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Juvenile Delinquents

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Oskar, the main character of Günter Grass's 1958 novel, *The Tin Drum*, is a shrieking child anarchist who deliberately stops his biological growth at the age of three. He is observant and impetuous, sneering at the behavior of adults around him. The boy Oskar also makes an appearance in the scientific field of population ecology, where he is used as a namesake term for trees that "prefer the juvenile to the adult state."[1] These nonhuman Oskars occupy the understory of a mature forest, where seeds have germinated and grown up into shade-tolerant saplings, but persist as "ageing juveniles, lingering in a stunted condition" for decades (Figure 1). These individuals grow imperceptibly in diameter and height as they wait for mature trees to die and create an opening in the canopy. Once such a gap appears, the Oskars grow quickly toward the light, and advance to the next stage of biological development. While it is risky to anthropomorphize the landscape, in this case humans share a common attribute of growth: maturity is not strictly related to chronological age.

Presently, there is a small population of American beech Oskars (*Fagus grandifolia*) on the south side of Scarboro Hill in Boston's Franklin Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. These uncultivated exemplars lie in wait as understory below the original nineteenth-century plantation of European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), an elegant and slow-growing relative that evokes the estates and ancient forests of the old world (Figure 2).[2] With their copper-hued autumn leaves and smooth, silvery bark (now etched by graffiti), this aging stand of trees was designed as part of a scenographic experience from the park's carriage roads that

Figure 1. *Fagus grandifolia*, 'Oskar.' (Drawing by author.)

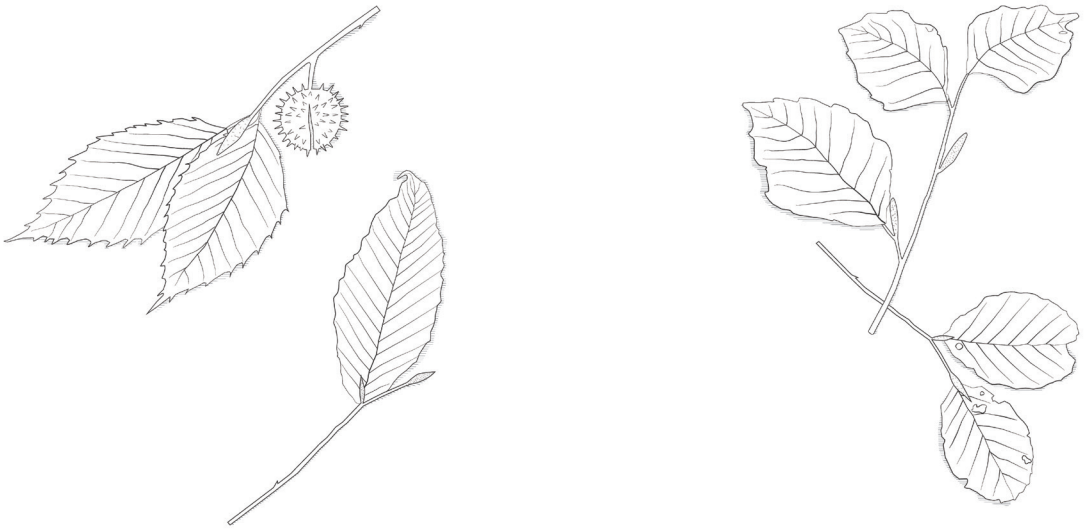

Figure 2. *Left*: *Fagus grandifolia* leaf detail. *Right*: *Fagus sylvatica* leaf detail. (Drawing by author.)

pass through the hills and dales of "The Country Park" to the native oak forest of "The Wilderness."[3] The European species superficially resembles the native American one and the two kinds tolerate comparable growing conditions. However, *Fagus sylvatica* has been more widely used since the late nineteenth century because it is easier to cultivate, transplant, and sustain with standard arboricultural methods in urban environments.[4] *Fagus grandifolia*, the American species, has a greater ability to reproduce independently through root suckering, a process where vertical shoots can emerge from underground roots and develop into viable trees.[5] It also has a wider range of climate hardiness, suggesting adaptability in the face of rising temperatures in the Northeast United States. According to the City of Boston's recent assessment of climate change in the area, temperatures have risen two degrees over the past one hundred years but may increase more than ten degrees over the next century.[6]

In order to preserve Olmsted's design intent, the European beech grove, now nearing the end of its biological life, requires a wholesale replanting of its original species. In addition, the aging trees' massive trunks and hulking stumps would have to be removed from the park. Alternatively, a passive approach—doing nothing—would yield a hillside succeeded by American beeches, which may be a desirable outcome from the perspective of restoration ecologists.[7] Spatially and genetically, the native species is similar to the European one and it thrives in regional woodlands. Furthermore, considering the limited resources of Boston's Department of Parks and Recreation to manage a site on the National Register of Historic Places, succession by compatible native species is appealing because it can sustain the figural gestures of forest and meadow envisioned by the original designers more than one hundred years ago.[8]

The discourse surrounding the preservation of aging public landscapes—particularly those works of landscape architecture by the founders of the professional discipline—has inherited many of its practices from architecture and restoration ecology. The International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) adopted the Florence Charter on historic gardens in 1982; its guidelines apply "to small gardens and to large parks, whether formal or 'landscape.'"[9] The Florence Charter emphasizes the "architectural composition of the historic garden . . . its vegetation, including its species, proportions, colour schemes, spacing, and respective heights."[10] Although this document acknowledges the dynamic processes of living organisms, it relies on material authenticity from a specific moment to establish a baseline of spatial and visual relationships.

In large urban parks, the influence of restoration ecology plays a supporting role to the aforementioned spatial and visual criteria, one that guides the selection and management of living matter with minimal impact to the greater environment: Is it invasive? Drought tolerant? Is it susceptible to pathogens or pests? The US National Park Service (NPS) guidelines for the treatment of cultural landscapes, which applies to sites on the National Register of Historic Places (including Franklin Park), recognizes the interdependence of "natural systems . . . which may extend well beyond the boundary of the historic property." However, the NPS guidelines are quick to state that "natural resource protection is a specialized field distinct from cultural landscape preservation."[11]

Recent writings by landscape architects of the NPS have cautiously recognized that "historical ranges of variation" in the environment are no longer a stable predictor of future conditions.[12] The field of restoration ecology is itself experiencing a "crisis of baselines" and questioning long-held knowledge of ecological associations in the face of open-ended and rapid change.[13]

The horse-drawn carriages in Olmsted's Franklin Park have long been replaced by dirt bikes and jogging strollers. At an urban scale, the enterprise of human activity continues to destabilize what constitutes a known site: the chemical composition and temperature of the air, the movement of water, the flows of organisms and nutrients through soil are all part of the living matter of the landscape. The design of the land does not merely respond to the environment; it produces it, materially and culturally. Therefore, the uncertain range between the known design artifact and future environmental scenarios should not be cause for conservatism. What for architecture (durable and discrete) might constitute preservation, in landscape is merely a replica. The temporal range of landscape architecture may yield new possibilities for architecture if material interventions *within* existing spaces can mobilize the past to articulate potential futures. In designing spaces of preservation and rehabilitation, we can think of the present as a transitional moment where preparedness and premonition can give way to realms of possibility and desire.

Experimental preservationist Jorge Otero-Pailos offers the possibility of the "not-me creation" as a collective way to ask social and political questions about heritage objects; these dialogues are a way to interrogate what aspects of a cultural artifact are important to us.[14] While honoring the foundational projects of landscape architecture in the public domain, perhaps expectations surrounding the treatment of aging parks unfairly seek harmony among the values of authorial integrity, social authenticity, or biodiversity. How the landscape and its context have changed over time is deeply embedded as part of the project, and imaginative physical interventions can accelerate or retard these processes, or deploy them elsewhere on a site. Ecological questions do not merely demonstrate expertise, but they are spatial questions about durability, memory, and value. The American beech Oskars of Franklin Park offer just one example. Do we cut down the old trees to encourage new growth? Do we favor the few European saplings? What happens to the many tons of duff and deadwood, inscribed with the names of teenage lovers? Consequently, answering such questions requires thinking about preservation as an act of design, with a willingness to consider the original execution of a project as just one significant moment in the relay of matter from one state to another.

And our little man Oskar? His appearance of eternal youth obscures the visionary and destructive forces in his power. He has invented a temporal existence in the world that is incomprehensible to his minders. Oskar is asynchronously young and old, immature and fecund, too small to fight but always making noise. The fictional Oskar was eventually committed to an insane asylum; what if, instead, we asked him to play?

Author Biography

Danielle Narae Choi is an assistant professor of landscape architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD). She teaches in the core studio sequence and leads design research seminars. Choi's current research concerns infrastructure and the public realm in the political ecology of American urbanization. She is a licensed landscape architect in New York State, and holds a bachelor of arts in art history from the University of Chicago and a masters in landscape architecture from the GSD.

Notes

1 Jonathan Silvertown and Deborah Charlesworth, *Introduction to Plant Population Biology* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 169.

2 Cornelia Hanna McMurtrie, "The Beech in Boston," *Arnoldia* 42, no. 1 (1982): 32–44.

3 Alexander von Hoffman, "'Of Greater Lasting Consequence': Frederick Law Olmsted and the Fate of Franklin Park, Boston," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 47, no. 4 (1988): 339–50.

4 Russell M. Burns and Barbara H. Honkala, eds., *Silvics of North America 2: Hardwoods* (Washington, DC: US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1990), 653–67.

5 Ibid.

6 Boston Research Advisory Group, *Climate Ready Boston: Climate Projections Consensus* (Boston: City of Boston, 2016).

7 Within the field of contemporary restoration ecology, there are active and lively debates on the value of native versus non-native plant species. The evaluation of these species is contested through diverse criteria of benefit and harm, but functionality within an ecosystem is emphasized over aesthetic and cultural concerns.

8 At present, there is no active restoration plan for Franklin Park's aging forest canopy beyond regular park maintenance for visitor safety. The Franklin Park Coalition, a nonprofit citizen advocacy group, issued a draft management plan in 2008, but it was never officially adopted by the City of Boston.

9 International Council on Monuments and Sites, *Historic Gardens* (The Florence Charter), 1982, https://www.icomos.org/charters/gardens_e.pdf.

10 Ibid.

11 United States National Park Service, *Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (Washington, DC,1992), https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments/landscape-guidelines/index.htm.

12 Robert Melnick, "Climate Change and Landscape Preservation: Rethinking Our Strategies," *Change Over Time* 5, no. 2 (2015): 174–79; United States National Park Service, *National Park Service Climate Change Response Strategy* (Fort Collins, 2010), https://www.nature.nps.gov/climatechange/docs/NPS_CCRS.pdf.

13 J. Keulartz, "Future Directions for Conservation," *Environmental Values* 25, no. 4 (2016): 385–407; Bradley J. Butterfield et al., "Prestoration: Using Species in Restoration That Will Persist Now and into the Future," *Restoration Ecology* 25 (2017): S155–63; Eric Higgs et al., "The Changing Role of History in Restoration Ecology," *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 12, no. 9 (2014): 499–506.

14 Jorge Otero-Pailos and Danielle Choi, "The Not-Me Creation: Interview with Jorge Otero Pailos," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 44 (Fall–Winter 2017): 94–100.