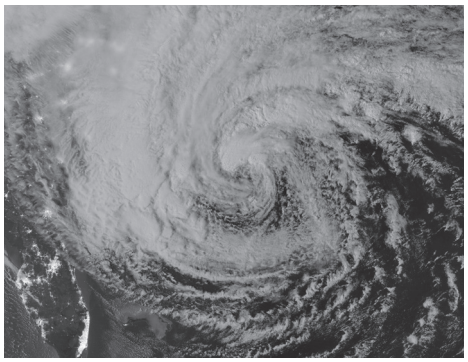
ILA
Institute of Landscape Architecture
Professor Christophe Girot
theory lab

The Power of Nature FS 2018 V04

"Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."
William Shakespeare: The Tempest, 1611

Our age has only recently been termed the „Anthropocene" because of the direct causal implications of our developed world on the state of the environment. According to Phillipe Descola in his book entitled "Beyond Nature and Culture," nature is now understood as something immanent, which is both threatened and yet also itself threatening for mankind (Descola 2013). The complexity of this new relationship between man and his environment has had direct consequences on our perception of landscape. The most symbolic phenomenon pertaining to our times is undoubtedly the melting of the ice caps on the North Pole, which have receded dramatically within the last three decades. Although the causes for this meltdown are being debated scientifically, the physical effects of this change can already be felt globally in cities, countries and their productive landscapes. Engineering choices over the past century have created unbelievable situations where cities and entire regions have become extremely vulnerable to such climate variations. The power of nature, good or bad, is often expressed through a variety of physical events such as storms, droughts, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides and floods, which makes us all very fearful of these forces that lie beyond our control.

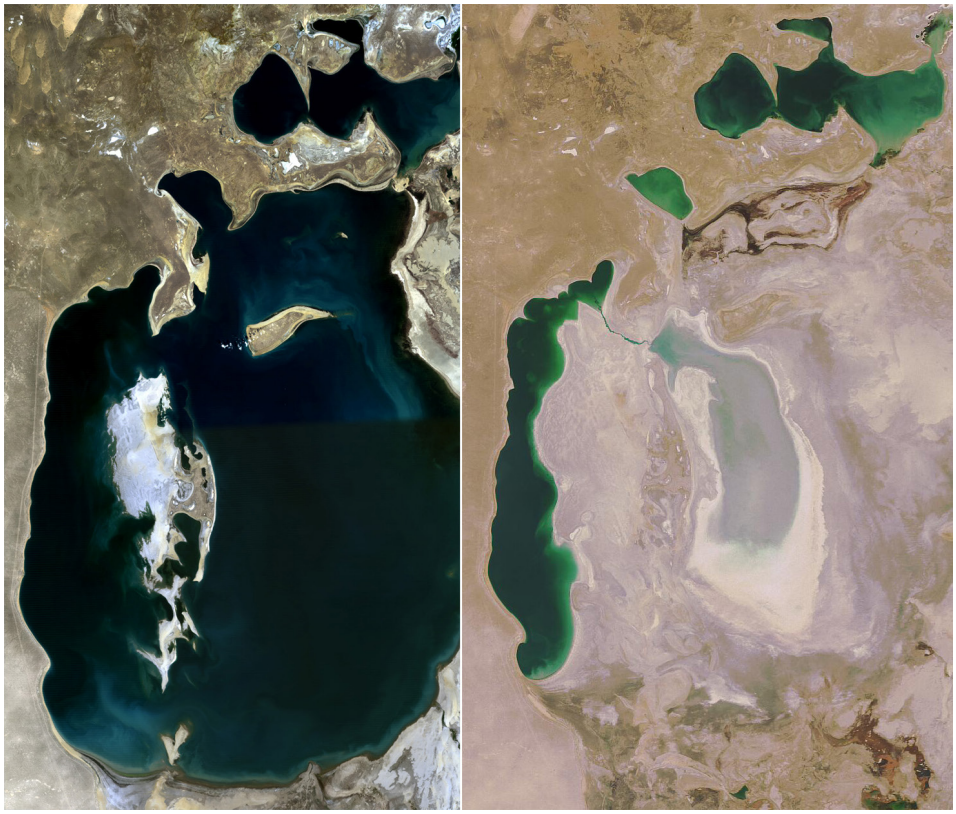


Hurricane Sandy over Georgia and Florida.
Photo: NASA

Water is probably the single most determining factor in each and every landscape of the globe. Since the most ancient times, it has been channelled and used for cities and irrigation. Today, entire environments must be rethought. We have become the "preparators" of a natural world that has been depleted, and in terms of resilience and sustainability, this will require a fuller understanding of the forces at play. Whether we have learned the lessons of environmental deterioration remains unclear, but in order to buffer environmental degradation a new kind of relationship to nature must be invented from scratch. Whether through excess of drought or flood, water has become the principle factor that changes environments. A series of examples show a portrait of the effects of change presently underway. From the dessicated Salton Sea that was created in 1906 as one of

www.girot.arch.ethz.ch
www.facebook.com/LandscapeArchitectureETHZurich

the largest artificial lakes in the Imperial Valley of California to the Aral Sea that disappeared from the map in Kazakhstan at the end of the past century, the examples of such transformations and mutations are innumerable. But it is most certainly cities and their hinterlands, such as Manila and New Orleans, that announce the coming of a new age – that of imminent change due to the power of nature.



Comparison of the Aral Sea between 1989 and 2008. Photo: NASA

Literature:

Blackbourn, David: The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany. London 2006.

Descola, Philippe; Beyond Nature and Culture. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2013.

Girot, Christophe: Pamphlet no. 16, Rising Waters, Shifting Lands. Edited by the Chair of Prof. Girot, Institute of Landscape Architecture ILA, ETH Zürich. Zurich 2012.

Jackson, John Brinkerhoff: Discovering the Vernacular Landscape. New Haven 1984.

Leopold, Luna B.: A View of the River. Cambridge 2005.

Leopold, Aldo: The Sand County Almanac. Oxford 1949.

McHarg, Ian L.: Design with Nature. New York 1992.