LANDSCAPE AS PUBLIC DOMAIN

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ABSTRACT

Future cities will be characterized by a loss of public space, according to Rem Koolhaas (1995) **and Lieven de Cauter** (2004). **If there is public life, it will be interiorized; inside shoppingmalls and hotel lobbies. In addition to the loss of public space, there may also be a loss of countryside, which might be due to the need of infrastructure, urban settlements and industrial zones. However, the landscape seems to be increasingly valued by the citizens and as a result, public functions are established on the countryside. A synthesis of these developments can be found in the notion of the public domain. In this paper, a future for the countryside as a potentially public domain, grounded on the existing qualities of the landscape, is described.**

CONTEXT

It has been only a few decennia ago that city and country were two opposite phenomena. This can still be recognized in the English language. The origin of the word 'country' is the Latin word 'contrast'. The contemporain city is described as a network city or an archipelago of enclaves (Hajer, A. and A. Reijndorp; 2001), indicating that the relation between city and country has changed over the last fifty years. The contrast is faded, city and countryside are mentally and physical fluid. The country may be a fragmented landscape, between new urban enclaves and cut by big lines of infrastructure. However, this fragmented space is not worthless. Moreover, these spaces are enormously popular. Especially on sunny Sundays, the landscape is filled by bikers, walkers, skaters, horse drivers and motorcyclists. New activities have been developed which combines urban functions and the possibilities of the meadows, orchards and farmhouses, for example survival tracks, nursing farms, local-products-stores. Is this landscape the city park of the future, in which the function of recreation is much more important than the agricultural function? (Metz, T; 2002) Despite the crushing landscape, it is increasingly used by citizens, who make the landscape more public. But public use does not automatically lead to what

we call a public domain. In this paper, we try to clarify how the quality of the existing landscape elements can be used to improve the potential function of the landscape as public domain. The context of this study is the unsurpassed changing condition of the countryside (and the city) in the last fifty years, at least in The Netherlands, but we assume that this may be comparable with other European countries. In the discussion on this topic, two different reactions can be recognized. The first reaction can be characterized by preserving the existing countryside, or even more, bring it back to a former condition (e.g. Metz, T; 1998). In this view, country and city are still opposites. The second reaction can be seen as a capitulation for the market, which may be the key mechanism for deciding to preserve the country or not (e.g. Ool, M. van (ed.); 2006). In our view, the landscape can not be saved by a nostalgic view nor by the market. Within the nostalgic view, the landscape is a flat image instead of a complex construct. Additionally, in our epoch the landscape should be seen as part of the city – not as its opposite – and can only be 'preserved' by using the forces of this city condition. On the other hand, just accepting the development and selling the landscape to the highest bidder do not grasp the meaning of the landscape it selves. The intense discussion on the landscape in several media, in newspapers as well as in scientific journals, shows us, that the landscape is valued as an essential part of our culture and may provide an important contribution to the quality of life. The hypothesis of our research is this value of the existing landscape, which may provide the landscape from opportunities for developing a new public domain within the context of the network city.

LITERATURE STUDY: ON PUBLIC DOMAIN

It is not so difficult to misunderstand the notion of Public Domain. Especially not for designers, with their focus on the concrete spaces. The notion of public domain is much broader than public space only. Public space is just a small aspect of the public domain, and above that not all public spaces are functioning as a public domain. The essence of this notion is the 'space for differences', the space to be confronted with the other and his dispositions, behaviors and beliefs. Several philosophers and sociologists mentioned that this space is an essential aspect of a democratic society, because only confrontations with other perspectives of the world, will lead to reflection on your own assumptions (Boomkens, R.; 1998, Hajer, M. and A. Reijndorp; 2001). The political philosopher Hannah Arendt proposed that the public domain relays on at least two important elements. First, of course there should be space enough to express your own identity. Pluralism is essential to society. A second element is the need for a podium for this pluralism, that is, a space where people can be seen and be heard. Arendt emphasized that we have to understand each other; otherwise we only talk in a vacuum. Therefore a common ground is needed – this is the podium on which we can be seen and be heard. (Arendt, H; 1994)

This crucial debate on the public domain has clear spatial aspects: the meeting, confrontation, interaction and exchange have to happen somewhere. It is not only a case of politicians, the confrontation of worldviews should not happen only in the political arena, neither is it limited to the opinion pages in the newspaper or the several web logs on the internet. The confrontations in everyday life with other people strengthen the possibility of exchange of ideas. Public space is important for the 'public appearance' of the individual, as stated by philosophers and sociologist, such as Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, J.; 1989) and Richard Sennett (Sennett, R; 1974/1992). But, in addition, they pointed out that this public space is loosing this function. The street, the square or even the tearoom is losing its function of space where people of different social classes can meet, while no other spaces have taken over this function. This warning finds its echo in the pessimistic scenario's on the future of the city. For years one of the main exponents of the narrative of lost public space has been the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. In his apocalyptic 1995 essay "The Generic City," he claimed that cities were witnessing an "evacuation of the public realm." He used this slogan to describe the pending transformation and uniformization of the public sphere into a mere traffic space. Squares and streets, traditional urban expressions of public life, were seen as increasingly reduced to infrastructural figures. If places still existed in the new urban world where public life could unfold, they would certainly not be on streets. "The street is dead. [...] Roads are only for cars. People (pedestrians) are led on rides (as in an amusement park), on "promenades" that lift them off the ground, that subject them to a catalog of exaggerated conditions — wind, heat, steepness, cold, interior, exterior, smells, fumes — in a sequence that is a grotesque caricature of life in the historic city." (Koolhaas, R.; 1995) In Koolhaas's view, the figure of the traditional street, with its room for chance encounters with the "other," would be replaced by decks, bridges, tunnels and motorways reserved for specific urban audiences. The underlaying logics of these changes were accurately described by Michael Sorkin. In the introduction to *Variations on a Theme Park,* he pointed to a strategy of "Disneyfication" that was increasingly being applied to cities. "Whether in its master incarnation at the ersatz Main Street of Disneyland, in the phony historic festivity of a Rouse marketplace, or the gentrified architecture of the 'Reborn' Lower East Side, this elaborate apparatus is at pains to assert its ties to the kind of city life it is in the process of obliterating." (Sorkin, M.; 1992)

Sorkin warned that even though the theme-park perspective was proving enormously effective in attracting tourists to historical cities, it might mean the end of a more diverse public life. After all, "In the 'public' spaces of the theme park or the shopping mall, speech itself is restricted: there are no demonstrations in Disneyland. The effort to reclaim the city is the struggle for democracy itself," he wrote. Sorkin appealed for "a return to a more authentic urbanity, a city based on physical proximity and free movement and a sense that the city is our best expression of a desire for collectivity. As spatiality ebbs, so does intimacy." (Sorkin, M.; 1992)

The cause of these developments is not only sociological, it may also be spatial. Modern urban plans fail to 'bring people together' in a easy and logic way. The street is lost in the concept of light-air-and-space. No new meaningfull places were developed, despite several attempts to redefine the street within the contemporain context, even despite the renewed interest in the measures and structure and the (re)building of old citystreets and squares, The proces of loosing the connection between the public space and the public domain was strengtened by increasing individualism and the growing 'fear' for difference. In the contemporain network city, to stress it a little bit, everyone has his own garden or the mony and mobility to search for the right places to be – the places he will enjoy. Within this search, the confrontation with 'the stranger' will be excluded, since what is strange is symbol of the threat of their safety.

LITERATURE STUDY: ON LANDSCAPE

Can the landscape offer a new view in this discussion? Till now, we mixed up the words landscape and country, but these words are not synonymous. Following the Oxford dictionary, the country refers to "land away from towns and cities, typically with fields, woods, etc. and used for agriculture". Indeed, this is the first focus of this paper, but the word landscape tells more about our intention. In the notion landscape, the personal experience of the viewer is emphasized. The Dutch philosopher Ton Lemaire, who has written extensively on the notion of landscape, postulates that this idea of landscape is a modern notion. The discovery of the beauty of landscapes corresponds to the emerging existence of the individual. (Lemaire, T.; 1970/1996)

In his definition, landscape refers to a part of the surface of the earth that is experienced as a unity by human beings. In this description, the landscape is by definition a cultural act. Human beings are defining the landscape, they are measuring its unity. Lemaire postulates that an overview is needed to experience a landscape. Only by the regular view on the horizon, an overview may exist enabling you to 'read' the environment and define the borders of one and another landscape. (Lemaire, T.; 1970/1996; Lemaire, T.; 2002)

There is hardly no landscape without traces of the human presence. Every landscape, especially in the Netherlands, is a cultural artifact, which shows many stories on the history of a region. Most of the times, these stories are related to the collective memory of the inhabitants. Landscape has, in other words, a mental dimension. (Schuppen, S. van; 2007)

The history of the landscape is first of all the story of the conquest with nature, a struggle which have left its traces in the landscape. This can be seen as a layered landscape. Not only in the concrete layers of the ground it selves, but also as an archeological well of knowledge of the past and a juxtaposition of elements of several periods. Old natural river-beds are interchanged with straight canals, historic buildings with contemporain farm halls, smartly structured grassland with the trees and bushes of new recreation fields, old

brick paved roads with futurist highways. This layered landscape is not limited to these concrete elements; also the mental landscape is layered. Different perspectives on the world can be simultaneously recognized in the landscape. First of al, you can see these different perspectives in the art of landscape paintings, from the Italian perspectives and the famous Dutch paintings, via the Romantic wilderness and the impressionistic colorful experience to the astonished views of Dali. (Lemaire, T.; 1970/1996; Schama, S.; 1995/1996) But also today, the experience of the landscape differs among the viewers and users. It can be frightening, romantic, expropriating and comfortable, and a spiritual well for human lives. It bears all those meanings and encloses the different experiences of the world of the past and nowadays and how they are transformed to our experience. With this layered experience and collectivity, the existing landscape has more opportunities for the emergence of a public domain than every new planned city park of living enclave ever can provide (see the parallel with Hannah Arendt, when she proposed the two elements of the public domain, especially the need for a communal ground as a premise for the emergence of a public domain, (Arendt, H.; 1994)). One of the main knots in this field is the cultural heritage, like fortresses, windmills, dikes, bridges, plants, locks, farmhouses and castles. In these artifacts, the history of the landscape is expressed very clearly. And upon this, those edifices are not only part of local structures, but also of structures on a higher level.

ANALYSIS: POTENTIALITY FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN

The question is whether this quality of the landscape may provide new perspectives for the appearance of a new public domain? A public domain can not be designed. At best, the prior conditions can be optimalized. In their essay 'In search for new Public Domain', Maarten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp postulated that we have to get rid of the expectations which classical examples of public domain, such as the public spaces of Paris and Barcelona, delivers us. (Hajer, M. and A. Reijndorp; 2001) In our contemporain context, according to them, we have to look to new sites, like parking lots, airport buildings and shopping malls. But, our proposal is that we still can learn a lot of some parks and squares within the old and new city structures. You still can find quiet well functioning squares and parks, spots which are not overwhelmed by tourist visitors or by privatization and nostalgia. The famous Parc La Vilette in Paris, designed in the eighties by the architect Bernard Tschumi is a wonderful example. It appeared that Tschumi was quite aware of the instruments he could use to attract several groups of people in the park. Tschumi described the designs as a superposition of different points, lines and surfaces. It is an arrangement, stacking and confrontation of intern and external routes, gardens, fields, trees and the famous structure of red follies. (Walker, E.; 2006) **[fig 1.]**

It is possible to differentiate four elements by which Tschumi tried to enlarge the diversity of the public in the park. The first element is the routing. The park consists of external

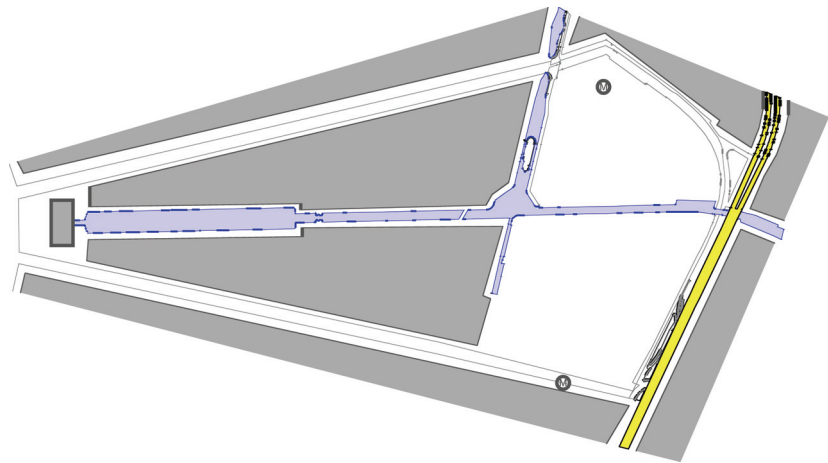**fig.1.** Plan of Parc de La Vilette   **fig.2.** Urban Setting

routes, which are connecting the park with the wider environment. These are ongoing routes from the surroundings, through the park to the city center. Those routes are part of the internal structure of the park and place the park in a bigger structure. This structure is part of the urban fabric as meaningful unity – as it is also an addition to it. The combination and interacting of those routes brings a public with different destinations within the same spatial structure. **[fig.2, 3, 4 and 5]**
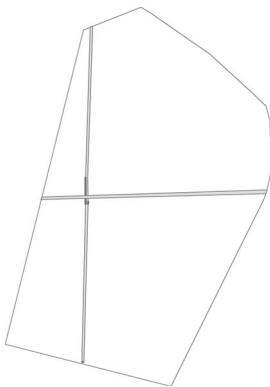
fig.3. External Routes   **fig.4.** Internal Routes   **fig.5.** Cultural History
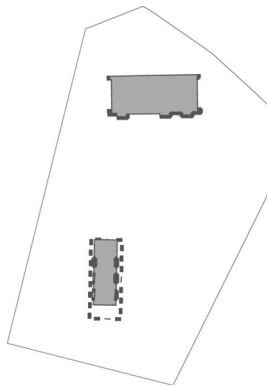
A second element is the diversity of the program of Parc La Vilette, diversity on different levels, temporalities and definition. The park accommodates within the same spatial system as some functions for the neighborhood as functions which serves the whole city, places with a defined function and more undefined spots, fixed programs and temporal events. The significance of this is bringing together those for whom the Parc is a everyday environment and others, for whom it is a special space. **[fig. 6 and 7]**
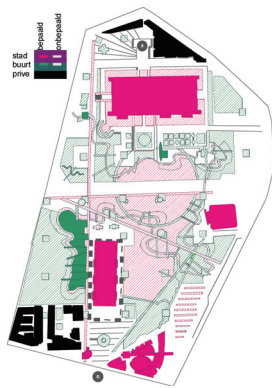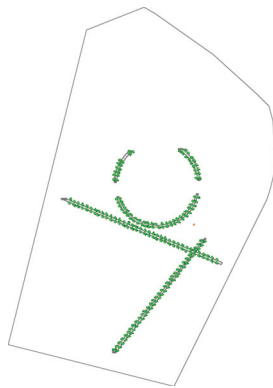
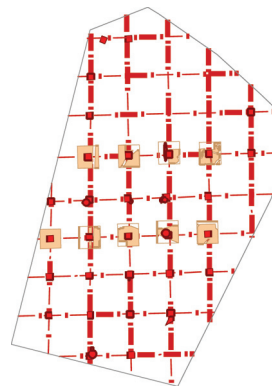**fig.6.** Program   **fig.7.** Fixed Form Elements   **fig.8.** Structure

The third element is the superposition which makes the space more ambiguous. More groups of inhabitants and individuals can occupy the space and make it their own, identify with it (see also Geuze, A.; 1993). It gives everybody what is needed, overview or intimacy, with a view on others, or just enclosed, an individual spot or just an open spaces, connected to a playground or close to a podium, at the canal or romantic in the bamboo garden. The last element is: bringing those elements to each other and unify them. Tschumi did that with his famous structure of the red follies. Because, with bringing together the routes, programs, spheres in one structure (if it is ambiguous too), gives space to a meaningful meeting among the different public. Because this meeting, the confrontation, we should not take it literally. According to Hajer and Reijndorp, looking at and looked to is already something. (Hajer, M. and A. Reijndorp; 2001) **[fig. 8]**

CASE STUDY: THE NEW DUTCH WATERFRONT
How can we use these excerpts from this analysis in a concrete context? To answer this question, we performed a case-study on the Dutch landscape between the cities and villages of Utrecht, Houten and Nieuwegein. It is a cultivated riverlandscape, enclosed by the dike of the river Lek and two canals. In addition, it is also cut by the highway A27 and the railway to Utrecht. Despite these big infrastructural lines, the landscape is not good accessible. It consists of several polders, which are still in agricultural use: cows and sheep in the grassland and here and there an orchard. Most remarkable are the big amount of fortresses and bunkers resulting from the old but famous Dutch defense line, the 'Waterlinie'. (Steenbergen, C.M. and J. van der Zwart; 2006) **[fig. 9]**

Despite the differences in scale and surrounding urban fabric between this landscape and La Vilette, we can still learn something of the latter. The planner and designer may influence the use of the landscape, in order to interest a diverse public, and bring them together in several points. Therefore, the fortresses can be used, which can accommodate different programs and spheres, and simultaneously can unify the landscape. Within the
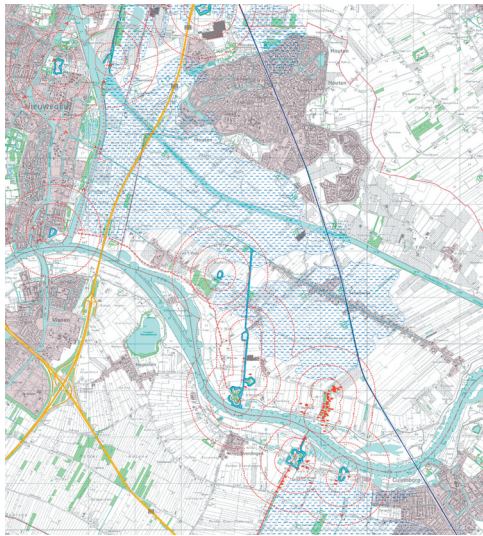
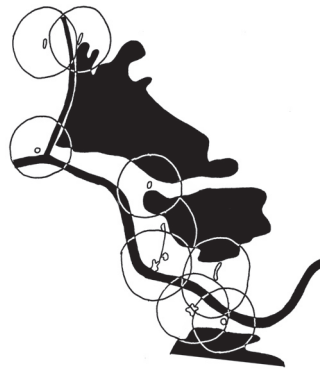fig.9. The Defence Line and its relation to the existing landscape

fig.10. Analysis of the fortresses, the inundationfields and the landscape
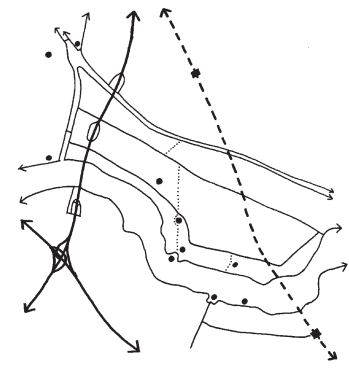

fig.11. Analysis of the structure of the landscape, fortresses, urban elements and infrastructure

first view, the defense lines did not interact with the old polder structures. The main canal cuts through the old structure as well as the fortresses appeared to be planned randomly. But behind the scenes, there is a really ingenious relationship, based on the river-bed and the condition of the landscape. By clarifying the relationship between the fortresses, the landscape and several buildings, a landscape may appear which will attract several groups of visitors – or maybe better: users. **[fig. 10 and 11]**

One of the methods to reach this goal is to search for a dense access to the landscape and connect these intern paths with continuous routes. The existing continuous routes are more or less in the east-west direction. A new north-south connection can be made by building a bridge over the Amsterdam-Rijnkanaal in the line of the main water structure of the polders. Along the river, both fortresses of Honswijk and Everdingen, can be connected by a ferry for bicycles – which can be operated in summer and in the weekends. The landscape it selves can be made more accessible by using the contour of the historical inundation surfaces for a skate parcours and a footpath. By using the contour, you also visualize that this flat landscape has some differences in height – the contour is the altitude-line and cuts through the existing structure of meadows. Those new paths have to be connected to existing routes for walkers, skaters, cyclists and other users. This may grow to a structure that reveal the landscape and brings together several groups within the same spatial system. The knots in the network of new and existing routes are potentially the space for the public, where people can meet. There have to be a balance in giving those knots a different function or not, because program is still needed to attract more people, but a kind of openness is needed to conquer the space and make it your own. **[fig. 12]**
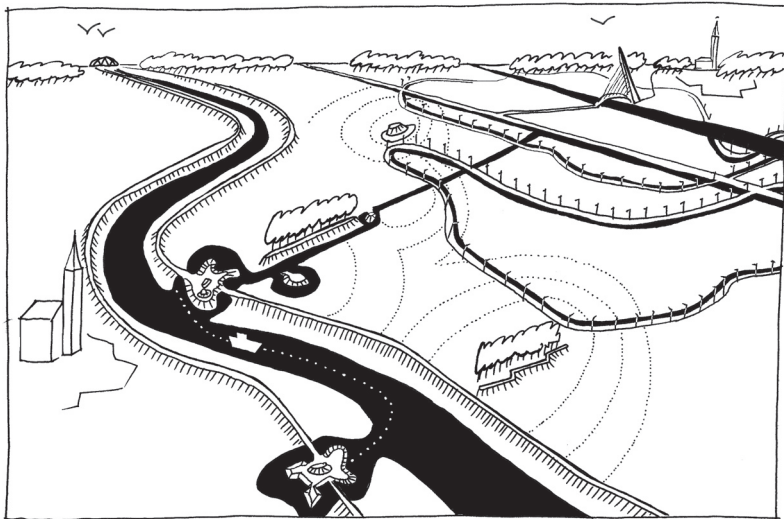
fig.12. New structures in the existing landscape

Two specific spots in this landscape may function as core-connectors in the network. The first one is the fortress along the 'Waalse Wetering' which may give the visitors a real landscape attraction. It is really a strange high and big element in the open landscape. From the fortress you have a wide view over this landscape, which helps the visitor to understand it. Above all, from this fortress, there is a good view on an old river-bed, which will be clarified by the paths following the contour of the old inundation surface. On this fortress, a specific program is not needed, the view on the landscape and the fortress itself are its 'attraction'. **[fig. 13]**
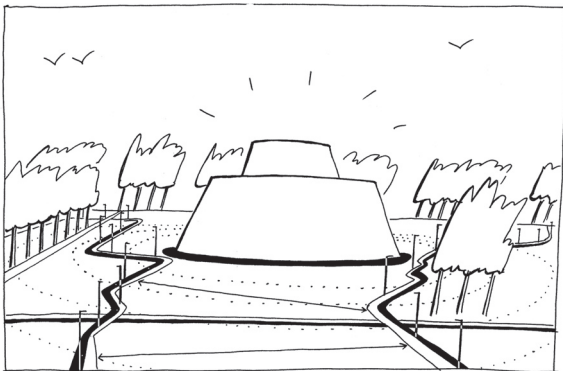

fig.13. Using existing elements to clearify the structure of the defenceline and the relation to the landscape
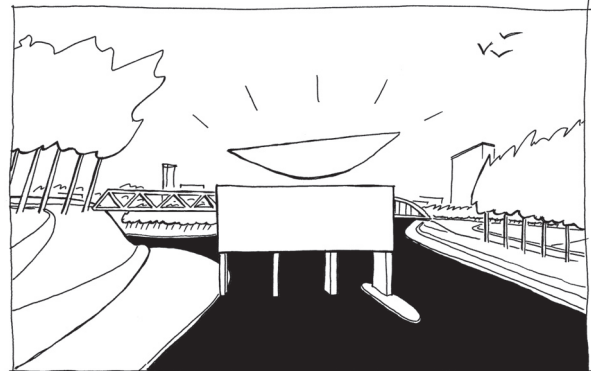

fig.14. The existing differences in height and the mysterious building of the defenceline can be used as skateparcours and a spot for events

The second spot is the intersection of the Amsterdam Rijnkanaal. This location is now characterized by many differences in height, bridges, a view on the city of Utrecht and over the landscape. In addition, a strange element dominates the shore a big concrete box above the water. It is a residue of the defense line – in case of emergency, big stones

which were in the box could dumped in the water, and with that, the water of the canal was directed to the land, to the inundation fields. The concrete box is now inaccessible and mysterious – it looks fantastic and has a great place above the canal. This spot, with the use of height differences, fits really good as a place for a youth public, for skate and skeeler paths, for temporal projects and events. It will be important to connect this program and these paths to the other routes and fortresses in the landscape. [fig. 14]

AGENDA: LANDSCAPE AS PUBLIC DOMAIN

The use of the landscape as a new public domain is not only the task of designers, but also of the government on several political scales, of farmers associations, nature defenders and developers. The core ideas of the Dutch Belvédère program, preservation of the cultural heritage by using it, can play an important role in this view. But the agricultural sector will be the main key in this vision – because the cultural landscape and the agricultural uses are intertwined. The farmers will have the task to use the landscape, and by using it also preserving it and above all welcoming people to their properties. The specific question for politicians and designers is to recognize the potential places in the landscape and connect them in a bigger and meaningful relationship by using landscape architectural interventions, trying to accommodate differences and simultaneously brings them together in one, maybe ambiguous, spatial structure, as Tschumi did in La Villette.

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