1 ABSTRACT

The basic premise of this paper is that a designer’s creation of “meaning” takes place through an engagement with a network of relations, and that landscapes themselves are more than collections of objects and processes, but may be thought of as bundles of relations. Actor network theory (ANT), realized through post-structural analyses (i.e., Foucault) or non-representational theories (i.e., Thrift) provide ways of uncovering the agencies of actors in networks. The (somewhat ambitious) intention of the paper is to consider how ANT can affect landscape architecture, by presenting a variety of dispersive strategies that may evoke new landscape architectural thinking. For landscape architects, understanding dispersion begins with an examination of physical phenomena, of seeds, water, etc., that may evolve into useful metaphors for revealing imagined worlds and ideas. So, for example, the physical dispersion of natural elements may provide powerful metaphors regarding the dispersion of knowledge. Conversely, dispersion may be about a kind of sorting, the way that light disperses through a prism results in the separation of colours, to disperse may be about the separation of elements, things, ideas, processes, etc., followed by their coming together into the constitution of, for example, place.

Three strategies for examining dispersion are developed, by contrasting how elements are separated (disaggregated, disassembled, and deterritorialized) and then come together (aggregated, assembled and territorialized). Landscapes architecture is thus considered as dealing with flux, of anticipating, articulating and coping with shifting states of becoming and falling apart. Each of the dispersion strategies is discussed first as physical phenomena and then presented as metaphors about an aspect of design thinking: aggregation and disaggregation in place making, assemblage and disassemblage in design representation, territorialisation and deterritorialization in discourse networks.