, so that new kinds of sameness and types of causations continually come into view and appeal to our interest. —William James[14]

As commonly used, the word "site" means the local position of a building, town, monument, or similar work; it may also signify a space of ground occupied or to be occupied by a building; more generally, it describes the place or scene of something.[15] The term approaches some architectural characteristics in colloquial use–it is inclusive in scale (encompassing both the building and the town) and is explicitly associated with the position of three-dimensional constructs. Derived from verbs stressing action (*sinere*, meaning to leave, place, or lay; and *serere*, meaning to sow), a site results from human agency.

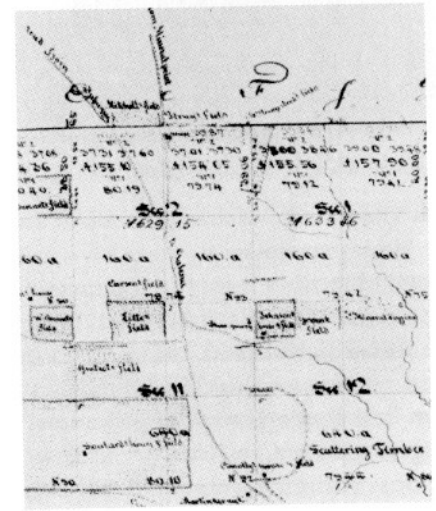
The architectural site eludes precise definition partly because of the disarming immediacy of its physical setting, which all too easily eclipses apprehension of its constructive and constituative aspects. The initial approach to understanding site through some models and strategies within architecture is now followed through citation of its own meanings, the diverse denomination by which it is described in common language. Briefly, each term is taken in itself and to derive a suggestion as to how its understanding may illuminate or be brought into architectural thought and practice. This is to try to open to study the conceptual possibilities of the site in its own potential, not as a contingency to architecture but in its own multivalence.



Brother Joshua Bussell, Map of Church Family Shaker Village, Alfred, Maine, Line drawing with color

The "lot" is a measured parcel of land with fixed boundaries as designated on a plot or survey. By association, it is simultaneously a fortune and a duty (to "draw lots" is to be subject to an operation of chance). The word also conveys contradictory meanings with respect to amount or measure: a lot is a fraction or a portion of some larger thing, as in a share; yet it is also a quantity significant in itself,

as in "a lot of something." In architecture the term "lot" seems neutral. A person may buy a lot on which to build a house, but the location for the house is determined by ascribing values to certain aspects of the lot–orientation, setback, view, etc. The lot exists "prior" to the site and conveys only boundary and measure. However, boundary is a function of both legal and economic power, and measure is a function of knowledge. Thus, the apparently neutral term "lot" is situated at the intersection of knowledge and power, potent forces preoccupying the architectural site.

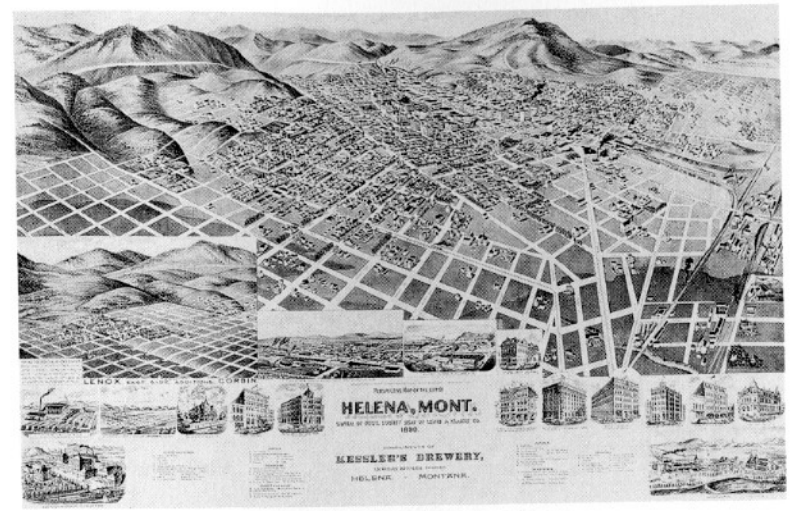


Northeast corner of West Galena Township plat, 1932-33, legal description

"Plot," like "lot," is an ancient word with consistent precise use and many different accompanying connotations. Most simply, plot is a measured piece of land. It is also a small area of planted ground; a graphic representation, as in a chart; and the outline of a literary work. The act of plotting implies careful foresight and intrigue, as in a devious plan. (Deviousness typically insinuates underhandedness or evil, though its strict derivation simply means "off the main road.") A plot is similar to a scheme in that each is a systematic plan, a representation of some type, and also devious in connotation. Thus, the plot at once demarcates the piece of land for a building, represents the land, and conveys the intended plan of action for change: to plot is to scheme is to design. Architectural design is by definition a "plot," a plan of positive action intending to promote change as a deviation from given reality. Each small area of measured land reveals the constructively deviant character of architectural thought.

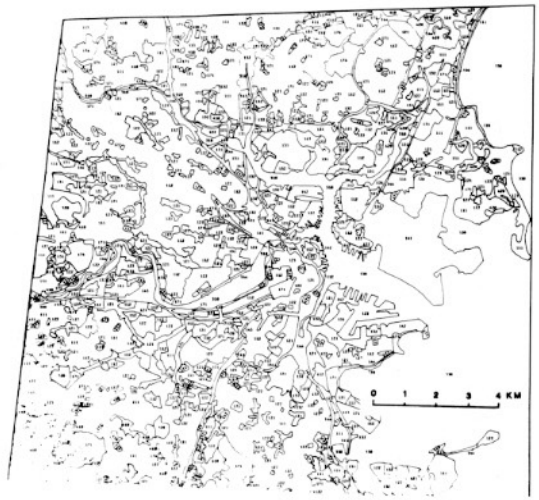
Section 3, Arlington National Cemetary, photograph

A particular building or site is characterized at a scale larger than itself as being within a particular "context," a word widely used in architecture. Context literally means the "connection of words" and is defined as "the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning." Local context is a topical concern in current architecture where, in contrast to the literary suggestion, it is implemented as generator, something that provides meaning or content in itself. In architecture context is broadly synonymous with environment. Both exist in relation to scale—a local context may have a specificity at odds with a larger regional context. Both are also subject to change over time—buildings around a site may be erected and demolished; a new building changes its own site and also changes its own larger context. The content of context—its constituent aspects and their ascribed values—is relative: one person may see construction materials as important; another individual may value the relationship of built parts over their material nature; a public agency may be concerned with context only as described by zoning, bulk, or setback rules. In architectural design, context is also subject to changes in representational—and conceptual—means. For example, context as seen in a figure/ground diagram stems from a spatial conception introduced by the Nolli map; the ongoing technological developments in cartography encourage different visual perceptions of context at different scales. Finally, context may not be exclusively visual—cultural context situates human efforts, and for architecture this includes, but is not circumscribed by, physical and spatial constructs.



Perspective map of the City of Helena, Montana, unsigned toned lithograph

The concept of the "region" has provided a means of analyzing and promoting tendencies opposed to the homogenizing forces of modernism's "International Style." Ironically, the region is by definition "a broadly homogeneous or indefinite geographical area." The region can only be described indefinitely in dimensional or perceptual terms because geographical boundaries are often physically imprecise (for example, the Shenandoah Valley is topographically inseparable from the surrounding Appalachian Mountains) even if they limit or circumscribe movement (the mountains have a confining effect). The stabilizing of settlement sponsors the emergence of cultural distinctions from within different geographic regions; therefore, the region can be seen as the product of the interaction between geography and culture. Given the instability of the population today, the ease of transportation across natural boundaries, and a culture fueled by mass media, such interaction between geography and culture does not necessarily occur spontaneously, but depends on intentional effort. The derivation of region stems from the Latin *regere*, meaning "to rule," recalling the precise relationship between the land and the power of the ruler or king. Today, we must choose to be ruled by the region. The architectural implications of this term underline the power of political and ideological control in shaping physical areas.

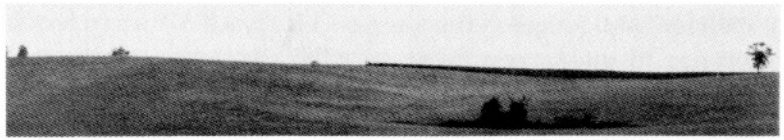


Portion of urban land-use and land-cover map of Boston compiled by satellite at 1:25,000 scale and produced by the Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, 1990

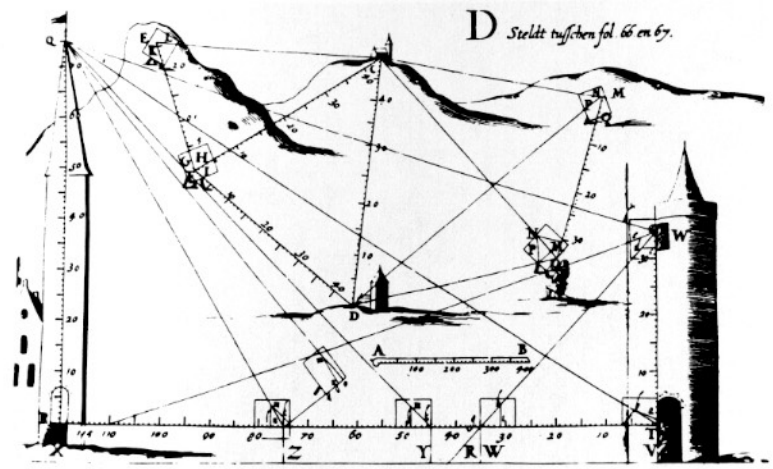
Perception itself gives rise to the term "landscape," which literally means the portion of land that the eye can comprehend in a single view. A word of relatively recent origin, it stems from eighteenth-century concerns for the visible and the picturesque. The force of viewing is likewise felt in the word "survey," which in etymology means "to look over," and in definition means "to delineate extent and position by measurement." These two terms point out the difference between the "aesthetic" and "mathematic" conceptions of the site, yet each reflects and contributes to a distancing between the individual—or society—and land; this distancing has an economic basis in industrialization. The aesthetic and mathematic conceptions are also analogous to the tension between art and science in contributing to and determining architecture.

Emerson points out that aesthetic and mathematical conceptions are fundamentally different but intimately bound to one another:

> The charming landscape which I saw this morning is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But



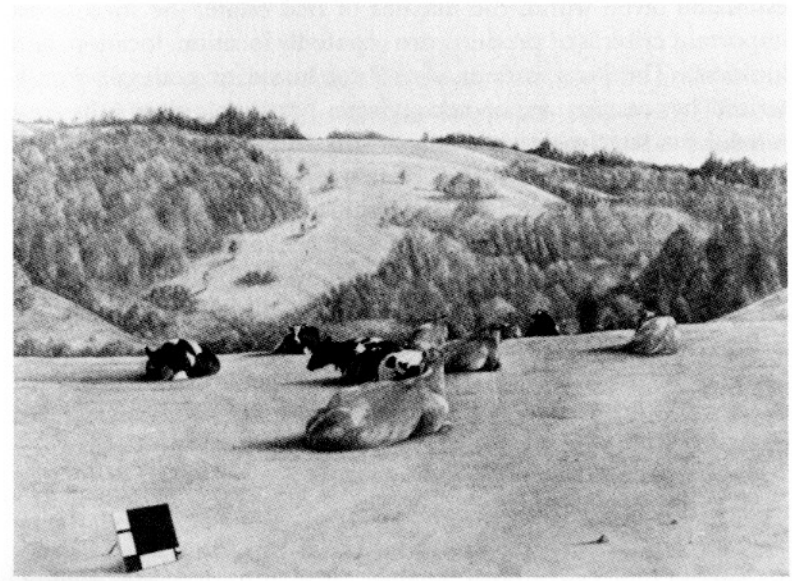
Art Sinsabaugh, "Landscape No. 64," photograph



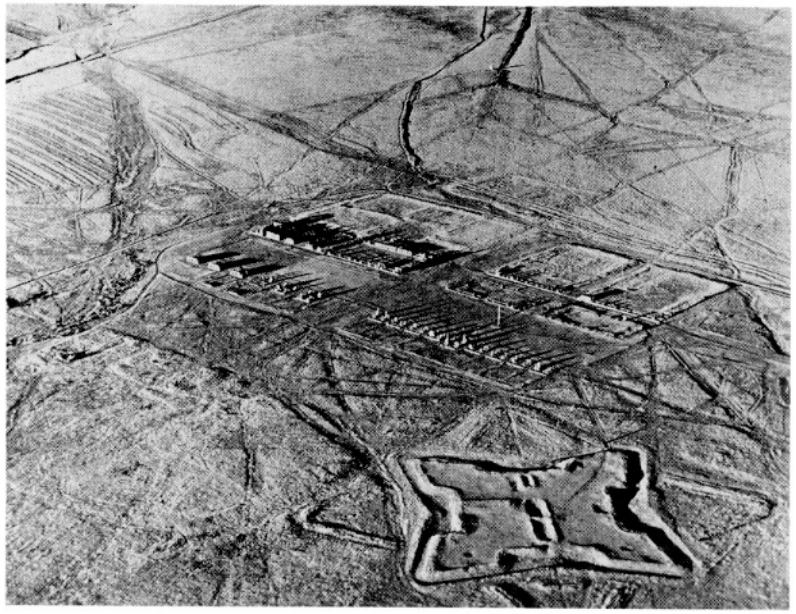
A means of applying the method of triangulation, graphic table

> none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet this their warranty deeds give no title.[16]

Landscape and survey inform ways of seeing because they are forms of knowledge. Like architecture, they frame information or content; they control by establishing principles that make the world comprehensible.

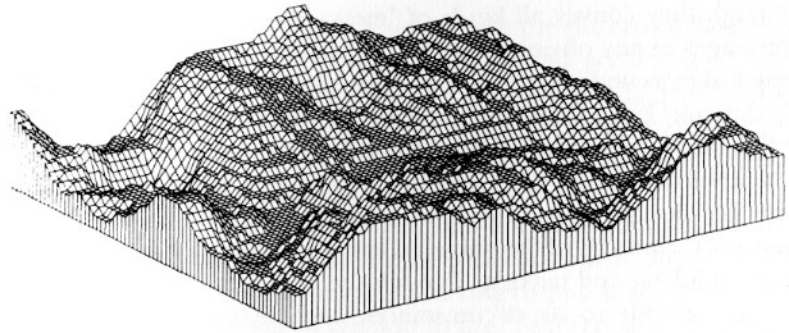


Willard Dixon, "Mondrian with Cows," oil painting



Fort Union on the Santa Fe Trail, aerial photograph

The broad notion of placement underlies the terms "location" and "position." Their derivation from the Latin verbs *locare* and *ponere*, meaning "to place," bespeaks their applicability to circumstances including but not limited to buildings or constructs. The force of these general words within architecture is not to be underestimated (even within the maxims of real estate, the three most important criteria of property are reputedly location, location, and location). The local is defined as "not broad or general; characterized by, relating to, or occupying a particular place." Its root word, *locus*, has the nearly mathematical definition of "the set of all points whose location is determined by stated conditions." Without precise technical application to architecture, the Latin source of "local" is in "stall," suggesting some attributes of architectural siting: one sense of "stall" is that of a physical compartment, a space marked off; another is temporal, that of bringing to a standstill or delaying in time. Such stalling is embodied in architecture, most directly in the stela, a commemorative slab or pillar intentionally sustaining a moment in time in an enduring physical form. By extension, to locate or to site any construction is to mark off and delay the architecture and the site both spatially and temporally.



North Georgia, Wireframe perspective generated by automatic stereocorrelation of data taken by remote sensing, 1989

"Position" denotes the point or area occupied by a physical object. In physical terms it implies a site. "Position" derives from "positive," so that it also implies an advocacy, as, for example, in arguing a proposition or making a proposal. Taking a position implicates affirmation: having an idea is fundamentally affirmative; the making of an idea is the making of the place of the idea. Henri LeFebvre goes so far as to insist on the utopian quality of any idea: "Today more than ever, there are no ideas without a utopia . . . There is no idea which neither explores a possibility nor tries to discover a direction . . . The architects, like the town planners, know this perfectly well."[17] Position, as the location of an idea or architectural construction, affirmatively asserts the connection between place and ideology.

Reviewing these terms reveals the elastic nature of the breadth and scale of site semantically, experientially, and temporally. The "architectural" character of the site is suggested in the consistent motives of politics and logic, latent ideologies under apparent neutrality, which inform and are imbedded in the architectural site and are revealed when approached from unrelated, even opposing, viewpoints. Each approach to site has its own specificity, and through association each speaks to a particular understanding of architecture. It is the gaps between the terms, the overlaps and inconsistencies among them, that finally betray the nature of the architectural site as both inclusive and evasive. In their multiplicity and disjunction the words associated with the general notion of site bespeak the relative impossibility of defining the specifically architectural site.

The understanding of site is neither self-evident in looking at a particular example nor explicit in theoretical terms.[18] Every site is a unique intersection of land, climate, production, and circulation. Peirce Lewis has stated that "most objects in the landscape—al-

though they convey all kinds of 'messages'—do not convey those messages in any obvious way."[19] The condition of each individual site makes its understanding in relation to the notion of site extremely difficult. Ernst Cassirer describes this as a basic noetic problem: "It is, as it were, the fundamental principle of cognition that the universal can be perceived only in the particular, while the particular can be thought only in reference to the universal."[20] The problematic reciprocity of the universal and particular speaks to architectural thinking and making. Though the architect's practical task is always specific to its circumstances, architecture as a discipline theorizes such tasks in general terms. In practical response to the complexity of the whole, designers attempt to reduce the site by seizing its particular aspects. This is exemplified by the constructed site's emphasis on the visible and by the cleared site's preference for the abstract. Architectural reductions of site, these conceptions implicate architectural practice.

Any site is already constructed by its specific circumstances. Adding a new building to a site transforms its use as well as its topography, microclimate, and circulation. The construction of a building defines successive sites for ensuing constructions—that is, any building alters adjoining sites as well as its own. The site is neither pure nor ideal; it is "claimed," which is to say it is preoccupied, by knowledge and power and time. As the embodiment and inscription of these preoccupations, the site is made in the work of architecture and is necessary if the work of architecture is to be made.

The site is a work, a human or social trace. It is comparable to a myth, temple, or city in that it is open to archeological deciphering. The site is a significative system with no singular author. Using nature to convey ideology, the site is a social product. The natural environment, long understood simply as a technical problem to be conquered, is now seen as threatened with destruction. However, like architecture, the environment and the site can also be created, molded, and transformed. The face of the earth, the landscape, and the site are products of human efforts. The site is also an economic product, and sites can be likened to "merchandise" in that there are interrelationships between the production of goods and that of the environment: the former accrues to groups who appropriate sites in order to manage or exploit them. John Locke theorized that land has no value without labor and that its value increases with the progress of settlement.

Settlement patterns are visual statements on the land that can be deciphered. Such a functional reading, however, fails to reveal the genetic aspect that brought the site into being. A complete assessment of the site must exist at several levels: the site can be described formally; critical analysis can define how and according to what methods the site was produced, including the crucial junctures of land use determination; finally, the real site must be analyzed, in other words, one must look at the people using the site, who perhaps are opposed to its physical form and purpose.

The apparent neutrality of the site—linked to the lack of comprehensive assessment—is a mask for issues of control. The discipline of architecture avoids admitting or taking responsibility for control and denies such power in relation to site. To attempt to detach the building from the site, in practice and theory alike, is to deny that any work of architecture is a work of site, to suppress that the work is political, ideological, and temporal, and to forget that it is implicated in the history of architecture.

In closing, it must be acknowledged that these remarks are both generally broad and specifically limited. They do not outline future work but suggest its potential. There are latent assumptions here to be challenged. For example,the persistent consideration of site as existing solely at or above the surface of the earth, the bias toward native rather than urban sites, or the apparent impossibility of a site in "wilderness" all argue for the need to qualify different kinds or types of sites. Because the topic of site initially seemed bounded or finite, it also seemed to be part of the discipline of architecture. However, in concluding that the means of thinking site is a means of thinking architecture, it ends by enveloping the discipline.

Though the site is a product of culture, it is by nature not a finished or closed product. It is an artefact of human work that can neither be completed nor abandoned. Its meaning can never be determinable. The site, like the human condition, is open. This is the surplus of site, its indefinable excess.