CA2RE
Conference for Artistic and Architectural (Doctoral) Research

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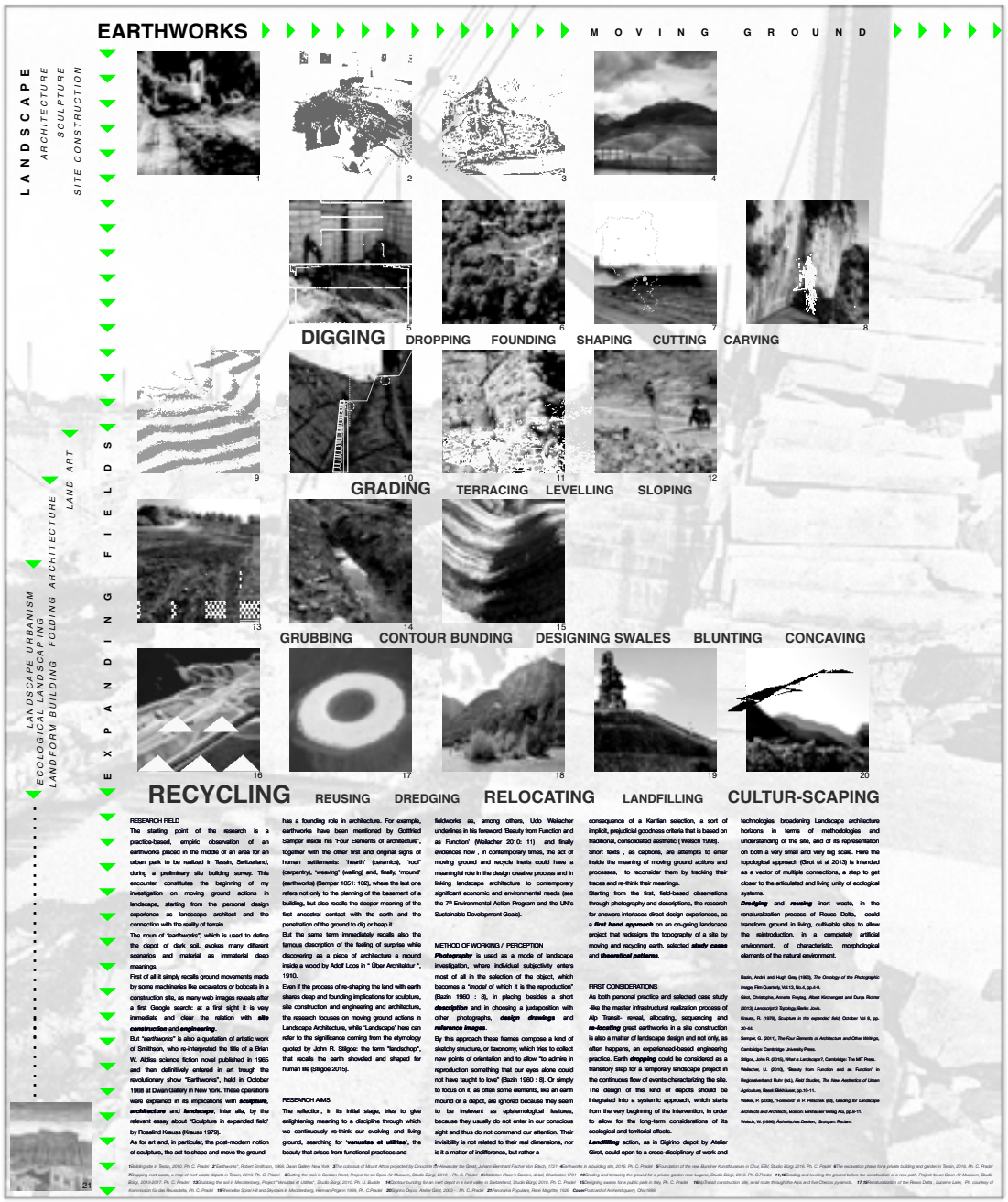
Research Title Moving Ground, rethinking and recycling earth.
Actions and reflections in Landscape Architecture



RESEARCH FIELD

The starting point of the research is a practice-based, empiric observation of an earthworks placed in the middle of an area for an urban park to be realized in Tessin, Switzerland, during a preliminary site building survey. This encounter constitutes the beginning of my investigation on moving ground actions in landscape, starting from the personal design experience as landscape architect and the connection with the reality of terrain.

The noun of "earthworks", which is used to define the depot of dark soil, evokes many different scenarios and material as immaterial deep meanings.

First of all it simply recalls ground movements made by some machineries like excavators or bobcats in a construction site, as many web images reveals after a first Google search: at a first sight it is very immediate and clear the relation with **site construction** and **engineering**.

But "earthworks" is also a quotation of artistic work of Smithson, who re-interpreted the title of a Brian W. Aldiss science fiction novel published in 1965 and then definitively entered in art trough the revolutionary show "Earthworks", held in October 1968 at Dwan Gallery in New York. These operations were explained in its implications with **sculpture, architecture** and **landscape**, inter alia, by the relevant essay about "Sculpture in expanded field" by Rosalind Krauss (Krauss 1979).

As for art and, in particular, the post-modern notion of sculpture, the act to shape and move the ground has a founding role in architecture. For example, earthworks have been mentioned by Gottfried Semper inside his "Four Elements of architecture", together with the other first and original signs of human settlements: "hearth" (ceramics), "roof" (carpentry), "weaving" (**wall**ing) and, finally, "mound" (earthworks) (Semper 1851: 102), where the last one refers not only to the planning of the basement of a building, but also recalls the deeper meaning of the first ancestral contact with the earth and the penetration of the ground to dig or heap it.

But the same term immediately recalls also the famous description of the feeling of surprise while discovering as a piece of architecture a mound inside a wood by Adolf Loos in " Uber Architektur ", 1910.

Even if the process of re-shaping the land with earth shares deep and founding implications for sculpture, site construction and engineering and architecture, the research focuses on moving ground actions in Landscape Architecture, while "Landscape" here can refer to the significance coming from the etymology quoted by John R. Stilgoe: the term "landschopf", that recalls the earth shovsted and shaped for human life (Stilgoe 2015).

RESEARCH AIMS

The reflection, in its initial stage, tries to give enlightening meaning to a discipline through which we continuously re-think our evolving and living ground, searching for **"venustas et utilitas"**, the beauty that arises from functional practices and fieldworks as, among others, Udo Wellacher underlines in his foreword "Beauty from Function and as Function" (Wellacher 2010: 11) and finally evidences how , in contemporary times, the act of moving ground and recycle inerts could have a meaningful role in the design creative process and in linking landscape architecture to contemporary significant economic and environmental needs (see the 7th Environmental Action Program and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals).

METHOD OF WORKING / PERCEPTION

Photography is used as a mode of landscape investigation, where individual subjectivity enters most of all in the selection of the object, which becomes a "model of which it is the reproduction" (Bazin 1960 : 8), in placing besides a short **description** and in choosing a juxtaposition with other photographs, **design drawings** and **reference images**.

By this approach these frames compose a kind of sketchy structure, or taxonomy, which tries to collect new points of orientation and to allow "to admire in reproduction something that our eyes alone could not have taught to love" (Bazin 1960 : 8). Or simply to focus on it, as often some elements, like an earth mound or a depot, are ignored because they seem to be **irrelevant** as epistemological features, because they usually do not enter in our conscious sight and thus do not command our attention. Their invisibility is not related to their real dimensions, nor is it a matter of indifference, but rather a consequence of a Kantian selection, a sort of implicit, prejudicial goodness criteria that is based on traditional, consolidated aesthetic (Welsch 1998).

Short texts , as captions, are attempts to enter inside the meaning of moving ground actions and processes, to reconsider them by tracking their traces and re-think their meanings.

Starting from the first, field-based observations through photography and descriptions, the research for answers interlaces direct design experiences, as a ***first hand approach*** on an on-going landscape project that redesigns the topography of a site by moving and recycling earth, selected **study cases** and **theoretical patterns**.

FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

As both personal practice and selected case study -like the master infrastructural realization process of Alp Transit- reveal, allocating, sequencing and ***re-locating*** great earthworks in a site construction is also a matter of landscape design and not only, as often happens, an experienced-based engineering practice. Earth **dropping** could be considered as a transitory step for a temporary landscape project in the continuous flow of events characterizing the site. The design of this kind of depots should be integrated into a systemic approach, which starts from the very beginning of the intervention, in order to allow for the long-term considerations of its ecological and territorial effects.

Landfilling action, as in Sigirino depot by Atelier Girot, could open to a cross-disciplinary of work and technologies, broadening Landscape architecture horizons in terms of methodologies and understanding of the site, and of its representation on both a very small and very big scale. Here the topological approach (Girot et al 2013) is intended as a vector of multiple connections, a step to get closer to the articulated and living unity of ecological systems.

Dredging and **reusing** inert waste, in the renaturalization process of Reuss Delta, could transform ground in living, cultivable sites to allow the reintroduction, in a completely artificial environment, of characteristic, morphological elements of the natural environment.

Bazin, André and Hugh Gray (1960), *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*, Film Quarterly, Vol 13, No 4, pp.4-9.

Girot, Christophe, Annette Freyberg, Albert Kirchengast and Curdin Richter (2013), *Landscript 3: Topology*, Berlin: Jovis.

Krauss, R. (1979), *Sculpture in the expanded field*, October Vol 8, pp. 30-44.

Semper, G. (1851), *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stilgoe, John R. (2015), *What is Landscape?*, Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Wellacher, U. (2010), "Beauty from Function and as Function" in Regionalverband Ruhr (ed.), *Field Studies, The New Aesthetic of Urban Agriculture*, Basel: Birkhäuser, pp.10-11.

Weller, R (2008), "Foreword" in P. Petschek (ed), *Grading for Landscape Architects and Architects*, Boston: Birkhauser Verlag AG, pp.6-11.

Welsch, W. (1998), *Ästhetisches Denken*, Stuttgart: Reclam.

ARENA ELIA European Association for Architectural Education Technische Universität Berlin PEP

Chiara Pradel

Moving Ground. Rethinking and Recycling Earth, Actions and Reflections in Landscape Architecture

Exhibition of photos with short descriptive texts

The initial point is a practice-based, empiric observation of an earth-mound placed in the middle of an area for an urban park to be realized in Tessin, during a preliminary site building survey. This encounter constitutes the beginning of my photographic, ethnographic (Yaneva, 2009) and ontological investigation on moving ground actions in landscape, starting from the design experience as landscape architect by considering dropping, mass grading, sloping, contour-bunding, excavating, filling, founding actions and recycling inert waste practices.

Presentation of the research

Earthworks recently enter in our esthetic consciousness, for example as "sculptures in the expanded field" (Krauss, 1979) and thanks to land-art (Smithson, 1969), but since ancient human history the process of re-shaping the land with earth has had sacred, social, ecological, artistic, political, economic implications for metropolitan, urban, rur-urban and agricultural life (Bourdon, 1995).

The reflection investigates on how, nowadays, the act of moving ground and recycle inerts could have a meaningful role in landscape architecture creative process: may recycled earth be functionally used as a living, cultivable resource, improving and supporting diversity, within the global economic and environmental status and the fundamental aims of the 7th Environment Action Program and of the UN Sustainable Development Goals?

Could an earth depot be considered as a transitory step for a temporary project in the continuous flow of events characterizing a site?

And, finally, how earthworks made by recycled inerts could change a still existing negative perception to become part of a landscape practice and of a renewed sublime collective imagination?

Starting from the first, field-based observations and descriptions, the research interlaces theoretical patterns, crossing the borders between a perspective on ecology (Braungart, Mc Donough, 2009; Bateson, 1979), proceeding trough the exploration on new methodologies in designing and representing moving ground in landscape (da Cunha, Mathur, 2001; Girot et al.,2013).

Realized study cases are examined as evidences of increasing innovative and creative praxis, together with a first hand approach of an on-going landscape project, which redesigns the topography of a site by moving and recycling earth.