

SHAKING HANDS WITH THE LANDSCAPE: INTEGRATING PERCEPTUALIST THEORY INTO A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE STUDIO CURRICULUM

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1 ABSTRACT

The paper introduces and provides a rationale for an interpretation of perceptualist, drawing-intensive methods of site engagement for a landscape architecture studio, and recounts some of the successes and the challenges of our approach. The studio drew on perceptualist theory as the means for understanding patterns, perceptions and processes on the Mt. Kessler Preserve in Fayetteville, Arkansas, a newly conserved 400 acre public resource. According to perceptualist theory, subsequent qualitative and quantitative data and knowledge enrich and frame phenomenological impressions. As is becoming more commonly recognized in landscape education, when a 'checklist' approach to site inventory and analysis is adopted there may be little thought to the sensorial responses a site elicits. However, the discrete elements that make up a checklist inventory are, in fact, overlays, interactions, or reinforcements that combine with aesthetic perceptions to define landscape character. This studio emphasized the importance of personal perceptions and reflections on what is 'special' about a landscape, with the objectives of developing a deeper understanding and demonstrating that objective knowledge will enrich and frame our perceptions. Since landscape architects are often solely responsible for communicating the aesthetic value of a landscape, the students were instructed in various methods of communicating poetics of place including site-sketching, temporary land-art installations, painting, composite analog/digital graphics, and character mapping. While the studio work itself was well-received by both art galleries and local land conservation organizations, and has catalyzed some important curricula changes within our unit, the approach was not without its challenges. The paper reports on some of the benefits and challenges of the shift in approach, while also suggesting possible areas for further modifications to practice to better incorporate perceptualism into landscape studios.

1.1 Keywords

perceptualist drawing, reflective interpretation, landscape architecture studio, phenomenology