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The term recultivation is quite new and awkward because it refers to an unprecedented situation: outside the tradition of typology and archetypes. Land and soil, which have been severely abused, are reclaimed and put into some form of cultivation, call it landscape if you will. As easy as this may sound, the transformation of so-called «brownfields» into productive «greenfields» requires specific know-how in terms of cultivation, relentless determination, and faith in nature over time. Countless projects and initiatives – at a broad range of scales – indicate a growing trend in urban and industrial areas where wastelands are transformed into new and possibly productive landscape environments. The range of recultivation projects in this century is impressive, it accounts for well over half the landscape projects underway. They range from large-scale industrial reclamation projects, such as the IBA Emscher Park in the Ruhr, through mid-sized urban parks like the Oerliker Park in Zurich, down to the small «Guerilla Gardens» which began in California ten years ago and are now rapidly spreading worldwide. The reason for the global appeal of recultivation projects is that they are the direct expression of a positive reaction to a general planetary condition, one where nature needs to be completely rethought and reinvented for the purpose of ecology.

It is difficult to address the aesthetics of recultivation along the same lines as earlier landscape and garden histories. There are presently no aesthetic models to draw from in terms of method of soil and landscape amelioration, although such methods in great part effectively determine and characterize the spatial configuration of a project. The shift at the paradigm of landscape recultivation, although not visible at first glance, is quite pervasive and determines in great part the final outcome of any design. It is the varying soil condition and the degree of contamination that determines the mode of intervention to follow. This in turn delivers the project’s inherent quality and singular aesthetic. The most common approach is to use a series of phyto-remedial processes and it takes up to half a century to achieve its remedial goals. The very placement of plants and trees on a tight grid within a landscape determines in great part the inherent spatial arrangement and the outcome of any remedial design. We need to learn anew how to live within this recultivated world, and to understand how to cope with the aesthetic constraints of these very long processes a stake. It requires a new understanding, but also a new vision of what landscape has come to be.

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Literature: