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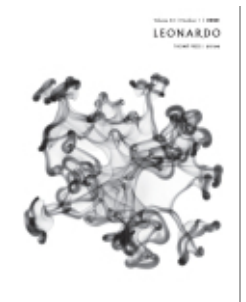
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*on the reconstruction of landscape*

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## ON THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LANDSCAPE

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### Abstract

This statement provides the theoretical and artistic context for the author's installation *on the reconstruction of landscape*, shown at the Palace of Arts within the framework of Cairotronica 2016. It does so by examining four of the author's previous works that are related to the Cairo work in that they employ historic or past gardens that are argued here to be heterotopias.

In discussing my installation *on the reconstruction of landscape*, shown at the Palace of Arts for Cairotronica 2016 (Fig. 1), I examine four of my previous works that are related to the *reconstruction* installation in that they employ historic or past gardens that are interpreted and represented in layered, non-hegemonic worlds—heterotopias, as I argue here.

*on the reconstruction of landscape* was conceived during my 2015 residency at Arte Studio Ginestrelle, Assisi, Italy, and explores the mid-nineteenth-century association of the Kew Gardens in London with Ascension Island in the South Atlantic, drawn from my physical location in Assisi.

The installation's central piece was a large charcoal drawing measuring 600 cm × 150 cm. The drawing depicted an imagined landscape layered on a constructed map of Ascension Island. A light projection on the drawing revealing a tempest at sea, and a monitor showing fragmented Assisi landscapes and a small sketchbook with ink drawings of the sky above Assisi, were positioned opposite the drawing.

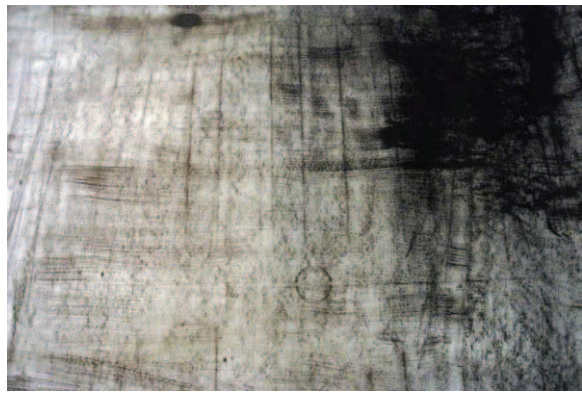
### **Remember Landscape, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Ludwig Forum Aachen, Wellington City Gallery (1994–1995)**

My engagement with “past gardens” began when I filmed my childhood garden for a video installation titled *Remember Landscape* [1].

Within this work, a series of seemingly unrelated video fragments reconstructs an imagined journey of a five-year-old me exploring my family's garden, creating a layered assemblage of visual references to the garden, terrains formed and dreams realized.

The translation of the child's world-making through attention to every detail in the garden, and the installation's subsequent exhibition, approached a theoretical framework developed first by Michel Foucault in his 1967 lecture “Of Other Spaces.” In this much-quoted lecture, Foucault speculates that the present age might be the age of “space” rather than of “history.” Foucault goes on to assert that, far from the present epoch being defined by a conscious perception and operation of space, there is an internal psychological space, and our notion of interior space informs our understanding of external space. To Foucault, the garden, the cinema and the theater belong to the heterotopias of the third principle. That is, they are “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” [2].

Foucault cites the theater's potential to credibly present a succession of diverse locations on a single physical stage and



**Fig. 1. Charcoal drawing, 600 cm × 150 cm, from the installation *on the reconstruction of landscape*, Cairotronica, Cairo, Egypt, 2016. (© Lawrence Wallen)**

identifies the garden as the oldest cultural manifestation of a “contradictory” site capable of containing entire universes within its borders.

In my work, garden, theater and moving image come together in differing constellations. In each of my works, Foucault's notion of “many sites in one” [3] renders the exhibited garden a secondary heterotopia, transformed toward a density derived from the massing of innumerable details and their projected two-dimensionality, thus gaining a distinct presence, be it in exhibition space or on the opera stage.

### **Ariadne auf Naxos (Richard Strauss), Sydney Opera House (2002)**

The first project in which I sought to layer site and consciously realize an entire world in this way was the media scenography for Richard Strauss's opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*, performed at the Sydney Opera House in 2002 [4]. The opera's main protagonist is the Greek mythological figure Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos who later becomes the bride of Dionysus. In this version of the myth, Ariadne falls in love with Theseus and secretly supplies him with the sword that allows him to kill her imprisoned half-brother, the Minotaur, in the Labyrinth. Theseus escapes the Labyrinth using Ariadne's thread. The central theme of the opera is one of transformation, made visible through a feature-length large-scale projected video that dominated the set design and employed images of the baroque-style



**Fig. 2. Video still from *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Strauss), 2002. (© Lawrence Wallen)**

Sanssouci Park (Potsdam, Germany) in order to create a fictional spatial autobiographical setting for Ariadne (Fig. 2).

The Ariadne video sequences—structured as a complex polyphonic response to Strauss’s compositional strategies of mapping texture, elaborate chromatics, point and counterpoint—framed my construction of Ariadne’s fictional autobiography as a garden, palace and labyrinth and a constant metamorphosis between the three locations.

The video built relationships between the musical and the visual composition through the construction of a nonlinear time-based image labyrinth that adhered to Strauss’s narrative logic. Following Foucault, I re-sited the three-dimensional garden in a digital realm through the “recomposition” of image data and subsequent projection in the performance.

### ***The Moving Stone Garden, Hamamatsu, Japan (2004)***

*The Moving Stone Garden* [5] was an installation realized in Japan that used moving objects with stone-like shapes and surfaces within the Dream Garden Factory Pavilion located in the center of the Shizuoka International Garden and Horticulture Exhibition outside Hamamatsu (Fig. 3).

I developed a labyrinthine spatial concept based on the structures and forms I uncovered during research on the late-eighteenth-century Dessau-Wörlitz Garden Realm in Germany. The installation was composed of pathways analogous to those found in the Garden Realm, including axial views, oblique views and framing, enclosed in a sequence of non-Cartesian volumes in acknowledgment of the Garden Realm’s formal break with the baroque garden’s highly symmetrical ordering systems.

I sourced the primary visual concept from scientific drawings of microscopic botanical elements published by German botanist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) contrasted against images I produced using a scanning electron microscope at the University of Bern.

In creating a media garden that made the invisible visible through projections on the surface of the moving stones, this project juxtaposed the meandering paths of the romantic Dessau-Wörlitz gardens, articulated through both space and media in the simulated microscopic botanical garden at the center of the Japanese Garden.

### ***Ascension 1 to 3, NG Art, Sydney (2013)***

My installation *Ascension 1 to 3* [6] was a direct predecessor of my work in Cairo, in terms of content and materials. The exhibition was composed of three large charcoal drawings, 16 photographic plates and a 20-minute video.

The title refers to Ascension Island, a remote and desolate point in the South Atlantic that in the mid-nineteenth century was planted from the seed stock of the Kew Gardens in London, resulting in the intended artificial creation of a tropical cloud forest.

The narrative surrounding Ascension Island is intertwined with citations from well-known personages from the nineteenth-century period of European expansion and colonization; these include excerpts from the diaries of Captain James Cook, Charles Darwin, Joseph Banks and Joseph Hooker. Together, these men and others engaged in a hitherto untried and ambitious terraforming exercise that brought the selected botanical collection of the “empire” together on Ascension Island. One



**Fig. 3. *The Moving Stone Garden*, installation, Hamamatsu, Japan, 2004. (Photo © Lawrence Wallen)**

hundred and sixty years later, the island still bears the garden born from the imported seeds and is a testament to the human capacity to accelerate evolution by several thousand years in a utopic project that raises both environmental and postcolonial concerns. The drawings are a concurrently micro- and macrorepresentation of an imagined landscape that seeks to frame and make visible the current research on the reconstruction of nature.

### **Conclusion**

This article highlights four previous works that informed my 2016 installation *on the reconstruction of landscape*, shown at Cairotronica. The installation articulated the convergence of material and immaterial landscapes at a location where the finite and the infinite meet in a constructed spatial narrative. This desired conjunction formed the conceptual and visual basis of the Cairotronica installation and argued that the particular alignment of material and immaterial landscapes forms a sequence of layered nonhegemonic spaces.

Retracing the sources of past gardens or landscapes through media interpretation and subsequent realization in art galleries and on the opera stage allows the topos of the “garden” to appear as a conflicted site and as “one site in many” (many sites in one).

This article provides context for how specific topoi, such as the garden, reappear in my work as symbols for the relatedness of nature and culture.

### **References and Notes**

1. *Remember Landscape* (part of the touring group exhibition *Cultural Safety*, 1994–1995), Frankfurter Kunstverein, Ludwig Forum Aachen, Wellington City Gallery.
2. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” Jay Miskowicz, trans., *Diacritics* 16, No. 1, 22–27 (Spring 1986) p. 25.
3. Foucault [2] p. 25.
4. The Australian Opera production *Ariadne auf Naxos*, staged at the Sydney Opera House in 2002, was directed by Thea Brejzek.
5. I created this work, also known as “the robot garden,” in collaboration with producers Stefan Iglhaut and Ken Fujisaki and composer Yasuaki Shimizu.
6. *Ascension 1 to 3*, NG Art, Sydney, 2013.