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Rhetoric of landscape architecture and interior design discourses: preparation for cross-disciplinary practice

Abstract: In the current reform context, the uniqueness of local disciplinary practices is being forgotten in the race towards cross-disciplinary practice. The rhetoric of the pedagogic discourses of landscape architectural students and interior design students is described as part of a doctoral study undertaken to document practices and orientations prior to cross-disciplinary collaboration. We draw on the theoretical framework of Bernstein and the rhetorical method of Burke to study the grammars of 'landscape' representation employed within these disciplinary examples. We offer a method of investigating how prepared final year students may be for working in a cross-disciplinary manner. The discursive interactions of their work, as illustrated by four examples of drawn images and written text, are described. Comparisons of these examples show both similarities and differences in the students' grammars of representation within their disciplines. Furthermore, however, the findings suggest a progressive weakening of the grammars of the pedagogic discourses that apply to the concepts and procedures of both disciplines. This poses some key issues for educators. It is argued that while weak grammars foster students' deeper understanding of concepts, they also weaken the pedagogic identity and autonomy of their discipline. Strong grammars resist domination and subordination, ensuring the ongoing relative autonomy of a discipline.

Keywords: rhetorical analysis, disciplinary discourse, pedagogic practice

Introduction

Many of us in universities are asked to undertake pedagogic practices that combine local disciplinary knowledge with integrated cross-disciplinary understandings. We are told that 'silo mentalities' must be broken down and boundaries shifted in a 'competitive' higher education sector going through further reformation in a global context. At a local level, teachers and students struggle to maintain the uniqueness of their pedagogic discourses as new knowledge, it is suggested, is to be found at our disciplinary borders. One field of endeavour where this is evident is at the border of 'insideness' and 'outsideness' where interior design, landscape architecture and other applied design disciplines deliberate over their territorial claims. Nowhere is this is more clearly an issue than with the concept of 'landscape'.

While we may agree that both landscape architecture and interior design disciplines have a strong intrinsic relationship to 'landscape', little empirical evidence has been offered in the literature as to whether or not our students might share an

understanding of this concept. Before students from each of our disciplines begin working together on a cross-disciplinary project, we suggest that it is important for us to explore the nature of the pedagogic discourses of each group in relation to this concept. The power of these disciplinary discourses may offer some insight into how our two disciplines might collaborate on inside and outside spaces in the future.

The study is framed by the theoretical work of Bernstein, who aimed to explain 'the inner logic of pedagogic practice' (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein argues that strong, clearly bounded disciplinary identities insulate themselves from other disciplines while weaker, less specialised disciplines struggle with dominance and subordination. Knowledge, according to Bernstein, may be tacitly acquired through *horizontal discourse* in the everyday 'common sense' world and deliberately acquired through *vertical discourse* within specialised languages (Bernstein, 2000). Those who understand both are at a distinct advantage over those who do not possess this expertise.

Rationale for the study

This study involved two groups of students: graduate diploma landscape architecture students and graduate diploma interior design students. The focus of the study for both these groups was their understanding of 'landscape'. Underpinning this was a concern for identifying common as well as differing representations of 'landscape'. It is speculated that any common representations could perhaps be viewed as a type of shared knowledge providing through its commonality a basis for each discipline to communicate with each other on the same conceptual level, a point where discipline boundaries can be breached and transgressed. Such breaching and transgression could also be facilitated, it was proposed, through representations that are abstract and, as such, highly metaphoric; acting perhaps like a universal language. The differing representations were also of interest in that they could be regarded as revealing points of resistance. This may not be necessarily negative. Points of resistance as they are described here could reflect discipline uniqueness, something that should perhaps be reinforced because of its potential to provide for a complementary view of the world and of issues faced by designers of the built environment.

Specifically, the study addressed three questions: How do students in one discipline (in this example interior design) engage with a concept that is considered a central component of another discipline's discourse (that is, the discipline of landscape architecture)? How do students in a discipline such as landscape architecture engage with a concept that is considered central to their discipline but 'of interest' to other disciplines? What implications does this have when evaluating and educating for the preparedness of interior design students to engage with landscape architecture students and vice versa? The study also sought an appropriate method for the analysis of drawings and words as discursive texts in pedagogic practice.

Practices in the disciplines

An exploration of 'landscape' in the 'interior' context

For seven (7) interior design students, the study focused on 'landscape' representation undertaken in a research unit that involved the students in developing

an understanding of and basic skills in using creative practice as a research strategy. In this component, students were asked at the beginning and end of the semester to externalise their own understanding of 'landscape' through writing and drawing. Their written responses and drawings together with those from the landscape architecture students were analysed by their interior design teacher.

An exploration of 'landscape' in the 'exterior' context

For the nineteen (19) landscape architecture students, this study focused on a landscape planning unit that aimed to assist these students in integrating their understanding of 'landscape' in a planning context with their experiences of landscape design. Students were encouraged to reflect on this understanding at the start and the end of the semester through drawings and in text. Their written responses and drawings together with those from the interior design students were analysed by their landscape architecture teacher.

These classes had both implicit and explicit 'protocols' that addressed how to draw 'landscape' and how to write about 'landscape' as the focus of the creative work. The materials available to the students' were written unit outlines describing the objectives of each unit, instructions for assignment work, teachers' talk, information from library resources, their own talk as they worked together, workplace talk and of course, the physical 'landscape' around them.

Looking at drawings and words

The drawn and written data were analysed to capture the rhetorical or persuasive qualities using the model of dramatism devised by Kenneth Burke in 1945 (Stillar, 1998). He defined rhetoric as the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents (Burke, 1945, p.41). In this respect he emphasises the importance of persuasion in language use, and the attendant understanding of language as not simply utterances from a speaker but as directed, purposefully or pre-reflectively, towards a certain reception. In order to do this, Burke argued, speakers must identify themselves with the opinions and values of their audience. An orator wishing to persuade an audience should not emphasise the gulf that separates their respective opinions. Instead, orators should try to match their controversial views with categories, which are familiar and well valued by the audience (Billig, 1987, p.194).

In addition to emphasising the audience orientation of language, Burke's perspective provided for the study of the properties of language that produce its rhetorical orientation. A central focus in this study is the discovery of human 'motives'. In this context 'motive' does not strictly refer to an individual's underlying reason or purpose, but rather the broader sense of the movement and direction of human action. In the Burkean sense, then, 'motive' refers to the motivating aspects of language, the movement between different elements that produce specific meanings.

Because this method emphasises the symbolic and cultural aspects of effective discourse, it is helpful in studying the student language of drawing and words not merely in terms of the substantive focus but also in terms of the students' orientations and motives in relation to their audience. The analysis considers the patterns of selection and combination of various resources available for making meaning.

Burke's pentadic model consists of five elements: act, scene, agent, agency and purpose. The act refers to 'what happened', the scene focuses on the context or background setting of the act, the agent is the person or thing producing the act, the agency refers to how the act was done, and the purpose identifies why it was done. These elements are used to identify how the students construct representations of the notion of 'landscape' with reference to the practices and terminologies of the pedagogic context. Drawings and words combine these elements in different ways, each leading to a different construction of motive. Burke called these various combinations ratios. A purpose:act ratio, for example, would characterise the act as necessary for a particular purpose whereas the scene:act ratio constructs the act as appropriate to or determined by a particular scene (Stillar, 1998). These ratios assist in revealing the dominant element in the rhetorical text and provide some insight into the most important philosophical dimension of the situation as seen by the rhetor (Foss, 1996, p.460).

In order to examine the students' motives implicit in their representations of 'landscape', the work of all students in each class was analysed. However, the work of only four students are discussed in this paper as examples of the distinctly different 'texts' produced by students – where 'text' is the analytical object consisting of either drawing or writing or both. Two of the examples originate from the interior research class and two of the examples come from the landscape planning class. Our concern here is in how students in interior design and landscape architecture choose to represent a shared concept that should convince their teachers of their disciplinary and cross-disciplinary 'competence'.

Persuasive elements in the disciplinary discourses

An exploration of 'landscape' in the 'interior' context

We suggest that drawings, like words, can be considered as rhetorical texts and analysed in this way. Foss (1996) agrees and argues that 'non-discursive forms of communication' function in a similar way to discourse in that they transmit information and evoke some response from the audience (p. 83). A two-step process of analysis was followed in this study: the five pentadic elements of each student's text was described then the dominant element was identified for each example (Foss, 1996, p.458).

In the two interior design examples, the students have reflected on and represented the salient elements of 'landscape' to be read by their viewer, understood here to be their teacher/practitioner in research. Each conveys a different 'motive' or persuasive quality in the pedagogic discourse surrounding this concept. So, in figure 1, a student depicts in their drawing the juxtaposition of 'exterior' and 'interior' as two parts of a whole, with the boundary seen as a 'barrier' placed left of centre and the framing left open. A further dimension is added to the 'exterior' element, being composed of foreground and background.

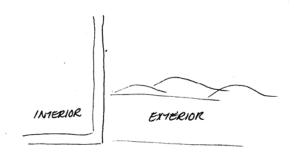


Figure 1: An interior design student's representation of 'landscape' at the beginning of the semester (with permission).

We suggest that the agent could be the producer of the text *or* the viewer of the text, positioned out of the picture, in an abstract, neutral (on the border) viewpoint. The act is understood as 'seeing the relationship' between inside and outside, something that is 'happening' in the drawing. The agency is the way the 'marks on paper' depict 'interior' using two parallel lines, a convention of interior design, and an everyday commonsense depiction of 'exterior'. The scene is what is depicted in the representation of 'landscape, a juxtaposition of the inside of a (built) structure on equal footing with the outside foreground and background, a division between the insideness and outsideness of 'landscape'. The purpose suggested by the producer of this image is that 'landscape' is the complement of 'interior', an equal partner in the discourse concerning the world around 'us'.

In addition to the drawing, words offer alternative potentials for a rhetorical view of the concept. In the first example, the student represents 'landscape' as

exterior surroundings that may vary in scale eg. a backyard versus a mountain range. The exterior part of an inside/outside relationship.

Here the agent again becomes the viewer/reader of the text positioned in *exterior* surroundings, the objectified 'landscape'. The text persuades us that the act of the agent operates in two ways. It relates scaled 'knowable' outside places to one another, as well as relating inside and outside 'unknowable' places. This offers us greater insight into 'seeing the relationship' expressed in the drawing. The agency is how 'landscape' varies in scale, operating as part of a relationship. The scene is both 'this' space and the 'other' space, distinct from interior: *the exterior part of an inside/outside relationship*. The purpose is to distinguish 'landscape' from 'interior', while at the same time, bringing outside and inside together as a whole entity.

In a second example in figure 2, a student uses centrality to depict a 'horizon' bounded by a frame slightly right of centre in their drawing. The detail associated with each element here is more ambiguous than the first. Outside the frame, the boundaries of the drawing are left open. In both examples, space is represented as an abstraction or theoretical concept, simultaneously close to and distant from the viewer on the two-dimensional page. It is *not* represented as the accepted everyday lived experience of 'landscape'.

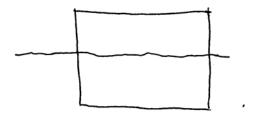


Figure 2: An interior design student's representation of 'landscape' at the end of the semester (with permission).

We suggest that the agent could again be the producer of the text *or* the viewer of the text, positioned out of the picture, on equal eye level with the horizon line and the framed viewpoint. The act is understood as 'experiencing the relationship' between 'self' and the 'other' that lies beyond the viewer as a person, something that is both sensed and understood conceptually. The agency is the way the frame commands the viewer to gaze at a part of the horizon while knowing that more can be seen and understood. The scene is an abstract, minimalist representation that both distances the viewer from and invites the viewer into the 'landscape. The purpose conveyed by the drawing is that 'landscape' is open to interpretation, bounded in some ways by a particular viewpoint but with the potential for multiple meanings.

In this example, the student also describes the concept as:

highly personal; to be experienced; to be viewed in section/parts; hint of horizon; 5 senses especially sight, colour and visual texture.

We argue that the agent here remains the producer or viewer of the text, extending what is expressed in the drawing. 'Landscape' becomes the act or process through which something is *experienced*, *viewed* or *sensed*. It is the very personal, highly subjective experience that becomes the agency. It includes viewing *in section*, *in parts*, *in colour* and as *visual texture* - conventions employed in interior design. The scene is both the internal world of the person and the external world of the perceived landscape. The purpose conveyed in these words is that 'landscape' is a phenomenon of personal interpretation from sensory experience.

An exploration of 'landscape' in the 'exterior' context

In the two landscape architecture examples, the students also understand that their drawings of 'landscape' are to be read by their teacher/practitioner in landscape planning, presumably persuading her of their 'competence' in the pedagogic discourse of this field of landscape architecture. So, in figure 3, a student depicts three representations of 'landscape': a realist view with foreground and background, a three-dimensional view with symbols leading the eye to the background and a plan view, wholly symbolised on a two-dimensional page.

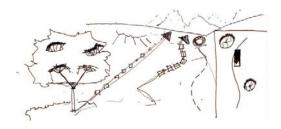


Figure 3: A landscape architecture student's representation of 'landscape' at the beginning of the semester (with permission).

The agent is seen as the producer *or* the viewer of the text, positioned above the observed and symbolised landscape. The act consists of ways of representing 'landscape' as an object using numerous symbolic conventions employed in landscape architecture. The agency is the depiction of a range of features comprising the whole but drawn from three distant viewpoints. The scene is a naturalistic place: of trees, hills, mountains, but *not* of people, buildings, or cars. The purpose suggested by the drawing is that 'landscape' should be considered as a represented object connected to an observable, natural place.

The pentad is also applied to the written component of the student's text:

The terrestrial in which we as humans live, see and use.

The agent could be the 'terrestrial' object or we as humans existing within it. The act may be either the way in which we as humans actively live, perceive and operate in this object or how the 'terrestrial' is passively colonised by us as humans. The agency is the positioning of 'terrestrial' and 'humans' as equal entities. The scene is an interactive world where humans are dominant. The purpose of the words here suggests that 'landscape' is an object to be utilised for 'our' human requirements.

In a final example in figure 4, a student uses words to form the elements of the drawing; *inclusive ideas dreams possibilities hopes relevance [w]holistic lasting meaningful* form 'hills' and *information communities* form 'trees'. Here the boundary between written language and drawn image becomes blurred.



Figure 4: A landscape architecture student's representation of 'landscape' at the end of the semester (with permission).

The agent is considered to be the producer *and* the viewer of the text, as one. The act is a subtle collaboration where the representation by the producer and the interpretation by the viewer are interconnected. The agency is the way in which

words compose the image and image connects the words. The scene is both the realm of the mind and the visual senses of the body. The purpose suggests that 'landscape' should be seen as symbolic of multiple meanings and intentions, open to abstraction and interpretation.

The written text:

Landscape is inclusive of all our surroundings / environments – including our personal perceptions which are future landscapes

persuades the reader that the agent is 'us', the viewer and producer of the text and future landscapes. The act is the 'inclusiveness' of 'landscape'. The agency is how we use this concept to consider our surroundings and our perceptions of our surroundings / environments. The scene is an abstract, all encompassing view of our present and future environments. The purpose suggested by these words is that 'landscape' should be conceptualised as an entity that transcends physical and conceptual notions of the world, open to personal and collective interpretation.

Blurred boundaries in the 'interior' and 'exterior' contexts

Identification of the five pentadic elements gives us an overview of how these students have chosen to represent this concept to their teachers. The most common dimension of these representations was the agent, the person or thing producing the act, frequently conveyed in the data as the viewer and/or the producer of the text – interactants in the pedagogic discourse. In contrast, the act varied from the objectification and experience of 'landscape' to the interconnection and collaboration between 'self' and other'. The agency, how the act was accomplished, and the scene where the act took place, were different in each student example. 'Landscape' as object and experience was often expressed in distinct disciplinary language while 'landscape' as an interconnected and collaborative concept was expressed in abstract ways open to interpretation.

Arguably, the most interesting element of the student representations was their purpose, why each act was performed in a particular way. In both the interior design examples, the viewer was persuaded that 'landscape' is much more than the everyday 'lived' perception of our surroundings. The students convinced 'us' that the most salient dimensions of this concept are the complementarity of interior and exterior, and the importance of personal interpretation in the 'landscape' experience. In both landscape architecture examples, the viewer was persuaded that what is important to 'us' is the connection between human action and the objectified 'landscape' as well as the symbolic view of the physical and metaphysical 'landscape'. If the pentad provides a method of determining how a student views the pedagogic context, we suggest that these students are providing evidence through their rhetorical texts that the boundaries around the concept of 'landscape' are blurred and can be transgressed in both pedagogic contexts.

Key elements of the disciplinary discourses

We suggest that each student's attempt to get their teacher to accept their view of the concept as the correct one reflects what they perceive to be their discipline's normative practice. Thus, insight into the students' choices or 'motives' is explored through the paired relationships or ratios between the elements in each representation. The element that exerts the strongest influence on the other elements in the text is said to be the dominant aspect of the representation (Foss, 1996, p. 461). The drawn and written texts represent examples of what their creators understand to be a valued concept of 'landscape' by their viewers. Our interest here is in how students in interior design and landscape architecture choose to represent a shared concept that should convince their teachers of their disciplinary and cross-disciplinary 'competence'.

The producers of the first, second and fourth drawings ordered the elements of each visual interaction in such away that it was the agent, the viewer of the text, which dominated how the concept was understood. In positioning the viewer in front, at eye level to the drawn objects, the producer maximised the role of the agent. By emphasising the close proximity of the viewer to at least part of the scene, the viewer was understood to be having an intimate personal encounter with what was represented. Thus, the agent was almost offered *control* over what was seen in the drawing. In the third drawing, however, agency was the dominant element in the representation. Here the agency brought objects together in one drawing, showing they all belonged to the concept of 'landscape'. The agent was kept at a distance, maintaining an impersonal objective gaze. Because the drawn image was made up of parts that compose a whole, it was how the symbols were interpreted together that gave power to the representation. Thus, the agency controlled how the concept was to be understood.

The written texts pointed to similar elements in the students' representations. In the second and third written texts, the agency was the dominant element in that the words carried an action-oriented connotation. The agent as viewer and the act of 'landscape' became subordinated to the means, that is what was important was to be ... experienced, viewed, sensed, lived, seen, used. In the fourth written text, the agent again became the most salient element, as in the drawings. The producer and viewer acted together as the agent with the emphasis placed on 'our' in our surroundings / environments and our perceptions. Interestingly, the first written text presented a different rhetorical position. Here the dominant element was the scene where the author gave precedence to exterior surroundings as a backyard and a mountain range, setting up an understanding of exterior as a visible setting.

According to Foss (1996), Burke suggested that the dominant term in a discourse might be used to identify the corresponding philosophical system. Burke suggested that if the agent is featured in the rhetorical text, the philosophy that corresponds is *idealism*, a system that views the mind or spirit, as each person experiences it, as fundamentally real, and the totality of the universe is believed to be mind or spirit in its essence. If agency is featured, the corresponding philosophy is *pragmatism*. In this doctrine, the meaning of a proposition or course of action lies in its observable consequences, what something is 'good for', and the sum of these consequences constitutes its meaning. If scene is featured, the philosophy that corresponds is *materialism*, the system that regards all facts and reality as explainable in terms of matter and motion or physical laws. These are the philosophies we are concerned with in our data.

So if the dominant element in the pentad reveals what a student regarded as the most appropriate response to the pedagogic situation, then the agent as the controlling factor may reflect an idealist viewpoint. We suggest that here a student's text could reveal an understanding of 'landscape' that allows the action of the agent to determine the 'truth' or 'reality' of the concept. Where the agency is offered as the primary feature of the concept, the text could reveal a pragmatic approach, an understanding that focuses on 'landscape' as a useful 'tool' in the student's practice. Where the scene is the most salient aspect, the text could propose an understanding that sees 'landscape' in terms of its physical presence, something that just 'is'.

Conclusion

Our concern here has been in how students in interior design and landscape architecture choose to represent a shared concept that should convince their teachers of their disciplinary and cross-disciplinary 'competence'. We have suggested that teachers and students are struggling to maintain the uniqueness of their pedagogic discourses as our quest for new knowledge takes us to the frontiers of cross-disciplinary borders. We have taken 'landscape' as a conceptual window, positioned at the border of our two disciplines, through which to peer at the uniqueness and commonality of our disciplinary discourses.

We also draw attention to our search for an appropriate method for investigating how students convince their teachers of their abilities and understandings of 'landscape' in a disciplinary setting. Rhetorical analysis has allowed us to systematically describe and attempt to explain our students' choices of symbols and signs in drawn and written text. The pentad and its ratios were applied to drawn texts for the first time in landscape architecture and interior design. This assisted us in improving our understanding of what the students believe to be the most important ways of seeing 'landscape' through a disciplinary lens.

The study highlighted common as well as differing representations of 'landscape'. The most common dimension in the drawn and written representations was the agent, the person or thing producing the act, frequently conveyed in the data as the viewer and/or the producer of the pedagogic discourse. This was unexpected as we anticipated the purpose to be the controlling element in an interaction between student and teacher. Interestingly, this led us to a conclusion that our students demonstrated an understanding of 'landscape' that allowed the action of the viewer to determine the 'truth' or 'reality' of the concept. We suggest that for cross-disciplinary practice, this is a valuable understanding in preparing practitioners to transgress the boundaries of their discipline and communicate with others on the same conceptual level. This idealism corresponded to texts that were abstract and, as such, highly metaphoric; acting like a universal language.

The differing representations were also of interest in that they were regarded as potential points of resistance to integrative practice. In the interior design texts, both examples balanced the importance of the agent (idealism) in the drawings with the scene (materialism) or the agency (pragmatism) in the writing. However, in the landscape architecture texts, one example used the agency (pragmatism) in both drawn and written text while the other example used agent (idealism) as the key element in both drawing and words. While we have only four examples to consider

here, the data does illustrate the potential for individuals in one discipline, interior design in this case, to persuade us of the value of the abstract ideal while at the same time confessing to the importance of tools such as *scale*, *section and visual texture* in a pragmatic material world. In another disciplinary context, landscape architecture in this case, an individual may reveal their pragmatic conviction that the meaning of their symbolic action lies in its observable consequences, while another individual conveys their idealistic view that the mind or spirit of each person experiences something fundamentally real. We suggest that in applied design disciplines, there is a point of resistance to the esoteric, introspective view, where we must persuade our audience of the importance of a concrete perceptible view of our disciplinary discourse and practice. This could be reflected in our discipline's unique graphic and textual language, holding onto ideas that should perhaps be reinforced because of their potential to provide a complementary view of the world.

Rhetoric is an invitation to understanding – we offer our perspective and invite others to enter our world to see it as we do, so others can understand us and our perspective better (Foss, 1996, p.5). This doctrine forms the basis for learning and teaching in our two landscape planning and interior research classes. We, as teachers, do not seek to convince students to adopt our perspective of 'landscape' but ask them to be prepared to understand their own and others' perspectives. In Bernsteinian terms, this might constitute a *weak grammar* of realisation, learnt as blurred boundaries around concepts, little formal or explicit procedures and the shared nature of multiple viewpoints (Morais, Neves, Davies, & Daniels, 2001, p.139-140).

If these findings suggest a weakening of the grammar of our pedagogic discourses that apply at least to the concept of 'landscape' in both disciplines, there are some key issues for educators. Bernstein has argued that weak grammars of realisation weaken the pedagogic identity and autonomy of their discipline. Strong grammars resist domination and subordination, ensuring the ongoing relative autonomy of a discipline (Bernstein, 2000, p.5). Faced with integrative practices, we need to concern ourselves with that part of our pedagogic discourse that makes each of our disciplines unique and valuable, as well as that part that should be shared between disciplines. We should continue to develop the verticality of our discourses, with further research into the power and control relations of our pedagogic practices.

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