

Designing Change:
Transforming Cultural Attitudes Towards the Natural Environment
Through Design

by

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Over the last thirty years, for the most part independently of each other, public artists and landscape architects have begun to tackle environmental issues in their work. Whether by incorporating natural forces such as wind or tide into their designs, 'recreating' local plant communities destroyed by human intervention, or explicitly using their work to instruct about ecological processes and issues, these artists and architects have attempted to transform our attitudes about, awareness of, and behavior towards the natural world through design. To explore the strengths and weaknesses of these attempts at transformative environmental design, I focused on works by four designers: two landscape architects – George Hargreaves and William Wenk – and two public artists – Andy Goldsworthy and Alan Sonfist.

Based on my analysis, I argue that the most crucial problem facing environmental designers is the lack of a theoretical basis to support the social commitment of their work. More specifically, I argue that phenomenology and Jungian theory, the most common bases of landscape theory, are fundamentally unsuitable as frameworks within which to make *culturally* powerful design decisions because their most basic unit is the universalized *individual*. Instead, environmental designers must work from theoretical frameworks, such as social and cultural geography, that embrace the cultural aspects of landscape, and its concomitant potential to effect the values that shape it. Only then will designers be able to create landscapes that are transformative in any serious way.

Thesis Supervisor: Kristina Hill

Title: Assistant Professor of Urban Studies and Planning

This thesis is dedicated, in no particular order, to Peter Parshall, John Goldberg-Hiller, Peter Steinberger, and Ray Kierstead.

And to everyone at Reed College--
because they understand that when you finish there should be parade.

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Introduction: The Cultural Relevance of Landscape

[O]ur physical environment is a fundamental reflection of our culture. Today's parks and gardens, or the lack thereof, and the prevailing relations between buildings and nature are perhaps the most visible reflection and symptoms of the profound ecological crisis on a global scale. Not only must we deal with the fundamental ecological issues, but we must find new aesthetic and symbolic forms for our new faith in nature and the earth.¹

– Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams –

[W]hile our goal must be the sustenance of nature, our premise is the acceptance of the obvious artifice of human design, put to work by nature or for it.²

– Diana Balmori –

Over the last thirty years, for the most part independently of each other, a small number of public artists and landscape architects have begun to tackle environmental issues in their work. Whether by incorporating natural forces such as wind or tide into their designs, 'recreating' local plant communities destroyed by human intervention, or explicitly using their work to instruct about ecological processes and issues, artists and landscape architects have attempted to transform our relationship with the natural world through design. Traditionally, these movements within landscape architecture and art have been regarded separately although they address many of the same issues and use similar ranges of design strategies. The time is ripe to let go of disciplinary divisions and consider artists and landscape architects together in order to get a clearer picture of environmental design's strengths and weaknesses, and the unique challenges it faces.

Tackling environmental issues through landscape design is not an easy task for either landscape architects or artists. Neither existing design techniques privileging form over content, nor traditional educational tactics will suffice. When designers attempt to use their work in transformative ways, they move away from both the single-mindedly aesthetic focus of much landscape design, and from the more explicitly didactic, often textual or narrative,

¹Stuart Wrede and William Howard, eds., *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (H. N. Abrams, Museum of Modern Art: New York; 1991), p.6.

²Diana Balmori, "Park Redefinitions," in Herbert Muschamp, et. al., *Once and Future Park*, (Walker Art Center: Minneapolis, MN; 1993), p.44.

methods of informing the public used in environmental education. Instead, they rely on the visual/experiential power of their designs to convey their ideas, to catch and hold people's interest. Successful environmental design seems to demand both the environmental knowledge of the landscape architect and the interpretive skills of the artist, in addition to the flexibility to discard many of both disciplines' traditional practices. In the struggle to find visual images and design experiences to transform our attitudes about, awareness of, and behavior towards the environment, these works need to be considered together.

The first question that comes to mind in considering environmental design is why landscape should be considered a potential medium for transforming *cultural* attitudes. After all, landscape design has not been a particularly politically or socially engaged discipline in recent decades. But designed landscapes are in fact uniquely suited to carry messages about the natural world for at least three reasons.

First of all, for centuries parks, one of the most common forms of designed landscape, have been designed and viewed as imitations of nature, and thus continue to shape cultural ideas of what nature is.³ Secondly, public parks are widely accessible and well-used in this country, providing designers with an audience they could never get in a museum or publication. Lastly, the designed landscape has traditionally been the site where our society negotiates the perceived boundary between nature and culture; this boundary must be redefined, perhaps even erased, in order to stop the escalating degradation of the natural environment.*

These issues are discussed at length in Herbert Muschamp's excellent edited volume, *Once and Future Park*, where discussions of the future of public parks frequently revolve around their potential to affect attitudes toward the environment. As he argues in his essay, "Looking Beyond Vision",

³Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design*, (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1982)

* In this thesis, I use "landscape" in the sense of cultural landscape; an environment shaped by humans, whether it be through agriculture or horticulture, clear-cutting or grading. "Landscape" encompasses the land contained in a freeway clover leaf as well as the gardens at Versailles. For the most part, I will be discussing the designed landscape, environments shaped by architects, landscape architects and planners. Part of my argument, however, is that the designed landscape is strongest when it pulls from the cultural landscape around it.

The issue of the environment warrants special focus...[because of] the park's traditional power to evoke imitations of nature. Many environmentalists insist that we should abandon our traditional binary distinctions between nature and culture. I believe that the urban park may provide the most readily available site for reconfiguring them.⁴

James Corner, John Dixon Hunt, and other scholars argue that historically, landscape had an even richer cultural role to play as both an embodiment and a creator of cultural values stretching far beyond human relations to the environment. Corner, for example, writes that,

Many fail to even appreciate the role that landscape architecture plays in the constitution and embodiment of culture, forgetful of the designed landscape's symbolic and revelatory powers, especially with regard to collective memory, cultural orientation, and continuity.⁵

There is some consensus that the designed landscape no longer holds such a central position in our society, that its metaphysical and meaningful content has been replaced within the design professions by an emphasis on aesthetics alone. But some landscape historians and theorists are actively promoting a return to earlier, metaphysical principles of landscape design. Corner, especially, continues to regard landscape as a potential source of contemporary social meaning. Refusing to relegate culturally relevant landscape to the past, he argues that landscape is still a repository of older meanings:

The landscape is itself a text that is open to interpretation and transformation. It is also a highly situated phenomenon in terms of space, time, and tradition and exists as both the ground and geography of our heritage and change... Landscape is not only a physical phenomenon, but it is also a cultural schema, a conceptual filter through which our relationships to wilderness and nature can be understood...It is not until we choose a prospect and map what we see, marking some aspects, ignoring others, that the landscape acquires meaning... As time passes, this marked landscape weathers, ever subject to the contingencies of nature. Other points of view are chosen as circumstances change and new ways of marking are overlaid upon the old, producing colagic and weathered overlays. Residua in this topographic palimpsest provide loci for the remembrance, renewal, and transfiguration of a culture's relationship to the land.⁶

⁴Herbert Muschamp, "Looking Beyond Vision" in Herbert Muschamp, et. al., *Once and Future Park*, (Walker Art Center: Minneapolis, MN; 1993), p.11.

⁵James Corner, "A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics," *Landscape Journal*, 10/2, (Fall 1991), p. 116.

⁶*Ibid.*, p.129.

Corner is arguing, in effect, that the context for transformative design already exists; environmental designers need to use the cultural meanings latent in the landscape to reshape our relations to the natural environment.

It is important to note that this leads to a dramatically different vision of the appropriate social role of artists and landscape architects than the image of the solitary genius. In describing environmental art in the catalogue for the 1992 exhibit *Fragile Ecologies*, Barbara Matilsky argues that environmental designers embrace this vision of the artist's instrumental involvement in society:

Through ecological artworks, artists try to mitigate environmental problems often by revitalizing an ecosystem and the human interaction with nature... Expanding upon early environmental art, these works represent a more socially oriented approach to integrating art and nature... While restoring nature and the urban environment, artists also redefine their role in society. They become social activists, physically weaving their ideas into the fabric of a community.⁷

Thus environmental designers go way past the elite audience of the gallery, attempting instead to rework widespread attitudes about the environment. The majority of the built landscape in America, after all has never been touched by designers. In his essay "The American Ideology of Space," Leo Marx argues that most of the American landscape has been created by just plain folks raised with the dominant American ideology of space (and its regulatory manifestation: zoning). Notably utilitarian, this ideology has shaped the vast majority of the design decisions that make the sprawling, decentralized American landscape what it is today.⁸ He argues that it is thus absolutely crucial to rework this dominant ideology into a form more responsive to the needs of the natural environment. As Marx puts it,

Can there be any doubt that the prevalent American ideology of space has done more to shape the natural terrain than the ideas of our most gifted architects, landscape architects, and planners? However much we may cherish the work accomplished by men like Olmsted, Sullivan, Schuyler, Wright, and Mumford, not to

⁷Barbara Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies*, (Rizzoli: New York; 1992) pp. 56-7.

⁸ Marx's essay never addresses the effects of zoning on the contemporary landscape, which are obviously quite significant. I believe it is reasonable, however, to interpret the wasteful land-use practices of Euclidean zoning as a manifestation of the progressivist view of America.

mention the achievements of all the responsible teachers, practitioners, and critics whom they inspired, the fact remains that so far as the scope of their influence on the transformation of the American terrain is concerned, all their efforts put together hardly begin to compare with the results of the countless uncoordinated individual, corporate, and governmental decisions made in accordance with the reigning progressivist ideology of space. And when, in addition, we consider the speed with which we now are degrading the global environment, the need to repudiate that anachronistic ideology becomes all the more urgent.⁹

The focus of this thesis is a critical examination of the ways in which environmental designers are trying to reconfigure that ideology. I will argue that their work is fundamentally hampered by a reliance on individual- and species-oriented theoretical frameworks that ignore the very middle ground of culture that these designers are attempting to influence.

⁹Leo Marx, "The American Ideology of Space," in Stuart Wrede and William Howard, eds., *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (H. N. Abrams, Museum of Modern Art: New York; 1991), p.77.

Chapter One: The Goals of Environmental Design

Over the last 30 years, one of the most notable qualities of environmental design has been the wide variety of forms it has taken. Given this highly disparate body of work, I think stepping outside the realm of style and examining instead the goals of environmental design is the best approach. There seem to be four main types of environmental issues that designers try to address:

1. Reconnect nature-deprived city residents to the natural environment, usually by providing a rich variety of environmental experiences, under the theory that they need to encounter nature before they will be willing to make sacrifices for it;
2. Rework our culture's limited and iconic view of nature, showing it as a fragile and ever-changing force rather than as pastoral and constant;
3. Counter widespread pessimism about environmental degradation by providing concrete examples of successful rehabilitation of polluted sites; and
4. Educate people about how the natural world functions by making ecological processes such as drainage, wind and plant succession visible.

Obviously, some of these goals will be easier to meet than others: it is a simpler task to expose people to a tidal marsh (1) than to reveal it's workings to them (4). In thinking about the future of environmental design, the question becomes which of these goals, or which combination of them, appears most relevant for transforming our relationship with the natural world. They also carry implications about the extent and direction of transformation.

The first goal, reconnecting city dwellers to the natural world – often by providing them with a variety of habitats – surfaces in many artists' work. As Kathy Halbreich writes in the introduction to *Once and Future Park*: "We need, urgently, to imagine a range of environments that enrich our cultural life and reshape our link with nature."¹ The basic point of this argument is strong if simple: city dwellers are so alienated from the natural world that it makes no sense to them to make any sacrifices for it. The boring similarity of most urban parks: a patch

¹Kathy Halbreich in Herbert Muschamp, et. al., *Once and Future Park*, (Walker Art Center: Minneapolis, MN; 1993), p.9.

of mowed lawn with some trees around the edges, isn't helping matters. They present a vision of the natural world that is neither compelling nor complicated. Some environmental designers attempt to address this by creating as many diverse kinds of eco-systems as possible. Others focus on making urban park spaces compelling to the senses. In both instances, the goal is to reestablish city dwellers' sense of connection to the natural world.

Patricia Johanson has been designing landscapes that attempt to reestablish that connection since the-late Sixties. One of her best known pieces is the *Leonhardt Lagoon* in Dallas. In addition to remediation work to stop the flow of nutrients into the lagoon, Johanson also tried to bridge the gap of ignorance and distance between visitors and the aquatic habitat of the lake. She designed a series of large sculptures loosely modeled on the roots and leaves of two of the native plants she reintroduced to the site. The sculptures stretch out into the water, forming a path system that literally connects people to the natural world around them. Which is just what Johanson wanted: "The 'sculpture' was thought of as not just aesthetic, but rather as a means of bringing people into contact with the plants and animals and the water."²

The second goal calls for reconfiguring our cultural attitudes about the natural environ-



Fig. 1 Patricia Johanson, *Leonhardt Lagoon*

²Barbara Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies*, (Rizzoli: New York; 1992) pp. 61-2.

ment from the pastoral, unthreatening and unthreatened vision of Olmsted, to a more realistic view of nature as fragile and constantly changing. Urban parks are, as Kathy Halbreich points out:

[T]he most readily available site for *reconfiguring the relationship between nature and culture*. Perhaps, rather than expressing a naive attitude toward a peaceable nature, an attitude that is more than 100 years old, parks could educate our children about the change, decay and disorder that affect the environment today.³ (Italics added)

The challenge is to redefine our culture's view of nature as for the most part safe from and for us, to a more complicated, realistic view that encompasses nature's impact on humanity and vice versa. In *Once and Future Park*, Diana Balmori describes this process of reconfiguration as one that walks in the realm of myth and cultural imagery. She argues that any new vision of nature must include both a realistic picture of nature's needs, and a deep appeal to our own spiritual needs, allowing us to sense the connections between ourselves and the natural environment:

In redefining nature we are entering the field of myth and seeking imagery that satisfies the soul by form, content, and meaning. If images can express a vision of nature that moves us and corresponds both to our present understanding of nature and to our spiritual needs, we just may have gotten our new definition right... [This new landscape will] be the place where we sense life, its brevity, fragility, mutability, and intensity, and its connectedness among all living forms.⁴

The third goal involves the symbolic value of environmental rehabilitation. Herbert Muschamp argues in *Once and Future Park* that modern people are deeply pessimistic about the state of the environment, and that this pessimism prevents them from acting on behalf of the natural world. He suggests that successful examples of rehabilitation do far more than remediate individual brownfield sites: they change people's sense of the possible, and counteract their sense of the inevitability or irreversibility of environmental degradation:

Parks can indeed be places where designers, through their actions, and, above all, interactions, begin to lift some of the bleak and paralyzing mood of pessimism

³*Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴Diana Balmori, "Park Redefinitions," in Herbert Muschamp, et. al., *Once and Future Park*, (Walker Art Center: Minneapolis, MN; 1993), p.44.

provoked by the subject of the environment... What happens in parks in the near future will have not only practical but also symbolic value, as a sign of what we can accomplish in the building of an emerging global culture.⁵

Opportunities for highly visible remediation projects are common these days as increasing numbers of degraded sites become available for public use, from capped landfills to former military bases. Rehabilitation of polluted sites is not necessarily an environmentally sound idea, however. Some designers have expressed discomfort with the idea of working on brownfield sites, especially when remediation is not part of the program, because they feel it sweeps the problem of industrial pollution under an aesthetic carpet.

One of the best known projects which engaged artists to spruce up damaged sites happened in King County, Washington in the late Seventies. The county invited six artists to design projects specific to brown-field sites around Seattle and its suburbs. In the end, two of the proposals were actually built: Robert Morris' reclaimed gravel pit, and Herbert Bayer's lovely earthworks and flood control project along Mill Creek Canyon. While accepting the

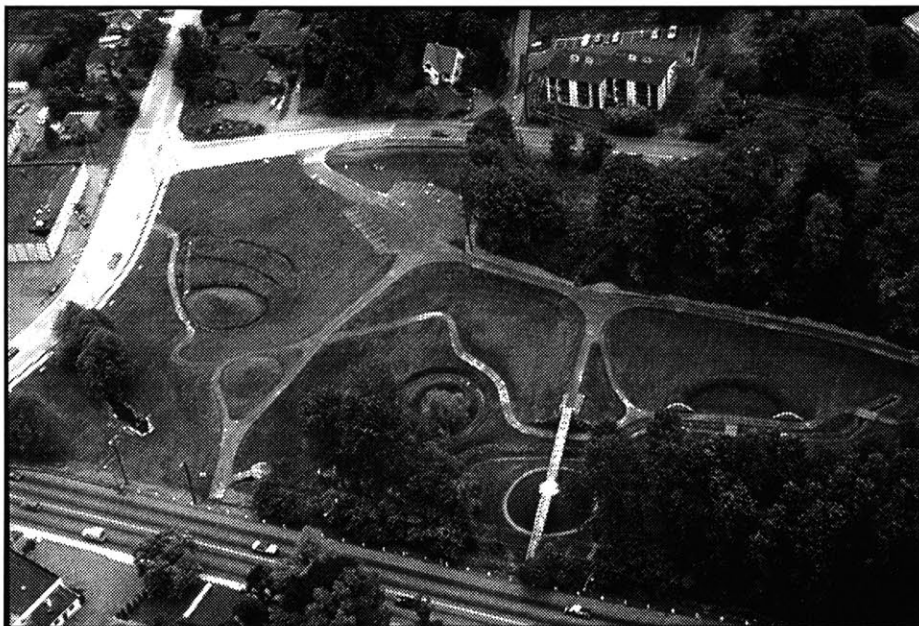


Fig. 2 Herbert Bayer, Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks

commission, Morris pointed out that this kind of design raises serious ethical issues in its focus on prettying up rather than cleaning up. At the conference at which his design was unveiled,

⁵Herbert Muschamp, "Looking Beyond Vision," in Herbert Muschamp, et. al., *Once and Future Park*, (Walker Art Center: Minneapolis, MN; 1993), p.14.

Morris said, I think correctly, that:

The most significant implication of art as land reclamation is that art can and should be used to wipe away technological guilt. Do those sites scarred by mining or poisoned by chemicals now seem less like the entropic liabilities of ravenous and short-sighted industry and more like long-awaited aesthetic possibilities? Will it be a little easier in the future to rip up the landscape for one last shovelfull of non-renewable energy source if an artist can be found (cheap, mind you) to transform the devastation into an inspiring and modern work of art? Or anyway, into a fun place to be? Well, at the very least, into a tidy, mugger-free park?⁶

Seattle continued with the program, but the problem Morris outlined continues to haunt them even today with Gas Works Park, where there is ongoing litigation between the EPA and the City over the contamination of the site. Rehabilitation of polluted sites is clearly a necessity, both to prevent further contamination off-site and because many of them sit on land, such as riverfronts, which would otherwise be very valuable. Just as clearly, however, remediation must be a major part of the program; simply shaping these sites into aesthetically appealing parks is not enough.

The last proposed goal for environmental design is revealing environmental processes, both by incorporating natural forces such as wind or tide into designs, and by arranging natural elements such as wetlands in such a way that their functions are made visible. Buster Simpson's *Nurse Log* is a clear if somewhat limited example. Simpson educates about plant succession and the dangers of clear-cutting through a demonstration of the role of nurse logs:

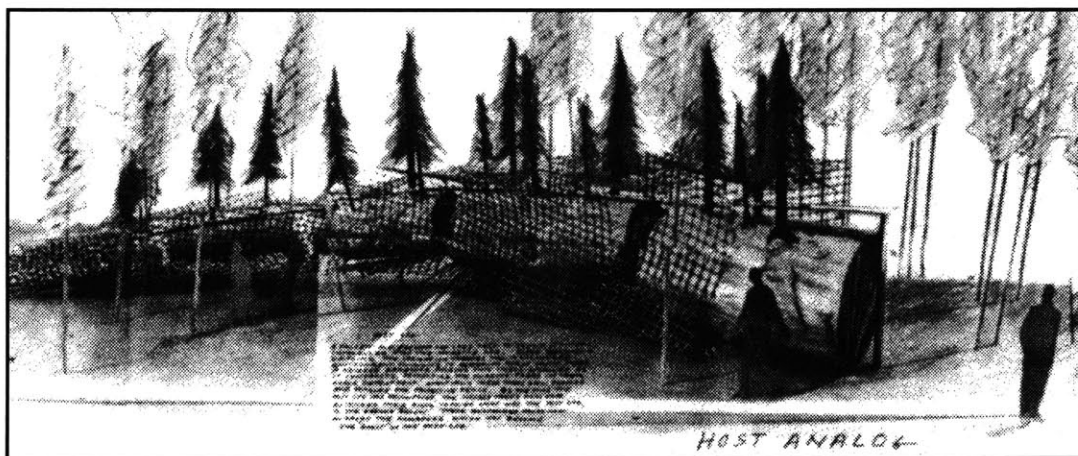


Fig. 3 Buster Simpson, *Nurse Log*

⁶Robert Morris cited by Barbara Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies*, (Rizzoli: New York; 1992) , p.47.

fallen trees that form homes for new seedlings. He placed a gigantic nurse log, complete with foot high seedlings, in front of the convention center in Portland, Oregon where it continues to slowly decay as the seedlings mature.

It is possible to take this a step further, however. One of the most exciting potentials of environmental design lies in making the *connectedness* of ecological systems visible: making it clear that the environment of a site does not stand alone, but is dependent on larger environmental conditions around it. This could help people to understand, for example, why fragments of 'nature' preserved in development's left over spaces do not necessarily provide viable habitat for plant or animal communities. Far too many designers use natural elements in isolated chunks. They look only at the conditions of a site itself, rather than its context as part of larger systems.⁷ This ecological naiveté is a serious issue in environmental design, as well-meaning artists and landscape architects subvert the very cause they are attempting to uphold.

I have presented these four goals individually both for greater clarity and because that is how many designers view them. I think, though, that it is only when considered together that they make a complete picture. Environmental design, in order to be transformative, needs to do some combination of the four: to (1) reconnect people to nature, and (2) reveal nature's vulnerability to human intervention, while (3) counteracting pessimism about environmental degradation through successful remediation projects, and (4) educating about ecological processes so that people can put their new awareness of the natural world to constructive use. I do not believe that any of these goal, on their ow, is enough to catalyze serious change in our attitudes toward the natural world. Counteracting pessimism about the environment does not help people learn how to change their destructive behavior in response to new hope; teaching

⁷ In "Looking Beyond Vision," Muschamp describes the environmental naiveté, typical of many designers, in a graduate architecture studio's attempt to incorporate ecological concerns into a development project in Manhattan by restoring the water's edge to a salt marsh:

To designate a strip along the Hudson River shoreline as a salt marsh, however, does not mean that the design is more ecologically sophisticated than a proposal to construct a concrete seawall.... A park is at once a system of related parts and a part of other systems that lie largely outside its boundaries. We cannot truly assess the introduction of, say, a salt marsh, without adequate information about these relationships.

people about the way the environment functions does not necessarily motivate them to change their behavior unless they can see that humans are having devastating impacts on the environment, and feel connected enough to the natural world to care about those impacts. Environmental designers must address these goals in concert.

In order to look at how these goals interact in actual landscape designs, I will examine four projects in greater depth in the next chapter: George Hargreaves Byxbee Park, William Wenk's Shop Creek Park, Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village*, and Andy Goldsworthy's *A Collaboration with Nature*. Ranging from the abstract to the literal, sometimes within a single composition, these four examples represent a broad range of goals and design techniques. To compare them, I use the analytical framework Elizabeth Meyer developed in her 1991 article, "The Public Park as Avante-Garde (Landscape) Architecture: A Comparative Interpretation of Two Parisian Parks, Parc de la Villette (1983-1990) and Parc des Buttes-Chaumont (1864-1867)."

The Public Park as Avante-Garde (Landscape) Architecture

In this article, Meyer uses a comparison with the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont to reveal Bernard Tschumi's ignorance of the landscape history he claimed to have subverted in Parc de la Villette, and to highlight the sterile landscape he created when he refused to acknowledge the natural and cultural history of his site. Meyer argues that La Villette's design says, "nothing about the site's specifics;...[it is] a neutral, universal idea, a diagram looking for a site."⁸ To create a fertile paradigm for landscape design in the future, she argues, we must give serious consideration to the expressive power of landscape rather than using it as a *tabula rasa* for preconceived design ideas.

Tschumi's design for La Villette is self-consciously avante-garde, rejecting what he sees as the stultifying characteristics of modern landscape architecture for the non-hierarchical and

⁸ Elizabeth Meyer, "The Public Park as Avante-Garde (Landscape) Architecture: A Comparative Interpretation of Two Parisian Parks, Parc de la Villette (1983-1990) and Parc des Buttes Chaumont (1864-1867)." *Landscape Journal* 10/1 (Spring 1991) p.24.

fragmented design strategies of post-modern architecture. He bases his design on randomly overlaid systems of points, lines, and surfaces, spurning, in some sense, the whole idea of composition. As Meyer describes it, Tschumi's

park form is derived not from a compositional strategy wherein all parts are subservient and reinforce the whole, but from a strategy of superimposition that cannot predict the relationships of the parts to the whole. Fragments replace parts. The three systems of organization – the folies denoting *points* on a 120-meter grid, the covered promenades and 'cinematic landscapes' represent *lines* of circulation, and the expansive *surfaces* of 'programmed' and 'leftover' space – are independent of one another.⁹

In the same way that Tschumi's design rejects what he sees as traditional landscape design, he also rejects the view of parks as oases of nature in the urban fabric, emphasizing the architectural framework of the folies instead. Meyer writes that, "In essence, Tschumi's model rejects the normative park's relationship to the city (one of opposition), its base (nature), and its method of creation (composition)."¹⁰

Meyer uses a comparison with Alphand's Nineteenth-century Parc des Buttes Chaumont to make two points about the supposedly avante-garde design for La Villette: that it's been done before, and that it's possible to do it better. She argues first that Tschumi's design is not, in fact, new or avante-garde within the context of landscape architecture, and second, that it is possible to use the same non-hierarchical techniques and embed them in the natural and cultural context of the site, thereby designing a far better and richer park.

Meyer carefully analyzes Alphand's compositional techniques, showing how they parallel La Villette down to the non-hierarchical superimposition of points, lines and surfaces. She then argues that Alphand's design contains a fourth system in addition to Tschumi's: the site's natural and cultural history.¹¹ Meyer cites one example of this fourth 'system', the Temple of the Sibyl on an island at the approach to a huge limestone cavern. She argues that this is a reference to "Aeneas' structure honoring Sibyl, who led that traveler safely out of the Underworld," and an embodiment of "the collective memory of past political terror in Paris."¹²

⁹*Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁰*Op.Cit.*

¹¹*Ibid.*, p.20.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp.20-1.

This implies that the fourth system of cultural and natural history is its own separate layer, to be overlaid along with the other three systems. But it is hard to be sure if this is what she means, especially given the fourth system's lack of parallels with points, lines, and surfaces, purely physical aspects of design. Is Meyer suggesting that we simply add a historical layer to the design, looking at points, lines and surfaces at two different moments in time? Or does the fact that she includes culture as well as nature in the fourth 'system' suggest that she also means to include events from outside the site?

I would suggest a third reading. To my eyes, the Temple clearly fits into Meyer's definition of a *point*, albeit a point with an iconographic and historic layer of meaning. In fact, Meyer describes all of the points, lines and surfaces of Alphant's park in terms of their cultural and natural contexts. Thus I would argue that Meyer uses the fourth 'system' in a different way than she says she does, layering it in throughout her analysis of the other three systems rather than making it a system on its own. The fourth 'system', rather than being an independent layer of a design, is a way of overlaying different kinds of meaning into the formerly entirely aesthetic forms of the first three systems.

Meyer implies this clearly later in the article when she discusses the differences between the ways Tschumi and Alphant use the three systems. She argues that the main weakness of the former's design is the abstraction and lack of context that result from his refusal to incorporate natural and cultural history into the points, lines and surfaces:

The specific locations in the park plan where Tschumi's three systems coincide may present unexpected relations, [and] powerful juxtapositions ...But the formal development of that superimposition is a hermetic, abstract act devoid of the sort of chance that could occur when cultural intentions and natural systems coincide. When the circuitous systems of lines intersects the existing geology of Buttes-Chaumont, numerous unexpected chance encounters result: land-bound walks transform into suspension bridges, tree-lined views precede spectacular urban panoramas... At Buttes-Chaumont, superimpositions and juxtapositions are not merely a strategy for a designer's personal self-expression. Instead, they say something about the relationships between an art work and a site. The specific place of superimposition is a meaningful fragment of the park's identity.¹³

¹³*Ibid.*, p.24.

Meyer goes on to suggest that this revamped version of Tschumi's systems could form the basis for the future of landscape design. If we accept Meyer's proposal, we are immediately faced with a new problem: how to render that history legible to an audience. How does a designer make a park 'readable', and readable for whom? Looking at Buttes-Chaumont, for example, it seems highly unlikely that the Temple of the Sibyl is readable to any but a handful of its modern visitors. Unschooled in epic poetry, they are unlikely to connect Alphond's Temple to Aeneas', much less to the political violence that characterized urban life in Paris for the century before the construction of the park. But were those meanings legible to a late 19th-century audience? It is, of course, impossible to know, but it is at least more likely given that the *Aeniad* was still standard reading, and the stories of high culture far more widely known throughout society.¹⁴

The question is, what is the modern equivalent of the *Aeniad*? What cultural references could a designer build into a landscape today and expect to be readable? Turning back to environmental design, how would a designer make environmental information and processes readable not just to the eye of environmental professionals, but to the lay person, since that is the intended audience for transformative design?

There are several ways to approach this issue, to justify claims for the readability of a design. Theorists influenced by phenomenology claim universal legibility for the sensory aspects of design, its physically perceptible qualities, predicated on the idea that perceptual structures are similar species-wide. This focus on physiology is problematic because it ignores any potential cultural influences on perception, and also because it reduces the potential content of design down to its sensual, unreflective aspects rather than allowing for any more complicated meanings with cultural resonances. Theorists influenced by Jungian theory argue that designs are legible insofar as they tap into the universal structures of humanity's collective unconscious: archetypes. While this too grants landscape design an automatic shot at legibility,

¹⁴See for example, Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in the History of American Civilization*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA; 1988).

like phenomenology, it completely pares away the culturally-specific aspects of interpretation; the legibility Jungian theory guarantees revolves around a purely formal vocabulary of shapes and patterns.

Lastly, there are arguments within landscape history for legibility because of common cultural reference points. Common culture leads to the possibility of commonly understood symbolism. One of the most thoughtful explorations of this cultural position is by philosopher Nelson Goodman in his essay, "How Buildings Mean."^{*} Goodman lays out potential layers of cultural meaning, ranging from "denotation", such as the painstakingly detailed "realistic" still lifes of Dutch Baroque painting; to "literal exemplification", when a design evokes certain qualities or properties it possesses already but in less obvious ways; to "expression" of more intricate, metaphoric meanings, such as when a design evokes an earlier tradition as much for its cultural associations as for its aesthetics.¹⁵ The legibility of a design for Goodman, then, is dependent on a shared cultural framework that allows me to see architectural forms reminiscent of an Athenian temple, for example, and associate them with democracy. Without that shared context, those forms would not be meaningful to me.

While I believe that cultural context is fundamental, arguments for legibility through common cultural associations run into difficulties in our multi-cultural society. Phenomenology and Jungian theory are thus far more common in landscape design today, despite the implicit limitations their physiological and psychological arguments for legibility place on the potential meaningful content of design. It is thus worth the time for a brief exploration of their positions, before I explore them in depth in Chapter Three.

Phenomenological and Jungian theory both reject cultural explanations for the meaning of the individual's experience of a design, but they have very different beliefs about what the fundamental form of that experience is. For phenomenologists the key is an individual's sensory experience of the world, her pre-reflective perception of, and engagement with, the world around her. For Jungians, the key lies within the psyche rather than in the physiological

^{*} Although Goodman is discussing architecture, I find his argument extends easily to landscape.

¹⁵Nelson Goodman, *Reconceptions in Philosophy*, (Hackett Publishing: Indianapolis, IN; 1988).

act of perception. An individual's experience of a design would almost be better characterized as a re-experience as she sees shapes and patterns that reference species-wide, unconscious memories. Both are, in effect, arguing for similar mental structures in all humans: individuals can be expected to perceive or react to a landscape in the same ways that other human beings will.

Despite this structural communality, these theories have quite different design implications. Jungian theory's emphasis on received patterns in the psyche focuses designers on shape and form, while phenomenology's emphasis on *a priori* perception focuses designers on the sensory engagement of the site. But while their implications for design may be different, their common focus on the shared structures of physiology and psychology leads environmental designers to similarly ineffective conclusions, as I will try to show in the next chapter. All four of the projects I address are provocative pieces of environmental design, but none of them, in the end, have anything approaching the transformative impact their designers hoped for, at least in part due to the phenomenological and Jungian frameworks they rely on. In order to transform people's attitudes towards the environment, I believe environmental designers must address the culture from which those attitudes arise.

Chapter Two: Focusing on the Individual

I will now use Elizabeth Meyer's analytical framework of points, lines, and surfaces to focus in more depth on specific projects by four designers: two landscape architects, George Hargreaves and William Wenk, and two artists, Andy Goldsworthy and Alan Sonfist. Byxbee Park, Shop Creek Park, *A Collaboration with Nature*, and *Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village* are interesting examples of productive directions for environmental design to move in the future. They also provide insight into some of the major blind spots hindering environmental design as it has evolved to date, most importantly, I will argue, its crippling reliance on phenomenology and Jungian theory, both of which discourage culturally-oriented design.

Byxbee Park – Hargreaves Associates. Palo Alto, California. 1988-1992

George Hargreaves has been practicing in the San Francisco Bay Area since the late Seventies, producing work notable for its sculptural power, intellectual interest, and site specificity. Attention to the physical, earth-shaping aspects of landscape architecture, thought-provoking abstraction and symbolism, and a strong emphasis on environmental processes local to his sites, such as wind and tide, have become Hargreaves' trademarks.

In graduate school at Harvard, he was inspired by Robert Smithson's insistence on designing for the character of individual sites, and willingness to portray natural forces such as impermanence, decay and disorder ordinarily absent from the pastoral and seemingly changeless designs prevalent in landscape architecture at the time. As Hargreaves described it later, "No matter how much site analysis was done, built works of landscape architecture fell into a few easily defined categories," all heavily reliant on preconceived design strategies rather than careful readings of the particularities of a site.¹ Smithson's emphases on site specificity, entropy, and working with degraded landscapes became core pieces of Hargreaves design phi-

¹ John Beardsley, "Entropy and the New Landscape," *Process: Architecture: Hargreaves: Landscape Works* 128 (January 1996) : 14.

osophy and practice.

Another early inspiration came from minimalist art, with its spare forms and phenomenologically-based emphasis on heightening the individual's experience of the material world.² A last, less-publicized source of inspiration seems to be a belief in the power of symbols, an implicit reliance on Jungian archetypes to justify some design choices.³ The combination of these influences has been fertile ground for Hargreaves, inspiring designs replete with abstract symbolism and nuanced attention, almost deference, to the often degraded environment of the specific site.

Hargreaves relies on abstraction to reveal natural processes, or to build meaning into designs, as he puts it. Most often, he uses disjuncture or oddness of form to provoke the visitor to search for conjunctions in meaning, natural or cultural. According to one of his employees, Steve Hanson, Hargreaves is

adamant that meaning should read through at some level. To this end, unusual or even uncomfortable juxtapositions are not shunned... [D]esign which disappears because it fits too well within conventions of balance and composition is generally rejected in favor of forms and juxtapositions which make their presence known by their disfit: self-conscious forms which imply that they have something to say, some reason for deviating from convention – and they do. It is obvious to visitors of these places that they are man-made; that the shape of the land, and the various objects placed upon it are intentional. It is precisely the oddness of certain forms and relationships which make people ask why: why is this place here, and why does it look the way it does.⁴

By focusing on the *conceptual* coherence of a design rather than its *compositional* coherence, Hargreaves provokes people to find explanations for the fragments, to create personal meanings as they analyze the design for themselves. His overarching goal is to find ways to open up the site for the visitor, but in oblique and symbolic ways which cause her to reach out to understand and experience it, "to perceive in ...[it] things that are usually over-looked, to have, in fact, an encounter with the *real*."⁶ It is in this intent to heighten the individual's experience of the world that

²*Ibid.*, p.15.

³Hiroki Hasegawa, "Beyond the Site," *Process: Architecture: Hargreaves: Landscape Works* 128 (January 1996), p. 5.

⁴Steve Hanson, "Editor's Note," *Process: Architecture: Hargreaves: Landscape Works* 128 (January 1996) : 4.

⁶Hiroki Hasegawa, "Beyond the Site," *Process: Architecture: Hargreaves: Landscape Works* 128 (January 1996) p.6.

Hargreaves' phenomenological leanings come out.

At his best, George Hargreaves designs striking, almost mysterious places. Places that require thought and attention. Places that attempt to incorporate environmental and cultural meaning. But for Hargreaves, successfully grasping the meaning of a design is an individual, intellectual process. He downplays shared meanings in favor of coldly abstract puzzles. As I will argue in the discussion of Byxbee Park that follows, the success of Hargreaves' work is in the revelation of environmental processes specific to a site; despite persistent attempts, his references to cultural and shared meanings, the meanings that define a culture rather than an individual's experience, are still too oblique to be legible.

Byxbee Park

Byxbee Park is on a 30 acre site, almost two-thirds of the way down the San Francisco Bay's southern arm. The site was a dump for Palo Alto, one of the longest-established and most affluent of the communities on the Peninsula. Byxbee lies in a sort of no-man's land, cut-off from Palo Alto by the 101 Freeway, eight lanes of some of the most heavily traveled asphalt in the Bay Area. For most of this century, the strip of land between the freeway and the Bay held little development. The almost absurdly over-sized balloon hangers at Moffitt Field, an air force base, were the notable exception to this. Until recently, there was the dump, the tiny Palo Alto airport, and the run-down municipal golf-course, the only three turns off a street that dead-ends in the verdant green of the salt marshes.

The booming computer industry, however, has made undeveloped land in Palo Alto very valuable, and the City has been gathering its wayward edges back into the fold. In the last decade, there has been serious office park development just off the freeway. The land-fill was capped, and now even the municipal golf-course is being restored.⁷ Byxbee Park is part of Palo Alto's effort to reconnect to the water, and to provide a variety of recreational spaces for its residents.

⁷By Amphion Environmental, in Oakland, CA.

points

Rather than create a pastoral park without reference to the industrial landscape of the South Bay, Hargreaves chose to link his design to the built systems of the area as well as the natural ones. Byxbee Park is in no sense haven or sanctuary: its most striking features reference the man-made landscape. Walking out of the parking lot and restroom area, the first thing a visitor to Byxbee sees is a row of concrete chevrons marching down the hill toward the water, marking the flight path for the runway at the Palo Alto Airport. Single-engine planes fly over Byxbee with some regularity: the chevrons marking their path incorporate them into the design, making them a celebrated rather than intrusive element.

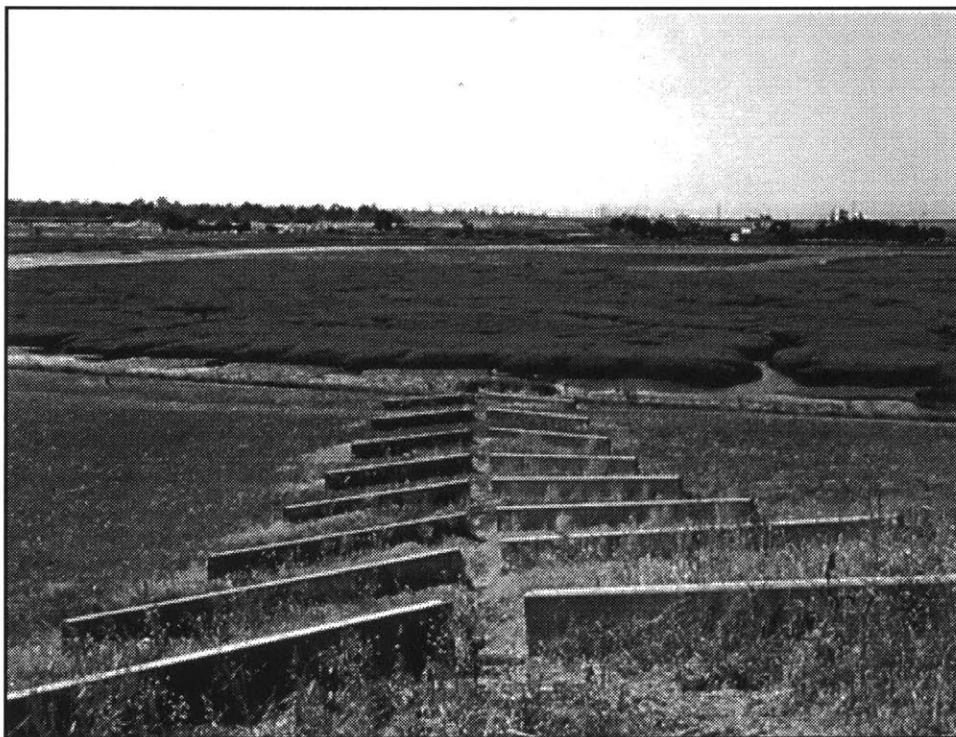


Fig. 4 George Hargreaves, Chevrons at Byxbee Park

Perhaps the most visually spectacular point in the park, the pole field, reaches out to the line of enormous electrical towers marching across the Bay just north of the site. Two wings of poles set at roughly 60 degrees to each other come together in a wedge at the western-most tip of the park, pointing toward the towers. The poles' heights and spacing are set to inscribe a

tilted plane coming out of the hill and up toward the water, an interestingly geometric contrast to the rounded forms of the hills. The plane is only visible from above on the hill, or near the tip of the wedge; walking alongside, the poles create interesting visual illusions of depth or collapsing space because of irregular spacing in what seem to be regular rows. As with the chevrons, in some strangely symbolic way, they incorporate the hulking electrical towers into the Park. The most jarring reference to the man-made landscape is the unadorned, unintegrated form of the methane burner, roaring away noisily as it vents the landfill, alongside the only path that leads up to the summit of the hills from the south side of the park.

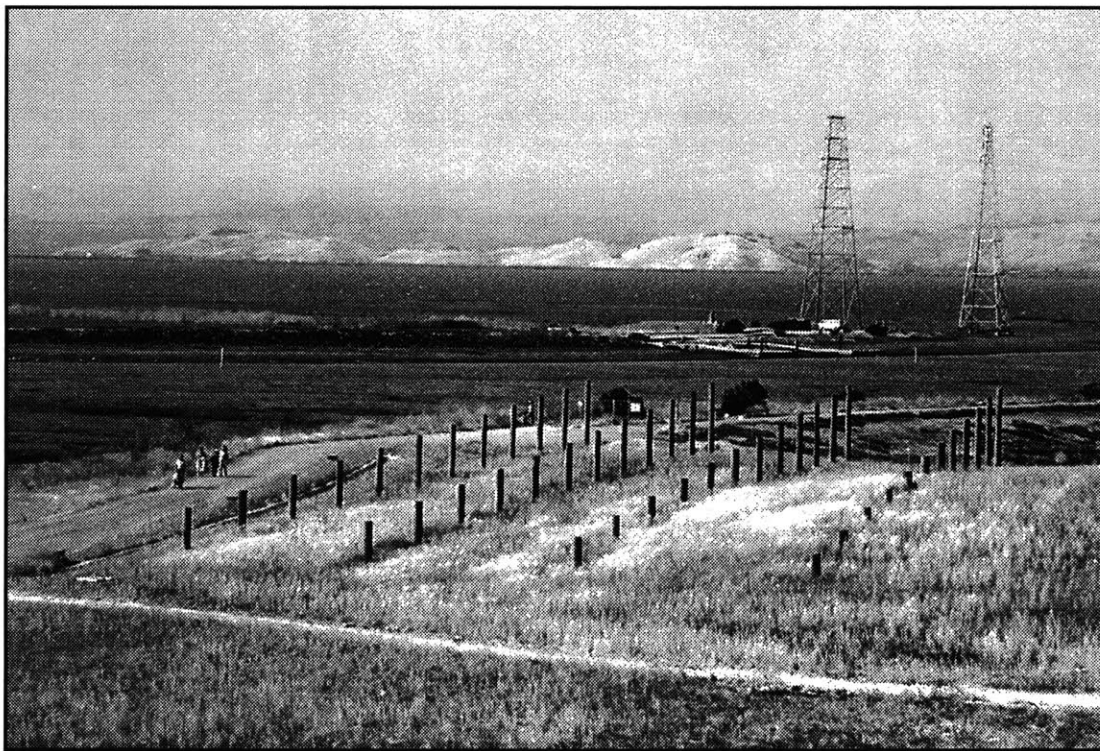


Fig. 5 George Hargreaves, Pole Field and Electrical Towers, Byxbee Park

There are also points in Byxbee Park that reference the natural environment. The land gate, for example, is a 'v' shaped notch along the ridge line, reminiscent of Michael Heizer's "Double Negative," that marks the transition from the windward to the leeward side of the park. There are also low wooden bird-watching platforms along the southern edge of the park, forming sheltered bridges for visitors between the land and the marsh.



Fig. 6 George Hargreaves, Windgate and Weirs, Byxbee Park

lines

The lines of the park are the two main paths that circumscribe and then bisect it. The edge path arcs from the parking lot east, past the chevrons and the pole-field, and then turns sharply back southwest, until the path ends at the property line, constantly skirting the edge of the marshes. To return to the lot, you either have to take one of the secondary paths up to the spine of the park (the cross-paths), or retrace your steps around the perimeter.

The spine path provides carefully selected views as the visitor moves from encompassing groups of small hillocks, which cover the tops of the three hills and block the view of everything except the earth and sky, to more panoramic views where the cross paths meet the spine path at one of the two 'passes' between the hills. At these crossroads, there are spectacular views of Moffitt Field, the Dumbarton Bridge, the electrical towers, and the beautiful rolling hills on either side of the Bay. Lying alone up on the hills, the spine path never meets the edge path below: its ends simply reach the edge of their respective hills and stop. The path system is thus a series of discontinuous lines and views rather than a continuous system of circulation. Each dead end or shift in range of vision challenges visitors to explain it. In at least one case,

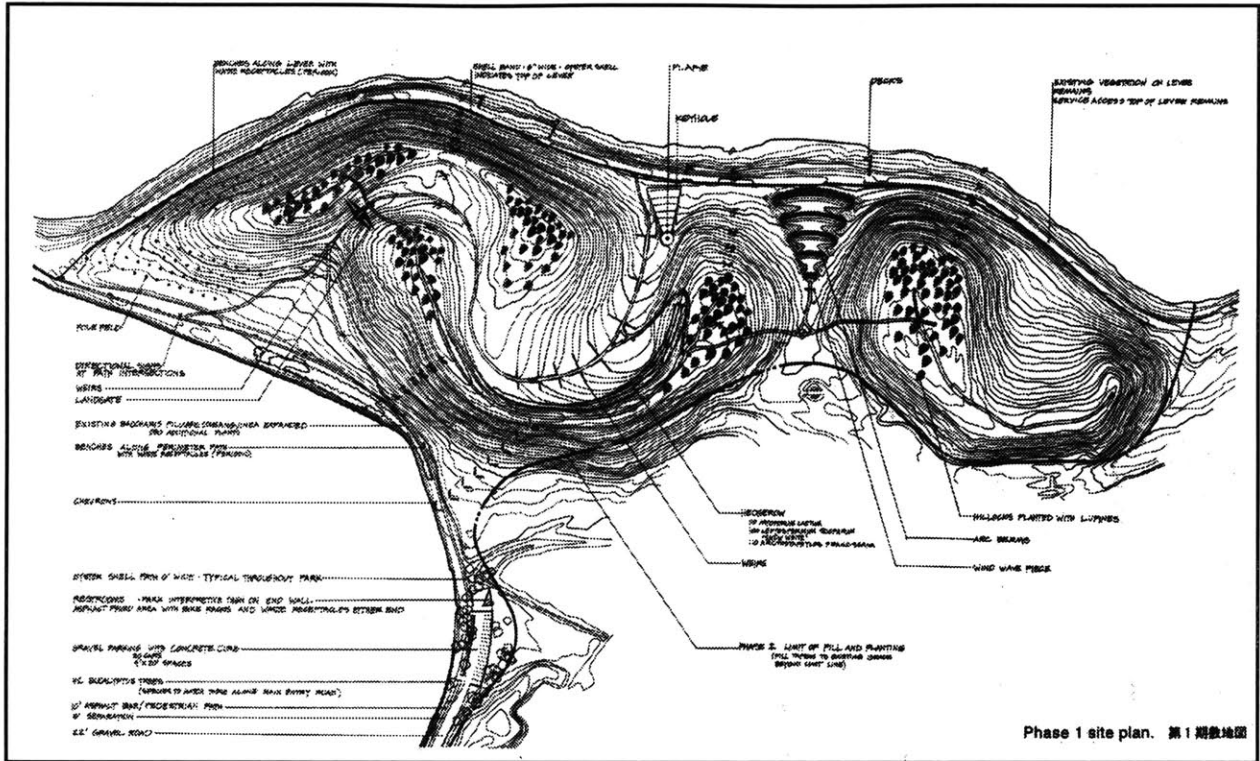


Fig. 7 George Hargreaves, Plan of Byxbee Park

they've refused to bother: the west end of the spine path used to stop directly above the pole field, providing one of the most dramatic view-points in the park. Now it continues down to the edge path in a well-worn foot path through the native grasses.

surface

The main *surface* of the park consists of three large, kidney-shaped, contiguous hills. Amidst the notably flat land immediately adjacent to the Bay, Byxbee's hills jut out of nowhere, an easy clue to their origins in a land fill. Though obviously artificial, their forms echo the much larger rolling hills that frame the Bay to the east and west. On each of the hills is a grouping of hillocks 2-3 feet high which break their silhouette. Their slightly jarring presence, popping up from the tops of the hills is intended to reference the shell mounds of the Ohlone Indians, a Native-American tribe who used to gather shellfish in the marshes centuries ago. Hargreaves also views the hillocks as having a more archetypal resonance as symbols of the primitive in contrast with the industrial landscape surrounding them.



Fig. 8 George Hargreaves, Hillocks at Byxbee Park

The weirs provide another break in the smooth curves of the hills, creating an almost terraced effect where they run perpendicular to two of the cross-paths. The weirs prevent erosion by collecting water and silt from run-off, and in the process become havens for the water-sensitive plants which can find no other place to root in the park. This further marks the weirs' presence as bands of green across the golden hillsides. The subtle but constant disruption of the surfaces of the hills gives a sense of discontinuity, of predicted shapes interrupted which need to be explained.

Despite the wonderful degree of incorporation of both the natural and cultural landscape, Byxbee Park seems a bit sterile. This is especially noticeable in the latter case. While Hargreaves' has made a clear effort to refer to the built form of the Bay, he does so in an entirely aesthetic rather than cultural way. It is almost as though he wants us to look at the tremendous human impacts of bridge, airport, and electrical towers with an eye to their aesthetics rather than their destructive environmental impacts. This same lack of critical comment is visible in his treatment of the natural world as well. He highlights forces in the natural world, such as wind and tide, without ever touching on human impacts upon them.

I believe this arises from Hargreaves' emphasis on making visitors *conscious* of the world around them, rather than explaining it or questioning the relations that shaped it. John Beardsley claims that Hargreaves' pattern of siting his work on degraded land forces us to acknowledge our impacts. I think, though, that while expecting visitors to understand forces of nature based on the 'disfit' of forms is a stretch, expecting them to grasp a moral argument for change on the basis of the disjunction between the former degraded state of the land and its designed form is pushing it too far. The methane burner with its intrusive industrial ugliness and noise pollution is indeed a strong reminder of the garbage underfoot, but I am not sure that it translates into a critique of the behavior that put it there. Robert Morris' point about the King County arts program comes to mind: proving we can 'pretty up' a degraded site does not change the careless attitudes that produced it; it may even support them. Hargreaves' parks may reawaken awareness of the world around us, but their rhetorical emphasis on changing cultural attitudes and behavior is too faint to be heard.

Shop Creek Park – William Wenk

William Wenk's urban stream work is clustered in and around Denver, Colorado. Denver has a semi-arid climate and an average rainfall of 15 inches a year, so the problem of flooding has only arisen in the last few decades as the population has exploded, bringing with it substantial urban development. As Michele Strutin puts it in a recent article in *Landscape Architecture*,

Before Denver unfurled across the high prairie, occasional streams cut thin channels through waves of bunch grass and little bluestem. Now, runoff from suburban lawns matched with violent thunderstorms creates flash floods. To avoid devastating torrents, water must be carefully sculpted across the civic landscape.⁸

Most of Wenk's work is in recently-developed suburbs, where increasing amounts of runoff due to exponential increases in impervious surface have wreaked havoc on existing stream channels, leading to severe erosion and sedimentation problems.⁹ The damage to watercourses, in

⁸Michelle Strutin, "Two Parks that Quiet the Storm," *Landscape Architecture*, 81/10 (Oct. 1991), p.84.

⁹William Wenk, "Drainage Parks," *Quaderns D'Arquitectura i Urbanisme*, no.196 (Sep.-Oct. 1992) p.64.

turn, affects the development that caused it: if precautions aren't taken, buildings near the disintegrating creekbeds are subject to flood damage as well.

The typical way of handling this cycle in the US in the past was through channelization: constructing trapezoidal concrete channels to control flood waters. No muss, no fuss, and channels require minimal amounts of land, allowing maximum room for development. The catch is that the stream, and the plant and wildlife communities it supports, are destroyed.

Wenk writes that,

What is lost [in channelization], however, is the opportunity to develop the waterways as open space amenities for the community, and the ecological diversity and natural values of the stream corridors... [L]ess commonplace engineering of the channels allows a much broader range of opportunities for recreation, wildlife habitat, and flood control to occur.¹⁰

Wenk has carved out a special territory for himself where engineering, recreational needs, and habitat restoration meet. In his urban stream projects, Wenk uses innovative engineering techniques to restore riparian habitat and provide trails and open space for nature-starved suburbanites. Wenk's techniques include the insertion of innovatively shaped drop structures to tame flood water; the excavation of new lowland park areas to function as temporary water storage during flood events; and the placement of sloping grassy swales at the end of suburban cul-de-sacs to filter run-off before it enters the streams, at the same time providing community picnic and playing fields. All of his techniques seem to serve dual purposes: for example, making pedestrian crossings over a stream extra wide in one project allowed him not to install railings, which collect trash during flooding. It also made the bridges wide enough to allow multiple uses: people can sit on the edges and look at the water without impeding bicycle traffic. His consistent emphasis on incorporating human recreational needs into his stream restoration projects seems to have won his park designs a great deal of community support.

Wenk's design philosophy seems in many ways similar to Alan Sonfist's, discussed

¹⁰Ibid., p.65.

below. Wenk emphasizes re-introducing nature to urban contexts as a major goal. He also seems to see his role less as a designer a la Hargreaves, creating parks that are instantly recognizable as art, but instead as more of an interpreter for nature, attempting to recreate natural environments destroyed by human interventions through technical artifice. His parks feel like natural high-prairie wetlands, which is exactly the impression that he wanted to create. As Wenk puts it, "Our projects are most successful when you can't tell anything's been done there. You bury your ego."¹¹

Shop Creek Park, 1989

Authorities finally acknowledged that there was a problem with Shop Creek when the phosphorous it carried began creating algal blooms in Cherry Creek Reservoir, killing fish and spoiling the water for boaters and swimmers. By that time the creek had already severely eroded its high prairie bed, creating a 'lifeless canyon'.¹² Wenk designed a park that filters more than half of the phosphorous from the Creek, and creates wetlands that, "look as though



Fig. 9 William Wenk, Shop Creek Canyon Before

¹¹Michelle Strutin, "Away from the Hard Edge," *Landscape Architecture*, 81/1 (Jan. 1991), p.50.

¹²Michelle Strutin, "Two Parks that Quiet the Storm," *Landscape Architecture*, 81/10 (Oct. 1991), p.87.

they have hosted birds and fish for centuries."¹³ In awarding the Shop Creek Restoration a Design Merit Award in 1995, the ASLA jury wrote that:

The completed project has been recognized as a model of self-sustaining stream restoration that uses indigenous forms and material, celebrates the processes of stream erosion and ecological succession, and provides the framework for a diverse ecology that is compatible with recreational uses in the adjacent state park.¹⁴

lines

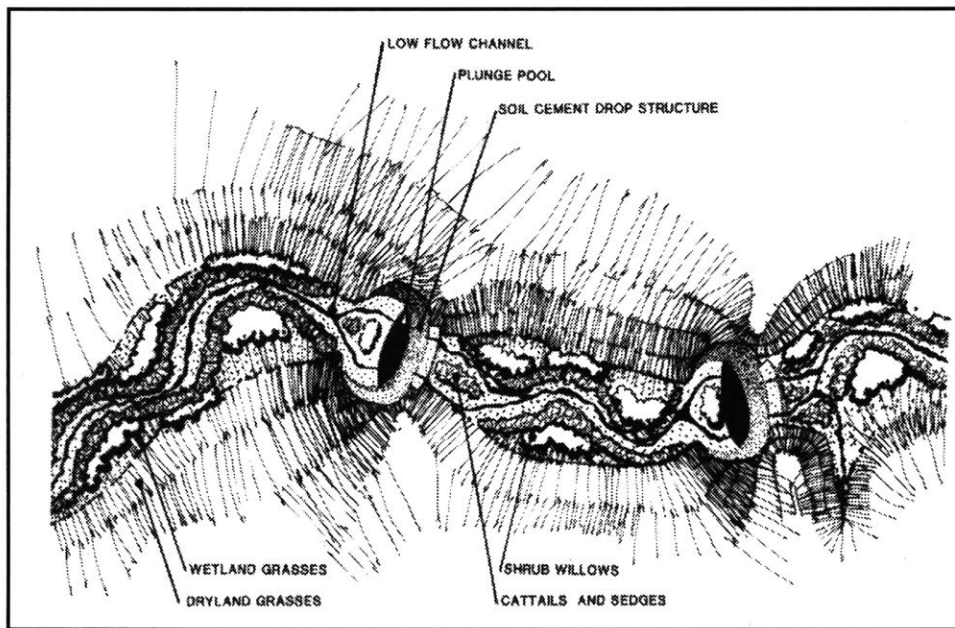


Fig. 10 William Wenk, *Plan for Shop Creek Park*

There are two sets of lines in this design: human and riparian. Trails running parallel to the stream, and at one point crossing it, form one set of lines through the landscape, allowing people close-up looks at Shop Creek and its accompanying wetlands without bringing them close enough to seriously disturb the habitat. The second line is the path of Shop Creek itself as it meanders through the landscape. Wenk's design follows the original path of the creek to minimize disruption of the prairie,¹⁵ providing a naturalistic counterpoint to the organic curves of Wenk's trails.

¹³Op.Cit.

¹⁴"1995 ASLA Awards," *Landscape Architecture*, 85/10 (Nov. 1995), p.50.

¹⁵Op.Cit.

surfaces



Fig. 11 William Wenk, Shop Creek Park

There are several kinds of surfaces in Shop Creek Park. The first is the high prairie through which the creek cuts, the human level, in some sense. Next is the extensive wetlands that lie between the drop structures on the creek, the realm of native plants and wildlife. Finally, there are the drop structures themselves. These stair-stepping, crescent shaped structures made of on-site soil and concrete provide a rugged, sloping counterpart to the wetlands below them and the rolling prairie above. The ASLA jury describes all three of these surfaces as self-sustaining, creating, “a wide-ranging wetland, riparian, and upland ecology.”¹⁶

points

While clearly forming a major part of the surface of Shop Creek Park, the crescent-shaped drop structures are just as clearly the points, the discreet events, in Wenk’s design as

¹⁶Op.Cit.

well. Spread across the landscape, the six of them look almost like natural outcrops in the streambed. They were made by rolling mixtures of Shop Creek's sandy soil and concrete into 'large, flat crescents' which were then stacked in a shallow stair-step pattern which drops down eight feet into the stream bed.¹⁷ The drop structures have been allowed to weather, beginning, according to Wenk, to reproduce the 'dynamic nature of the stream corridor.'¹⁸

Beautifully designed to recall the craggy rock formations of Canyonlands National Park,



Fig. 12 William Wenk, *Drop Structure, Shop Creek Park*

the structures are also formidably functional, bearing the primary responsibility for slowing the rush of flood waters. Water flows into a structure in the middle of the crescent, slowing as it runs over the stairsteps. It then "spills into a plunge pool, where the points of the cres-

cent focus the water back in on itself, slowing the stormy current even more."¹⁹ Finally, a low mound of the same soil/concrete mixture breaks any remaining current before it flows downstream into one of the wetland areas and onto the next crescent. The already rugged aesthetic of the crescents should blend even more into the landscape as they weather and erode. As Wenk puts it, "Shop Creek Park is not clean lines and sharp edges....It's rough. It's not something a lot of landscape architects are comfortable with – yet."²⁰

Wenk is far and away the most ecologically sophisticated of the four designers re-

¹⁷Michelle Strutin, "Two Parks that Quiet the Storm," *Landscape Architecture*, 81/10 (Oct. 1991), p.87.

¹⁸"1995 ASLA Awards," *Landscape Architecture*, 85/10 (Nov. 1995), p.50.

¹⁹Michelle Strutin, "Two Parks that Quiet the Storm," *Landscape Architecture*, 81/10 (Oct. 1991), p.87.

²⁰Op.Cit.

viewed in this chapter. He has created functional, self-sustaining wetland and riparian habitats, with a clear sense of the connectedness of natural systems: his vision and attention extend outside the boundaries of his site. He also seems to do an excellent job both of selling suburban residents on his projects by incorporating recreational trails into them, and at the same time exposing them to the workings of wetland and riparian environments. The irony, of course, is that before Denver's suburbs were developed with their acres of impervious surfaces, there wasn't enough water flowing through these streams to sustain wetlands on this scale.

Unfortunately, that irony is something Wenk never seems to address, never bringing out the human impacts on urban creeks as he designs 'natural' solutions to the problems they create. Wenk has in some sense avoided the theoretical pitfalls that beset Hargreaves, but he has his own methodological problems. Instead of basing his designs on phenomenology or Jungian theory, he works from an empirical, problem solving mind set which is just as limiting: it only allows room for solutions to the problem at hand, not for preventing such problems in the future. Once again, there seems to be no room for addressing cultural attitudes in a way that would be genuinely transformative.

A Collaboration with Nature – Andy Goldsworthy

Movement, change, light, growth and decay are the lifeblood of nature, the energies that I try to tap through my work... I want to get under the surface. When I work with a leaf, rock, stick, it is not just that material in itself, it is an opening into the processes of life within and around it.²¹

– Andy Goldsworthy –

In his books, Goldsworthy presents photographs of sculptures notable for their striking beauty, and for their transience. Because he works outdoors with natural materials specific to a particular site – leaves, ice, stones, flowers – his sculptures are necessarily temporary: leaves blow away, snow melts, precariously balanced stones topple. And yet, with great care, an incredible eye for detail, and a whole-hearted embrace of the transitory nature of his work,

²¹Andy Goldsworthy, *A Collaboration with Nature*, (Harry N. Abrams: New York; 1990), p.1.

Goldsworthy makes sculptures that seem to reveal the structure of nature itself. In his play with the energies of movement, growth, change and decay, and the aesthetics of pattern, color, form, and reflection, there is a sense of revealing something that had been hiding in plain sight. A fundamental reconnection to something we see but never look at. As ? wrote in *Landscape Architecture*, "The delicacy and color of his intricate craft and art seems[sic] almost impossibly close to the underlying order of nature – shells, anthills, spirals, seasons."²²

The site and climatic specificity of Goldsworthy's work, however, is countered by the abstraction of the forms he chooses, suggesting a level of spirituality, and an implicit Jungian influence on his work. As Terry Friedman writes in his introduction to *Wood*,

The now-familiar forms of his art – arches, circles, columns, domes, holes, lines, spheres, spirals, spires – are powerful expressions of the patterns and rhythms of growth. They are attempts to understand the purpose of sculpture and through it the purposes of nature itself.²³

Goldsworthy himself talks about the spiritual nature of his work in interviews, and he clearly believes in the symbolism of the shapes he chooses. Describing a work referred to simply as 'Sticks,' a sculpture constructed in Alaska in November out of pieces of stick, glued together with ice in order to create an elegant and attenuated line, Goldsworthy writes,

In making the line, I resisted using a single branch to achieve the curve. I wanted to make the curve out of smaller pieces rather than to find a curve already there. I want the line to be made up of wood, ice, wood, ice, wood, ice. Winter, summer, winter, summer, winter, summer. I like the idea of many pieces being joined together in a continuous line, just as the seasons are. Changes and the flow of time are lines that run through both tree and land.²⁴

One of the fascinating things about Goldsworthy's work is the way he uses forms fundamental to archetypal interpretations of landscape: spirals, cairns, holes, etc. but at a fraction of the scale. I have chosen to look at his art not simply because it is perhaps the most visually powerful environmental design on the contemporary scene, but also because his

²²?, *Landscape Architecture*, 80/2 (Feb. 1990): ?.

²³Terry Friedman, Introduction to Andy Goldsworthy, *Wood*, (Harry N. Abrams: New York; 1996) p.6.

²⁴Andy Goldsworthy, *Wood*, (Harry N. Abrams: New York; 1996) p.49.

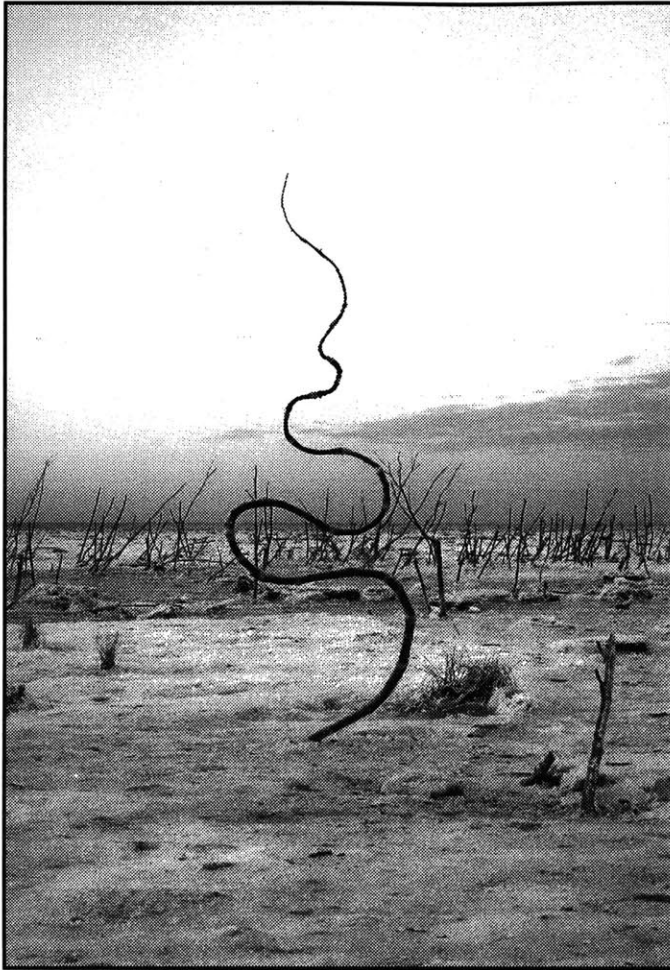


Fig. 13 Andy Goldsworthy, *Sticks*

sculptures use many of the same techniques as landscape design, and address many of the same issues, however small their scale.

Selected Works

In order to give a sense of the typical range of points, lines, and surfaces in Goldsworthy's work, I have selected four works to concentrate on: *Iris blades*, *Broken pebbles*, and *Oak leaves*, (from *A Collaboration with Nature*) and *Balanced stones*, (from *Wood*). While Goldsworthy's work lends itself to two obvious ways of characterizing it: by materials, as he

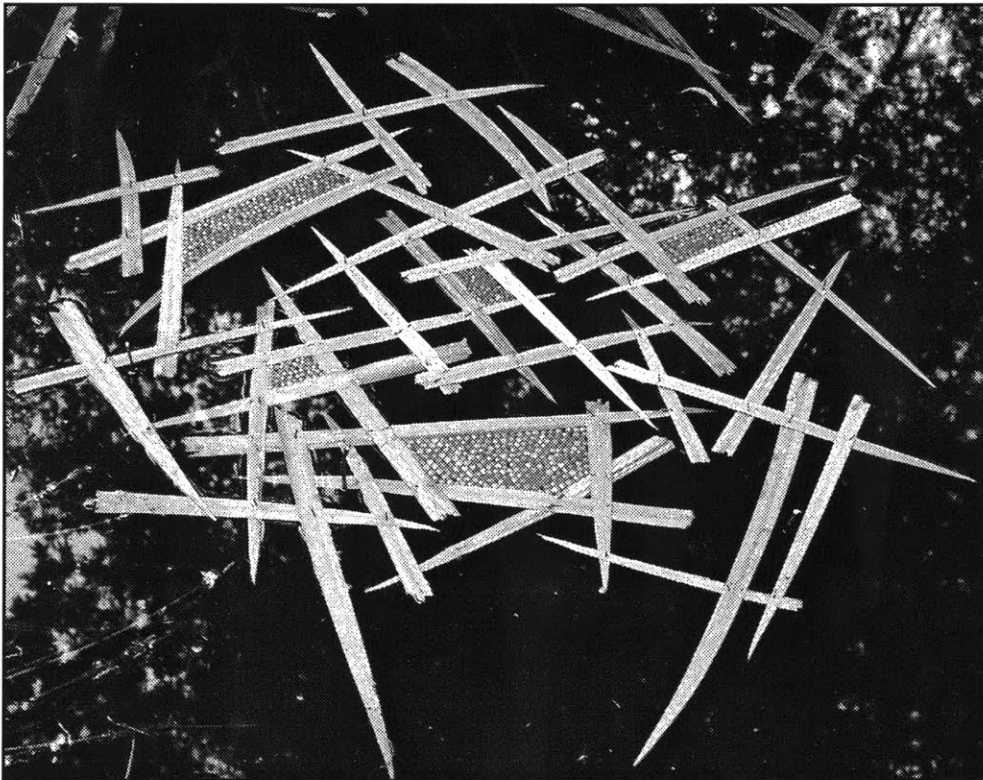
does in his books, and by form, such as the repetition of balls, towers, spirals, etc., I think that Meyer's system provides an interestingly different way of thinking about his works and their relation to landscape design.

lines

Interacting lines play a key role in all of Goldsworthy's works. The first thing that jumps out at the eye from *Oak Leaves*, for example, is the stark edge of the oak leaves against the black of the hole they cover, and the interaction of the outlines of the two leaves within each hole. Much of the impact of *Balanced stones* derives from the tension between the sinuous line of the olive tree and the straight (but still organically irregular) line of the balanced rocks it wraps around. There is a similar effect in *Broken pebbles*, where the thin and relatively regular



Fig. 14 Andy Goldsworthy, Oak leaves in holes



*Fig. 15 Andy Goldsworthy, Iris blades pinned together with thorns
filled in five sections with rowan berries
fish attacking from below
difficult to keep all the berries in
nibbled by ducks*



*Fig. 16 Andy Goldsworthy, Broken Pebbles
scratched white with another stone*

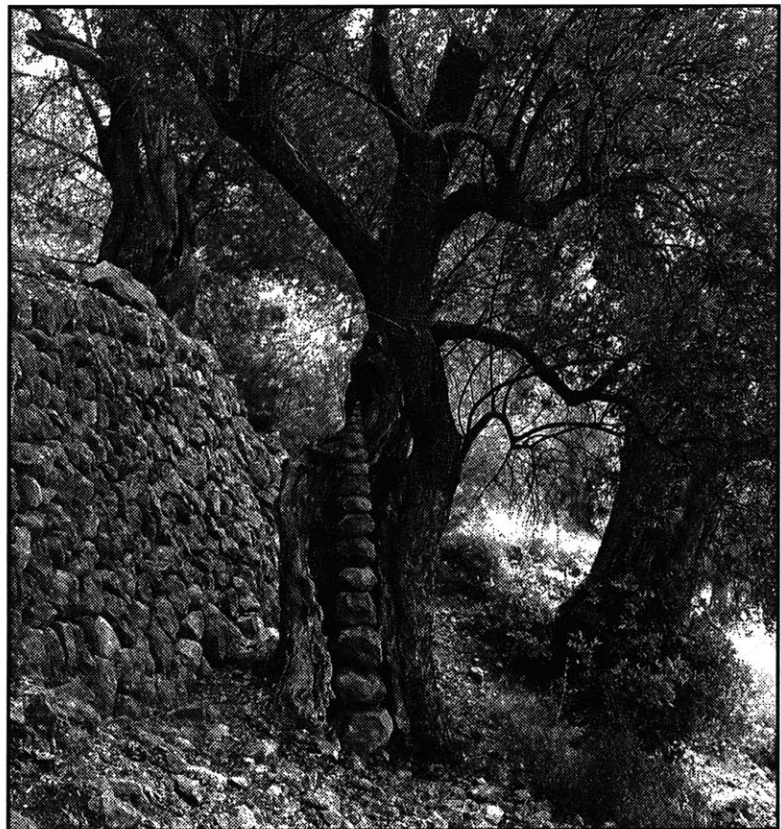


Fig. 17 Andy Goldsworthy, Balanced Stones Olive Trees

spiraling line created by the breaks in the pebbles is a dramatic counterpoint to the more irregular spiral line of the pebbles themselves. Lastly, in *Iris blades*, lines are used almost as writing, imitating the strokes of Japanese calligraphy. In all of these cases, lines are critical to the impact of the sculptures.

surfaces

Goldsworthy also seems to delight in playing with surfaces and textures. In *Balanced stones*, for example, the stretched and deeply crevassed texture of the bark provides a stark contrast to the pitted and chipped surfaces of the balanced rocks, or the rock wall next to it. In *Oak Leaves*, the smooth lightness of the leaves is an intense counterpoint to the dark and grainy earth surrounding them, and to the black void beneath them. In *Broken pebbles*, the smooth and scratched surface of the stones contrasts with the finer texture of the sand they lie on. And in *Iris blades*, the lined green of the leaves and the red roundness of the berries form an intriguing balance with the smooth, reflective sheen of the water they float on.

points

Points seem to have less relevance for Goldsworthy, which is illuminating in and of itself. There are in some sense implied points: the enclaves of berries in *Iris blades*, the interior tip of the spiral in the *Broken pebbles*, the place where the balanced stones break free of the embracing curve of the tree trunk in *Balanced stones*. But in general, Goldsworthy's sculptures seem to have more to say about the relations of their materials than about any one key moment within them. Every point along the edge of the oak leaf is in some sense a key point, depending on the light and camera angle. The only true point in his work is that made by the sculptures themselves against the background of nature.

Placeless 'site-specificity'

Despite the undeniable power of his work to reveal nature and natural processes, there

are some definite drawbacks to using Andy Goldsworthy as a model for future environmental design. To begin with, he works for an oddly elite audience given the 'every man' rhetoric with which he presents his work. Because of its transience, the only way for the public to experience it is to spend \$50 on one of his books. Public art and parks may be difficult spots for sophisticated design, but they are guaranteed a larger and more diverse audience. Everyone needs to transform their attitudes toward the environment, not just members of the art world.

Secondly, Goldsworthy presents an oddly sanitized view of a passive nature without conflict or threat. It has rules the artist must abide by – wind and tide, the characteristics of materials and their seasonal variance – but the substance of nature is presented essentially as benign and malleable: without avalanches or earthquakes, or even the food chain. In a 1992 review of a show in San Francisco, Mark Bartlett critiques Goldsworthy's romantic view of nature, and the neo-primitivism it results in:

The cover of a recent monograph... depicts him as a noble savage, barefoot, dirtied, hair wild, crouching on the banks of a river, reeds in hand, performing, we might surmise, rites for the river deities. He plays on the romantic possibility of escaping all civilizing forces, of 'going native'... Chance, the ephemeral, the amorphous, gravity, temperature, space and time themselves are foes/friends he seeks to conquer/convey through a personal mythos....No aspect of nature is too elemental to escape his domestication.²⁵

Just as importantly, Goldsworthy's vision is of a nature without human intervention, except for his own and the odd farmer's. The occasional fence, line of telephone poles, or town appears off in the hazy distance, but there is never a dump, or deforestation, or erosion. Goldsworthy's work may awaken us to the transitory character of the natural world around us, but it gives no sense of the imperiled condition of that world.

Asked in an interview about his relationship to environmentalist politics, and the work he made for Greenpeace's London headquarters, Goldsworthy's reply is unsurprising:

I am obviously deeply sympathetic to those concerns. I think my work expresses

²⁵Mark Bartlett, "A Tribe of One," *Artweek*, v.23 (July-Sep. 1992), p.16.

them. But I won't let my art be politicized and used – that's not my place. My voice is a visual one that is made strong because it is from a very personal relationship with the land... I don't do [political] things for events; I just don't. The work I did do for them [Greenpeace] says what I can say and says it in a way that the people of Greenpeace can't, just as they say things I can't say.²⁶

Goldsworthy clearly has no intention of turning his striking works into a rallying cry for the Green movement. Instead, he emphasizes their personal content over their political potential.

Lastly, and most fundamentally, for all the site and climate specificity of Goldsworthy's materials, his work is oddly generic. A given piece may be incredibly specific to a particular pond in a particular season, but that pond could be anywhere. There are few if any cultural references in his work, and he doesn't seem to adapt it to resonate more particularly with the culture of any of the areas he designs for: his sculptures seem to be little different when he works in Japan than when he works in Alaska. Only the materials and the seasonal possibilities shift. The repetition and abstraction of the forms Goldsworthy chooses contribute to this placelessness. In *A Collaboration with Nature*, for example, he illustrates several examples of the same basic sculpture on a single page; the only difference between them is their place of creation, and thus the type of leaf or rock out of which they are constructed. His faith in the universal relevance of the forms he chooses has a decidedly Jungian feel to it, even though Goldsworthy never uses the verbal language of archetypes.

Goldsworthy's work is powerful support for Peter Walker's argument that in order for ideas to catch on, they have to be presented in visually powerful and inspiring ways.²⁷ No one who spends time looking at one of Andy Goldsworthy's books will ever look at the world around them again in the same inattentive way: his work reveals too many possibilities to ignore. But they are aesthetic and abstract possibilities without a message behind them; nature appreciation instead of cultural change. He reveals the forms, materials, and forces of nature with unprecedented power, but his art in no way directs us to do anything with our newly opened eyes other than look for ourselves.

²⁶Meredith Tromble, "A Conversation with Andy Goldsworthy," *Artweek*, v.23 (July-Sep. 1992), p.17

²⁷Peter Walker and Melanie Simo, *Invisible Gardens*, (MIT: Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1994) p.49 & 314.

Time Landscapes – Alan Sonfist (1968-78)

Public monuments traditionally have celebrated events in human history – acts or humans of importance to the whole community. In the Twentieth century, as we perceive our dependence on nature, the concept of community expands to include the non-human elements, and civic monuments should honor and celebrate life and acts of another part of the community: natural phenomena. Within the city, public monuments should recapture and revitalize the history of the environment natural to that location.²⁸

– Alan Sonfist –

Alan Sonfist is one of the key figures in the Land Art movement that began in the mid-Sixties. Unlike many early environmental artists, nature has been Sonfist's muse from the beginning, and the depth of his commitment to the natural world shows clearly in his art.²⁹ He has always focused on returning nature to urban environments, revealing the natural history and forces of a city to its residents. Unlike Robert Smithson or Michael Heizer, for example, who moved tons of stone and rock to inscribe their minimalistic statements onto the environment, Sonfist's work is notable for the reverence with which he holds the natural world. So much so that in some of his sculptures, audiences have had a hard time discovering where the 'art' is, so completely does he seem to subsume himself and his creativity to nature. In contrast to the more invasive work of Smithson, whose sculptures, though site specific, are still a "rap-prochement between an element of the artist's vocabulary and a site,...Sonfist implacably restates the nature that was once there."³⁰ (This description of Smithson's work, incidentally, applies surprisingly well to Andy Goldsworthy's)

Given his aesthetic of the positive interdependence of humans and nature, with its resulting de-emphasis of formal aspects of his work, where *is* the art in Sonfist's sculptures? In an anthology published on Land Art in the early Eighties, Mark Rosenthal argues that the art lies on a theoretical rather than a formal plane. That is, by so closely imitating the visual

²⁸Alan Sonfist cited by Jonathan Carpenter, "Alan Sonfist's Public Sculptures," in *Art in the Land*, Alan Sonfist, ed. (Dutton: New York;1983)

²⁹Carol Hall, "Environmental Artists: Sources and Directions" in *Art in the Land*, Alan Sonfist, ed. (Dutton: New York; 1983) : 52.

composition of a forest, as he does in his *Time Landscapes* series, Sonfist engages his viewers in a dialogue about the historic, current and future conditions of the urban landscape:

Sonfist immerses art and himself in the site. This is not to say that Sonfist's work ...is passive and unprovocative. His work creates a dialogue between abandoned and current values, between concerns for the land and the priorities of an urban landscape.³¹

In short, Sonfist's vision of the proper relationship between the natural and created environments, and the broad social and ecological implications of the priorities he advocates, are unusual, even in the world of environmental design. Briefly, he holds the common view that nature is an isolated and beleaguered realm within a predominantly industrialized world. As more and more of the Earth has been colonized by human culture, nature has taken the place of human production as the rare object in our world. Jonathan Carpenter argues that what makes Sonfist's work unusual is that he takes this view a step further, arguing that because nature is now the rarity, the traditional valuations of art and nature should be reversed:

Art and other products of human culture used to be rare items in a natural world. Now objects of human creation are the norm, and products of unadulterated natural production are rare. The scarcity of nature makes it occupy the position that culture once did: it is becoming something of a rare collectible. This radically revised relationship of art and nature has inspired Sonfist's art.³²

Sonfist's chosen artistic role usually seems to be that of a mid-wife, bringing out aspects of the natural environment and re-introducing them to the city in their own forms rather than crafting them into artistic ones. His work is thus in some ways similar to William Wenk's, but unlike Wenk, Sonfist has a definite ideological point underlying his reconstructions of habitat. He is trying, in effect, to let nature speak for itself in the contrast between his faithful attempt at restoration and the urban form around it. As Carpenter describes it:

³⁰Mark Rosenthal, "Some Attitudes of Earth Art," in *Art in the Land*, Alan Sonfist, ed. (Dutton: New York; 1983) : 70.

³¹*Ibid.*, p.70.

³²Jonathan Carpenter, "Alan Sonfist's Public Sculptures," in *Art in the Land*, Alan Sonfist, ed. (Dutton: New York;1983) : 148.

When Sonfist uses natural materials from the site itself to make his public sculpture, he brings the city into a complex interaction with his art. The natural materials contrast vividly with the fabricated environment, yet are not alien to it. They actually preceded the structures on their own sites. Sonfist's sculptures act like a perspective point that allows people to see the present as part of a larger, vaster stretch of time.³³

Time Landscape: Greenwich Village

First conceived of in 1968 as an installation for the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alan Sonfist's *Time Landscapes* series evolved into a five part work installed around Manhattan and the Boroughs in 1978. The *Time Landscapes* are intended to be literal recreations of the pre-colonial habitats of New York City, plots of land returned to their original topographic and vegetal state, in lush contrast to the concrete jungle surrounding them. Lessons in natural history, Sonfist also sees them as memorials to important members of community that have died in much the same vein as memorials to important humans. Only with habitats, you can recreate them.³⁴

Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village is located on La Guardia Place between Houston and Bleecker on a 9,000 square foot lot formerly occupied by a tenement. After extensive research into the historical ecology of the site, and even more extensive negotiation with city planners and local community groups, Sonfist restored the soil and original topography. He planted the site to represent three stages of natural succession ranging from open meadow and grasses on the south end to a young oak forest on the north.³⁵ Over the years, it has become a local landmark, and school children and residents help to maintain it year-round.³⁶

lines, surfaces, points

Trying to use Meyer's framework to analyze *Time Landscape: Greenwich Village* is an interesting problem, largely because Sonfist attempted to mimic a the visual structure of a

³³*Ibid.*, p. 151.

³⁴Barbara Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies*, (Rizzoli: New York; 1992) p. 80-2

³⁵*Op.cit.*

³⁶*Ibid.*, p.83..

natural environment rather than to create his own: he was, in a way, trying *not* to design the landscape. There is only one line of movement in the piece: skirting the edge. Community groups insisted on putting a tall iron fence around the entire plot, making the piece, already a lesson in natural history, very much like an exhibit in a natural history museum in its hands-off quality. The surfaces of the park rise up in small, rolling hills: the restored topography of the site is a subtle contrast to the graded and flattened expanses of pavement and asphalt all around it. In a quiet way, it underlines the control and uniformity omni-present in modern city form. The points of this site could either be the three successional zones or, perhaps more in harmony with Sonfist's philosophy, they could be seen as every living thing on the site. But neither really fits Meyer's description. Sonfist's design forgoes dramatic moments in favor of creating a continuous fabric.

Recreating the natural systems of the site was clearly the focus of the work for Sonfist. Revealing its history, and thus making passers-by think about what came before the city is the point of the project. By restoring the pre-urban landscape, Sonfist forces us to challenge the

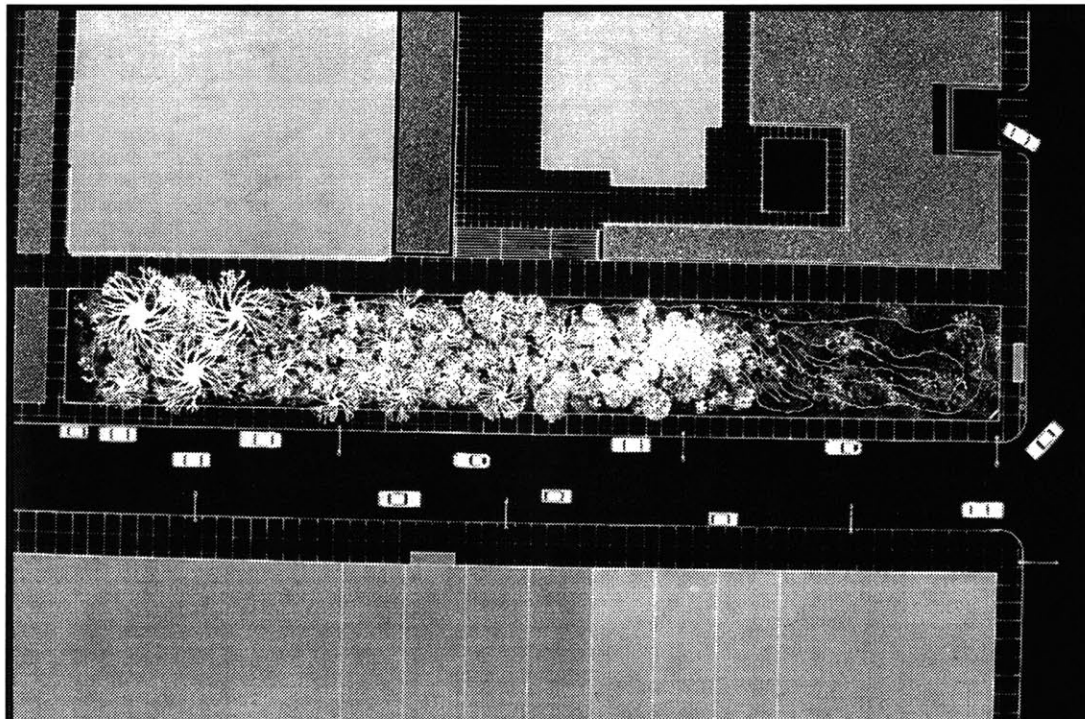


Fig. 18 Alan Sonfist, *Plan for Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village*



Fig. 19 Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village*

feeling that the city is the permanent and definitive feature of the landscape, that the buildings and streets, the densely urban landscape of Manhattan, has always been and always will be. I believe that Mark Rosenthal is correct when he describes Sonfist's work as making visible the normally unexamined values and land-use priorities of modern urban life.

There are, however, some obvious difficulties with *Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village*. First of all, it is absurd to call a plot of land 45 feet wide and 200 feet long a forest. It is not simply its untouchability that makes this piece feel like a museum exhibit: it looks a bit like the shallow space of a diorama. This gives the work a lack of immediacy; despite Sonfist's intentions, it doesn't make reforestation of Manhattan, or even a shift in urban priorities, look very likely. The presentation makes the forest look like a piece of the past dug out of someone's grandmother's attic, rather than a possible choice for the future. Which, in a sense, give the work much of its power. Sonfist may have intended it as a serious attempt at restoration, but the absurdity of a 9,000 sqft forest gives the piece an ironic power Sonfist never intended. It

belies Sonfist's sincere intentions and makes *Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village* appear an ironic comment on city dwellers' notions of nature, and the role of nature in the city.

Secondly, ecologically-speaking the whole piece is fairly suspect. Granted that it was reconstructed with careful research at a time when restoration biology was an even newer discipline than it is today, there is still something very sad about claiming to have recreated a habitat without including any of the animals, insects, and micro-organisms that were vital parts of the original ecosystem. It also seems naive to hark back to the pre-colonial state of the landscape without commenting on Native American uses of, and effects on, the landscape. There is, in short, something a bit ingenuous about presenting this tiny piece of land, in constant need of human intervention to survive, as a pristine piece of nature.

There are many ways in which Sonfist seems to be on the right track: actively involving the local community in his work, both by consulting them about it beforehand and in getting their help maintaining it. Creating environmental sculptures with immediate resonance for the people who see them, showing people some of the history of their homes. The act of erecting a restored landscape as art lends additional social value to the environment. And *Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village* clearly has a transformative intent behind it. I am not sure, though, that relying simply on the contrast between a restored landscape and the urban one surrounding it is enough to catalyze the re-evaluation of priorities that Sonfist is aiming for. This sculpture seems to have a better chance at transforming our attitudes toward the natural world than Hargreaves' exercises in abstraction and disjuncture, or Goldsworthy's sanitized and domesticated presentation of nature; but the only thing that gives Sonfist's sculptures more potential for change than Goldsworthy's is the contrast with their urban context, and that is not enough. Even with its unintended ironic punch, *Time Landscapes: Greenwich Village* doesn't transform much of anything because it neither gives people information necessary for change, nor presents a vision to inspire it. Sonfist is not presenting a workable vision for the future, nor even a particularly strident critique of the present, but a naive vision of the past.

Conclusions

Meyer's framework of points, lines, and surfaces has proved to be quite helpful in analyzing specific works. It provided, as I had hoped, a useful ground for comparing highly dissimilar works, and it shed interesting light on the ways the designers structured their compositions. The only project it did not seem particularly applicable to was *Time Landscape: Greenwich Village*, and there Sonfist was explicitly trying *not* to design. I think Meyer's framework is likely to prove useful for any analysis of the designed landscape.

I want not to return to the discussion of potential goals for environmental design from Chapter One, examining these four projects in relation to them. The goals were:

1. Reconnect nature-deprived city residents to the natural environment, usually by providing a rich variety of environmental experiences, under the theory that they need to encounter nature before they will be willing to make sacrifices for it;
2. Rework our culture's limited and iconic view of nature, showing it as a fragile and ever-changing force rather than as pastoral and constant;
3. Counter widespread pessimism about environmental degradation by providing concrete examples of successful rehabilitation of polluted sites; and
4. Educate people about how the natural world functions by making ecological processes such as drainage, wind and plant succession visible.

All four designers, especially Hargreaves and Sonfist, attempt to address multiple goals, which is one of the reasons I chose these projects in the first place. The problem, however, is that they don't address many of the goals very well. Goldsworthy, for example, clearly does a far better job of engaging people with the natural world (1) than Sonfist does. In fact, despite Sonfist's intentions, I do not think that his mini-forest behind a fence does a particularly good job of reconnecting New Yorkers to nature at all. Similarly, while both Hargreaves and Sonfist attempt to create optimism about the condition of our environment by rehabilitating sites devastated by human intervention (3), it is only Wenk who actually remediates his site, restoring it to a functioning ecosystem.

Each of these designers has his strengths, but none of the projects seem to be entirely successful as transformative environmental design. Part of the problem, I think, is that there is

more to effective environmental design than these four goals allow. From my critiques of these projects, I would suggest two new goals. First, environmental design must address human impacts on the environment in order to be transformative, and not just by making them vanish under a ground cover of native grasses. Secondly, environmental design projects need to include some kind of public gathering space, a place for social interaction around the environmental goals of the landscape design. None of these designs, with the possible exception of Sonfist's, include any way to make environmentalism a *practice* in people's lives. All four of these designers advocate major changes in our behavior and attitudes toward the natural world. Yet while learning and change are social processes, all of these projects are structured for individual viewing and enjoyment. The only space big enough to hold than more two or three people in Byxbee Park, for example, is the small area in front of the restrooms. I believe that this focus on the individual at the expense of the social and cultural world has serious implications for the kinds of compositions that designers privilege, and is rooted in their reliance on phenomenology and Jungian theory, the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Three: A Critique of Contemporary Landscape Theory

If any metaphysics, poetry, myth, and interpretive imagination are excluded from any synopsis of the real, then any outcome must be considered incomplete, if not completely erroneous.¹

– James Corner –

In this chapter, I will argue that in order to be transformative, environmental design must look beyond the individualistic focus of phenomenology and Jung to a culturally based theory of meaning in landscape. It is crucial to address theory because, as apparent in the last chapter, it deeply informs the form and content of a designers work; while all four of these designers would, I believe, characterize their work as intimately involved with environmental struggle, only Alan Sonfist seems to make anything approaching a direct attempt at changing people's attitudes. In the discussion that follows, I will argue that this strange gap between intentions and products is a direct result of all four designers' reliance on theory inappropriate to their goals.

James Corner argued for the importance of theory to landscape architecture in a 1991 article. He points out that some landscape architects object to an emphasis on theory on the grounds that there is already too much of it, and that it's just hot air. Landscape architecture is, after all, "primarily a craft profession, an artisanal practice requiring multiple skills and talents." But, Corner argues, there is a difference between the skill that goes into a design and the motivation of the maker: while craft can be taught, motivation requires reference points outside of practice:

Motivation necessitates the definition of a particular stance towards life – some idea of a culture's relationship toward the world and existential problems. It employs the feeling found in cultural memory and personal experience to generate meaning, wonder, and expression. Motivation engenders a heightened sense of purpose. A built landscape may well survive blemishes of craft, but will very rarely survive a creative stillbirth.²

¹James Corner, "A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics," *Landscape Journal*, 10/2, (Fall 1991), p. 118.

²James Corner, "A Discourse on Theory I: 'Sounding the Depths' – Origins, Theory, and Representation," *Landscape Journal*, 9/2 (Fall 1990) p.62.

What is the relationship of theory to all this? It provides the mediation between craft and motivation, the connection between larger, motivating goals and the particulars of design technique. As we have seen, this is a crucial problem in contemporary environmental design. Taking the time to delve into the mediating factor between environmental designers' overarching goals and their actual design practice is clearly worthwhile.

Phenomenology: Husserl and Schutz

Phenomenology can be characterized as a "descriptive philosophy of experience," focusing on an analysis of subjectivity and perception.³ The founder of this school of thought, Edmund Husserl, argued that in the struggle to ground knowledge of the world, the only certainty is your own consciousness, and that therefore you should examine it. The phenomenologist focuses on her perceptions of the world and attempts to extract their key facts and structures.⁴ The problem with this, as people have been pointing out for decades, is the inevitable descent into solipsism: the phenomenologist is left with the first person and no real way to prove the existence of anything outside it. As Anthony Giddens describes it, the problem is that "If we escape from the world into a 'self-contained realm' of consciousness, which has no point of contact with that world whatsoever, what means have we got of philosophically validating its existence at all?"⁵

This problem extends from the physical world to the social world, and even to the existence of other human beings. As Giddens describes it,

It remains difficult to see how others ... can be regarded as any more than just another intentional project of consciousness... The claim that ... [personal consciousness] has primacy over other kinds of knowledge, of the 'external world' or of others, has the consequence that a desperate struggle has to be put up to make it possible to accord others anything but a sort of shadowy, epiphenomenal existence.⁶

³Richard Osborne, *Philosophy for Beginners*, (Writers & Readers Publishing: New York; 1992), p.153.

⁴Op.Cit.

⁵Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Social Method*, (Basic Books: New York; 1976), p.25.

⁶Ibid., p.26.

In his later work, Husserl responded to the danger of solipsism with the concept of 'intersubjectivity'. Intersubjectivity is the claim that, by analogy, everyone else should have the same conscious structures that you do. But this reduces society and culture to agglomerations of individual perceptual structures. There is no acknowledgment of a larger, more complicated social reality: of unintended consequences of an individual's actions, or of the social and physical structures that may determine the conditions of those actions. This produces a view of social relations that is sparse and problematic, leaving no room for relations of power or culture.

This becomes a very serious problem for social scientists who attempt to adapt phenomenology to their concerns. The most famous of these, Schutz, simply chose to work with the absence of a larger social structure, focusing instead on building explanations of the individual's interpretation of directly experienced social relations. As he put it "the social world is 'strictly speaking, my world.'" Giddens critiques Schutz by pointing out that,

Having adopted the starting point of a phenomenological reduction, Schutz is unable to reconstitute social reality as an object world... [Other people] find a place in Schutz's analyses only in so far as they appear in the consciousness of the actor. Thus 'what at first glance may appear to be a social relationship between myself and one of my predecessors will always turn out to be a case of one-sided other-orientation on my part.' As an example of the rare case in which the behavior of predecessors may directly influence their successors, Schutz is only able to quote the bequeathment of property. But successive generations bequeath far more than this to one another ...; the social realm cannot be constituted... from the intentional consciousness.⁷

After nearly a century of attempts, it still seems impossible to account for the existence of social organizations and collectivities that transcend the individual from the starting point of the reduction of experience phenomenology is premised upon.

The Jungian Theory of Archetypes

Jungian theory is very complex and ranges over a great variety of topics. Landscape architecture, and design in general, however, has adopted only Jung's concept of archetypes.

⁷Ibid., p.31.

According to Jung, the structure of the human psyche should be envisioned as a cone, with the conscious ego at the tip, the personal unconscious in the upper-middle tier, and the collective unconscious forming a broad base for the whole edifice. The 'conscious ego' is the part of us that knows what's going on as it happens, the perceiver. It includes all of the aspects of our lives that we are immediately conscious of: memories, facts, names, etc. Next is the 'personal unconscious', the individual experiences that we have suppressed; things we don't want to remember but are a part of our personal experience. (If this sounds familiar, it is because it comes entirely from Freud.) For Jung, however, the structure of the psyche has another, deeper layer which represents the largest part of our souls. This is the 'collective unconscious'. Jung claims that humans not only have biology in common, but psychology, and that we share not only conscious emotions but also unconscious psychological structures. These structures are the 'archaic remnants' of the psychic history of humanity. As Jung put it, "The true history of the spirit is not preserved in learned volumes or in memory, but in the living organism of every individual."⁸ Jung called these universal remnants or archaic humanity 'archetypes'.

As Mike Brill describes it, archetypes are a kind of mental template "of form and meaning bonded together."⁹ These archetypal patterns, forms and themes function as a universal human language, and form the basic shared content of mythology, religion, and fairy tales. Archetypes also appear to individuals in the form of dreams and visions. According to Jung, archetypes are not simply passively existing patterns floating around in the collective unconscious of the entire human race. Instead, they have their own powers, and have independent effects in the world. Jung wrote that, "The archetype is a phenomena of 'numinos' or 'God-like' dimensions. The archetype is in a very real sense alive and functioning in the world. The archetypes thus have their own initiative and their own specific energy. These powers enable

⁸Jon Platania, *Jung for Beginners*, (Writers & Readers Publishing: New York; 1997), pp. 49-51.

⁹Mike Brill, "Archetypes as a 'Natural Language' for Place-Making" in Karen A. Franck and Lynda H. Schneekloth, eds., *Ordering Space: Types in Architecture and Design*, (Van Nostrand Reinhold: New York; 1994), p.61.

them both to produce a meaningful interpretation and to interfere in a given situation."¹⁰

The most questionable part of Jung's description of archetypes is clearly their independent existence and active interference in our world. This is an aspect of archetypes that landscape theory seems to ignore entirely, so I will not address it here. Still, there are other problems that exist with even watered-down constructions of archetypes. To begin with, there is the fundamental difficulty of constructing a convincing argument for their existence. While there are some arguments by scholars of comparative religion for the bare bones of shared content in mythology and religion, they are quite controversial; there is even less evidence for the existence of visual archetypes: shapes or forms with universal human associations.

Secondly, there is the crucial fact that Jung basically dismisses the influence of culture and personal experience, relegating them to the tip of the iceberg of the human psychic structure. Jung took the results of his analyses of the imagery of his own dreams and imagination for the most, but also of other European Christians, and generalized them to the species level. While the phenomenological concept of intersubjectivity makes a similar move, Husserl was quite explicit about the fact that he took his individual perceptions as a starting point and worked out from there. Jung, on the other hand, seems to have assumed from the beginning that the imagery characteristic of his own thoughts came from a species-wide font, rather than an individual or cultural one, and never acknowledged that the leap from individual to universal might be problematic.

Phenomenology and Jung in Landscape Theory

Between them, phenomenology and Jungian theory provide the underpinnings for much of contemporary landscape theory and design. Thus it seems important to examine phenomenology and Jungian theory not simply on their own, but as they have been tailored to fit the concerns of landscape theory. To do so, I will focus on the work of James Corner and Patrick Condon.

¹⁰Jon Platania, *Jung for Beginners*, (Writers & Readers Publishing: New York; 1997), p.58.

James Corner

In a pair of articles in *Landscape Journal* in the early nineties entitled "A Discourse on Theory," Corner, one of the foremost theoreticians in landscape architecture, lays out his phenomenology-based position. His basic argument is, I believe, well-founded. He argues that landscape used to be an integral expression of culture, both a repository and a creator of shared cultural meanings. With the Enlightenment and the rise of modern technology, however, that metaphysical layer of landscape design was written off, leaving us with an arid and aestheticized landscape. Originally, Corner claims, art and landscape had a very different social role:

[T]he origins of what we now call landscape architecture were buried deep within this symbolic ontology of myth and religion and..., as a profoundly traditional activity, its primary ideological role was as representational art... Many of the built landscapes before the Enlightenment were conceived and understood as figurative embodiments of divine order. They were manifestations of theoretical knowledge. Gardens during this time provided a kind of cosmic 'quarry', gravid with histories and myth. They were a lens through which culture could view itself and share in collective comprehension of the cosmos.¹¹

Corner goes on to describe in depth the slow transformation of the designed landscape from meaning-laden and expressive of a culture to rationalized and culturally barren. He argues that Modernism is a direct descendent of the Enlightenment project, and critiques its excessive emphasis on self-referential aestheticism:

The power of this autonomous aestheticism has worked to pervade all art ever since. Modern art and modern landscape architecture were to evolve an aesthetic where form alone could motivate the content. No longer did form have to express or convey an idea, as an icon or figure... 'Space', crystalline product of the Enlightenment, was put forth as an ethereal substitute for the continuity of lived experience. Imagine the audacity, or simple suspension of belief, necessary to reduce the complexity of living landscape to the sheer placelessness of 'pure form'.¹²

Following Husserl, Corner argues that this technical and aestheticized landscape alienates us from the natural world. With the destruction of the traditional cultural role of landscape, perception of the world around us was reduced to a sterile and rationalized experience.

¹¹James Corner, "A Discourse on Theory I: 'Sounding the Depths' – Origins, Theory, and Representation," *Landscape Journal*, 9/2 (Fall 1990) pp.62-3.

¹²*Ibid.*, p.74.

[T]he displacement of knowledge from the world as lived, or as sensibly perceived, created a distance between human life and nature. The freeing of science from its basis in the *lebenswelt* and its founding subjective nature was undoubtedly a necessary condition for its conquests, but Husserl argued that this freeing also carried the threat of an alienation... that makes the world inaccessible to us as human beings.¹³

We should not, however, take from this an abandonment of the Enlightenment project and a return to pre-modern thinking. Corner never suggests that we should dismiss techno-centric, modern thought, but that we should incorporate it dialectically in order to move past it. As he puts it, "Our rationality, as with our modes of abstraction, is part of our modern condition and will inevitably form the basis for any future work."¹⁴ Landscape architecture in the future must find a way to include the rational within the metaphysical because, "If metaphysics, poetry, myth, and interpretive imagination are excluded from any synopsis of the real, then any outcome must be considered incomplete, if not completely erroneous."¹⁵

Up to this point, I agree with Corner's argument almost entirely. Now, however, his deep investment in phenomenology becomes clear. He undermines his critique of the suppression of culture in Modern design by placing cultural meaning back under a similar yoke: as is the case with the rationalistic, aestheticized design culture he critiques, Corner locates the key component of social experience within the individual, far indeed from the cultural framework he wants to restore. The contradictions inherent in this are starkly present in the last sentences of part one of his article, as he jumps from the importance of culture to the primacy of the individual:

As the great mediator between nature and culture, landscape architecture has a profound role to play in the reconstitution of meaning and value in our relations with the Earth. By its very nature, this insight [into the 'very consciousness of humanity'] is primarily grounded in perception and cannot exist outside the *a priori* of the human body and its engagement with the world. Landscape architectural theory ought therefore to find its basis in the realm of perception and the phenomenological, the essential origins of existential meaning.¹⁶

¹³*Ibid.*, p.65.

¹⁴James Corner, "A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics," *Landscape Journal*, 10/2, (Fall 1991), p. 127.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p.118.

¹⁶James Corner, "A Discourse on Theory I: 'Sounding the Depths' – Origins, Theory, and Representation," *Landscape Journal*, 9/2 (Fall 1990) p.77.

Given the heat of Corner's critique of the self-referential and isolated character of Modernism, I find his claim that focusing on *individual sensory perceptions* is the route to reconstruction of *cultural* meanings in landscape difficult to explain. When he critiques Modernism because its, "Multiple representations, private and solitary, stand alone without any common-grounding within the discourse of culture and continuity,"¹⁷ it is difficult to understand why he feels that this criticism does not apply to his own work, as he returns to the individual as the fundamental building block of theory.

Patrick Condon: Archetypes, Landscape and the Savannah Primeval

Condon's argument, by contrast, never touches on the possibility of a cultural role in reading landscapes. He begins with the basic premise of archetypes: that there is a language, by implication shared among all cultures, of types of landscape spaces that are meaningful "in a fundamental, almost primal way."¹⁸ These space types have their roots in ancient man's primeval conflict with a hostile nature. Condon enumerates a short list of these fundamental types, and hypothesizes about how they came to be so important to the human species in its early days on the earth. He argues that these types are fundamental because they cannot be factored down to other forms, and because they express what he sees as the key dialectic in the age-old relationship between humanity and nature: the dialectic between the *beautiful* of human-created order and the *sublime* of nature untamed. He uses dialectic not in the Hegelian sense, but in the sense of two categories dependent on each other for definition.¹⁹

As our human spirit emerged and confronted the chaos of our environment, we were both acted on by that environment and, in turn, forced to act back. To create a meaningful world, to distinguish the important from the unimportant, the sacred from the profane, the good from the bad, and the useful from the useless, required thousands of years of human effort... I am suggesting that the meaning and impact of landscape types result from this relationship between the beautiful

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.76.

¹⁸Patrick Condon, "A Built Landscape Typology: The Language of the Land We Live In," in Karen A. Franck and Lynda H. Schneekloth, eds., *Ordering Space: Types in Architecture and Design*, (Van Nostrand Reinhold: New York; 1994), p.80.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p.81.

and the sublime, between the beautiful *order* of the arbor structure and the *chaos* or *sublime indifference* of the vine.²⁰

Condon argues that the archetypal landscape forms, from which the main types of landscape space derive, embody this dialectic, created as man tried to impose order on chaotic nature. The two archetypes he points to are the natural forest and the natural clearing. In his descriptions of them, Condon tries to give a sense of how stumbling upon one of them would have felt to ancient man:

The forest and the clearing, understood as a dialectical pair, are the archetypal landscape space foundation upon which the edifice of a designed landscape space typology can be erected. In forested landscapes, the natural clearing can be seen as nature's gift to humans. Imagine yourself thrashing through the trackless forest wilds. Suddenly you burst forth into the light and space of the clearing. Finally you are free of lurking threats (i.e., free of evil). You look up into the open sky and are thankful.²¹

There can be no doubt that to Condon's mind these archetypes are based in human biology, passed on for millennia and residing in the psyches of all of our species. He refers to Jay Appleton's work, for example, to justify the primal nature of our responses to archetypal places:

He [Appleton] suggests that "when humans are in re-created or natural savanna-type landscapes... they will normally experience a feeling of aesthetic satisfaction... [that] comes from a built-in capacity to recognize that their biological need for food and protection can be assured in such a landscape..."²²

Condon does later incorporate relations between human beings into his thinking about the derivation of types, but under the assumption that typologies draw on primitive social relations, not current social meanings. That is, Condon does not seem to believe in anything resembling a modern type. Definitionally, types spring from ancient roots in the collective unconscious, and thus modern, conscious cultural interpretations have no role to play.

²⁰Ibid. pp.85-6.

²¹Ibid. p.89.

²²Op.Cit.

Weaknesses of these Approaches for Environmental Design

Corner and Condon, while adapting phenomenology and Jungian theory to the concerns of landscape design, have brought with them the weaknesses of those theories outlined above. Most glaringly, there is a very basic difficulty with trying to change cultural attitudes one individual at a time; human beings do not change in a vacuum. At root, both phenomenological and Jungian arguments ignore the importance of contemporary society and culture in shaping our actions and beliefs. Who we are and how we function in the world is not a result of individual, *a priori* experience, or of an archetypal, species-wide collective unconscious, but of being a part of a shared social world that exists at many scales in between these two. The cognitive, epistemologically-based model of change -- that an idea is expressed, a person hears and understands it, and changes themselves accordingly -- is not born out in practice. Change is a social process, as much about identity as it is about knowledge. Theorists who try to use Jung's or Husserl's work as a framework for establishing shared readings of landscape leave themselves vulnerable to charges of the same individualism and isolationism that they deplore in Modernism's arid tenets.

Another weakness is these theories' dependence on the status quo rather than on any vision of future change or difference; both implicitly privilege continuity rather than change. This is especially true of Jungian theory. In reading Patrick Condon, for example, I am struck by the fact that even if we accepted the existence of archetypes, it is difficult to see how referring back to them could lead us in a profitable direction for the future. If we abandoned a doctrinaire Jungian view of archetypes, we could perhaps argue for the potential power of resignified archetypes. Given their grip on our psyches, if it were possible to tailor their meanings then archetypes could become a formidable weapon for cultural change.

No one within landscape theory argues for such a malleable construction of archetypes, however. Patrick Condon and Mike Brill never argue that archetypes are coded with complex or manipulable meanings. Instead, the dominant view of archetypes within landscape theory seems to be that they are capable only of evoking primitive emotions of well-being or fear,

rehashing a time when humanity's view of the natural world is supposed to have ranged between awe and terror. It is hard to see what environmental designers could hope to gain by tapping into those static and archaic meanings, when their basic goal is to transform our *current* relationship to the natural world, not look back to an earlier iteration of that relationship.

Phenomenology exhibits this same problem to a lesser degree. Its fundamental building block is the structure of pre-reflective perception, an unchanging, species-wide element. Clearly, it is not that phenomenology denies the possibility of fundamental changes in our *understanding* of the world. But denying the likelihood of change in our *perception* of it is not as benign as it might appear at first glance. This strikes me as fundamentally conservative thinking, with no allowance for future change in its most basic structure.

Given these seemingly obvious contradictions between the expressed goals of transformative environmental design and the theoretical frameworks underlying most projects, why are these theories still appealing? The theorists and designers who espouse them are clearly highly intelligent, thoughtful, and committed; why would they hamper themselves in this way?

One reason is that phenomenology and Jungian theory claim to solve the problem of landscape legibility, in both cases by resting meaning with the individual, whether in her lived experience or her psyche. Given the contemporary multi-cultural landscape, it is certainly far more difficult to find shared cultural meanings to tap into than to rely on individual interpretation, whether perceptually or psychologically conditioned. But as I have pointed out in my discussions above, these trains of thought start to derail when faced with the task of assembling coherent or even widespread cultural values out of individual pieces. As difficult as it is to find design strategies that embody readable, common cultural knowledge, I think it is far more difficult to argue for the creation of a coherent culture out of fragments of individual interpretations. Claiming that the structures of individual perception are common to humanity as a whole does not seem sufficient to account for the complexities of the social world and social institutions. In the end, neither theoretical framework's claim to producing landscapes

readable by the entire human race seems plausible.

An equally compelling reason designers have turned to phenomenology and Jungian theory is their opposition to the cult of pure aesthetics that reigned in post-World War II landscape architecture and art. Because they presented a humanistic, subjective alternative to overly aestheticized and rationalistic design, phenomenology and Jungian theory were greeted warmly by designers tired of a milieu that privileged a design's aesthetic pyrotechnics over a person's lived experience of that it. While these theories do provide an important counter to that lack of social commitment, at root they remain importantly *non-culturally specific* ways of looking at design, its limits and its potentials. While phenomenology and Jungian theory can be seen as liberating alternatives to design that refuses to consider its users at all, they address those users only as isolated units, leaving landscape designers with no avenue for transformative effects on a *society*. Phenomenology and Jungian theory simply don't move far enough away from modernist aestheticism; they continue its focus on the universal individual and thus deny the socially and politically grounded framework environmental design must have in order to change any of our cultural beliefs about the natural world.

A last reason designers may have languished so long in the halls of phenomenology and Jung is a dearth of alternatives. Landscape theory has always been relatively sparse on the ground, but lately its impoverishment has been the source of debate in landscape journals. Environmental designers would have a far easier time seeing that phenomenology and Jungian theory do not support their fundamental goals of cultural transformation if landscape theory provided a more socially and culturally oriented alternative.

Cultural Geography and Landscape History

Socially and culturally oriented theories of meaning do exist, and have, in fact, been prevalent in cultural geography and landscape history for some time. If environmental designers turned to theorists such as Rob Shields, Alan Pred, and Dennis Cosgrove, and landscape

historians such as John Dixon Hunt, they would find work much better suited to their needs.²³

John Dixon Hunt, perhaps the most eminent contemporary landscape historian, argues that landscapes are intensely tied to the cultures that produce them. In the face of landscape history's traditional emphasis on stylistic periods and the purely aesthetic contexts of historic landscape designs, Hunt argues that we must look at gardens in their political and cultural context. Only then will we be able to understand what a garden meant to its designer and patron. He writes that,

It is unwise to describe gardens or to explain garden history simply in stylistic terms... No, we must ask far more searching questions, probe more deeply into cultural assumptions, asking about the uses of gardens, uses both physical and metaphysical, visible and invisible. What Roland Barthes has written about photography is relevant to the study of historical gardens: 'We saw that the code of connotation was in all likelihood neither 'natural' nor 'artificial' but historical, or, if it be preferred, 'cultural'. Its signs are gestures, attitudes, expressions, colors or effects, endowed with certain meanings by virtue of the practice of a certain society...' Gardens, too, mean rather than are. Their various signs are constituted of all the elements that compose them – elements of technical human intervention like terraces or the shape of flower beds, elements of nature like water and trees – but they are nonetheless signs, to be read by outsiders for what they tell of a certain society.²⁴

Extrapolating from the idea that gardens are fundamentally grounded in their cultural contexts, Hunt argues that the most successful gardens are those that tap into that context most fully, filling contemporary symbolic needs:

I would argue that successful gardens always have been those where the ensemble of elements is not only just beautiful, but also answers to a particular society's deepest needs...[their] urgent and most desired – even if not always declared – ambitions and assumptions.²⁵

Hunt's many essays and papers demonstrate how gardens played a serious role historically in legitimating the ideology and presence of both new arrivals and old-timers in the folds of

²³See Dennis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, (Barnes and Noble Book: Totawa, NJ; 1984), Alan Pred, *Making Histories and Constructing Human Geographies: The Local Transformation of Practice, Power Relations, and Consciousness*, (Westview Press: Boulder, CO; 1990), Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, (Routledge: New York; 1991).

²⁴John Dixon Hunt, "The Garden as Cultural Object," in Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams, eds., *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (H. N. Abrams, Museum of Modern Art: New York; 1991), pp.27-8.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 28.

power and social control.

Hunt's ideas, however, do not translate easily to modern cultural landscapes because he writes about eras with much greater degrees of cultural homogeneity, periods where signs and symbolism built into the natural landscape were readable because viewers brought a consistent body of learning to the task of interpretation.²⁶ It is much more difficult to recognize Hunt's deeply politically and socially relevant landscape design in our modern, multi-cultural world, which perhaps explains why landscape designers have not latched onto his work.

There is, however, a body of work that addresses exactly these issues in contemporary, rather than historic times: social and cultural geography. Since the early seventies, geographers have been considering the social roles of landscape. Perhaps the most crucial contribution of social and cultural geography to the understanding of space has been overturning the view of the built landscape as fixed and concrete held by Jungian theory and phenomenology, among others. These theories portray the landscape as a passive object of human perception or recognition, rather than a dynamic field with which we interact, which can construct us as we construct it. As Edward Soja describes it, this passive view of the built landscape regards it as "the domain of the dead, the fixed the undialectical, the immobile – a world of passivity and measurement rather than action and meaning."²⁷

By contrast, cultural geographers view the built landscape as a deeply meaningful part of our lives, both reproducing and contesting established social meanings and systems of order. As Derek Gregory puts it, "[S]patial structures cannot be *theorized* without social structures and *vice versa*, and ... social structures cannot be *practised* without spatial structures, and *vice versa*."²⁸ A crucial implication of this is that because the structure of the built environment is both expressive and transformative of the structures of society, the ways in which we shape the

²⁶See also John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture*, (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1992)

²⁷Edward J. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Cultural and Social Theory*, (Verso: New York; 1989) p.37.

²⁸Derek Gregory cited in Alan Pred, *Making Histories and Constructing Human Geographies: The Local Transformation of Practice, Power Relations, and Consciousness*, (Westview Press: Boulder, CO; 1990), p.10.

built landscape can begin to transform the cultural landscape.

This attitude could transform the practice of environmental landscape design by starting from the premise that the landscape is deeply relevant to our cultural and social practices. The key question becomes, "how can we tap into existing meanings, while changing them enough to transform people's understanding of the natural world?", rather than "what kind of didactic structures can we build into a passive landscape for individuals to receive?"

At present, phenomenological designers seem to be hoping that by sculpting the physical experience of a site, they can heighten a person's awareness of and, hopefully, connection to, the natural world around them. It is even more difficult to see how Jungian designers expect their work to have any kind of transformative effects at all, short of returning us to ancient relations with the natural world. In both cases, the intent of the design is to trigger a reaction inside the individual, whether in their perception or psyche, through the physical form of a design, rather than through any cultural associations built into it. In short, neither phenomenology nor Jungian theory view the built landscape as a source and embodiment of the attitudes people hold toward the environment. If instead, designers considered landscape's cultural roles, the experience of a landscape could be seen as an interaction between visitor and designer, landscape and culture. The whole framework of environmental design would change, for the first time making transformative landscapes a real possibility.

Conclusions: Future Directions

I have argued over the course of this thesis that contemporary attempts to transform attitudes towards the natural environment through design are relying on theoretical bases that hamstring their efforts. Neither phenomenology nor Jungian theory acknowledges the importance of culture and the social world. Nor are they philosophies that embrace fundamental change as a part of experience. Thus neither is conducive to making design decisions that exploit the expressive cultural power of landscape. I have argued that environmental designers must work from theoretical frameworks, such as social and cultural geography, that embrace the cultural aspects of landscape, and its concomitant potential to effect the values that shape it.

If we accept the idea that the ways in which we shape the physical landscape can begin to affect the cultural landscape, then transformative environmental design looks like much more of a possibility. But what would a culturally based environmental design look like? What do environmental designers need to do to unlock the cultural potentials of landscape? These questions land us squarely back in the lap of the legibility issue. I have argued throughout this thesis that basing arguments for a design's legibility on shared cultural context is more plausible than basing them on the rather abstract concept of a universal individual. It is important to be clear, though, that we do not know when, or even if, landscapes are meaningful to visitors in the ways a designer intended; when, that is, the cultural meanings a designer tries to attach to a landscape are successfully communicated to the people who visit her park. There have been no detailed studies to guide designers of how designed landscapes are received by the people who use them. It seems to me, though, that two basic principles have become evident in analyzing current work that we could use to shape more effective work in the future.

First of all, it is undeniable that landscapes hold cultural meaning for people who live in and use them, and that those meanings change over time. Anthropologists, geographers, and folklorists have demonstrated this again and again. This means that if environmental design-

ers pay attention to the cultural landscape surrounding a site, they have a rich design language to work from already in place. Secondly, learning and change are social processes: people do not transform themselves in a vacuum.¹ The best way to provoke change is to involve people in a practice that supports or requires it. Given this, it seems to me that there are at least three possible avenues for environmental designers to take.

One way to focus on cultural transformation would be to emphasize people's interaction with the landscape, to design so as to encourage active participation. Designers could introduce new awareness of, and concern for, the natural environment into the cultural sphere by making involvement with landscape a new, widespread social practice. Bonnie Sherk, for example, established a combination working farm and alternative art space in San Francisco.² Located on 5.5 acres of land next to and under a freeway, Sherk directed *Crossroads Community/*

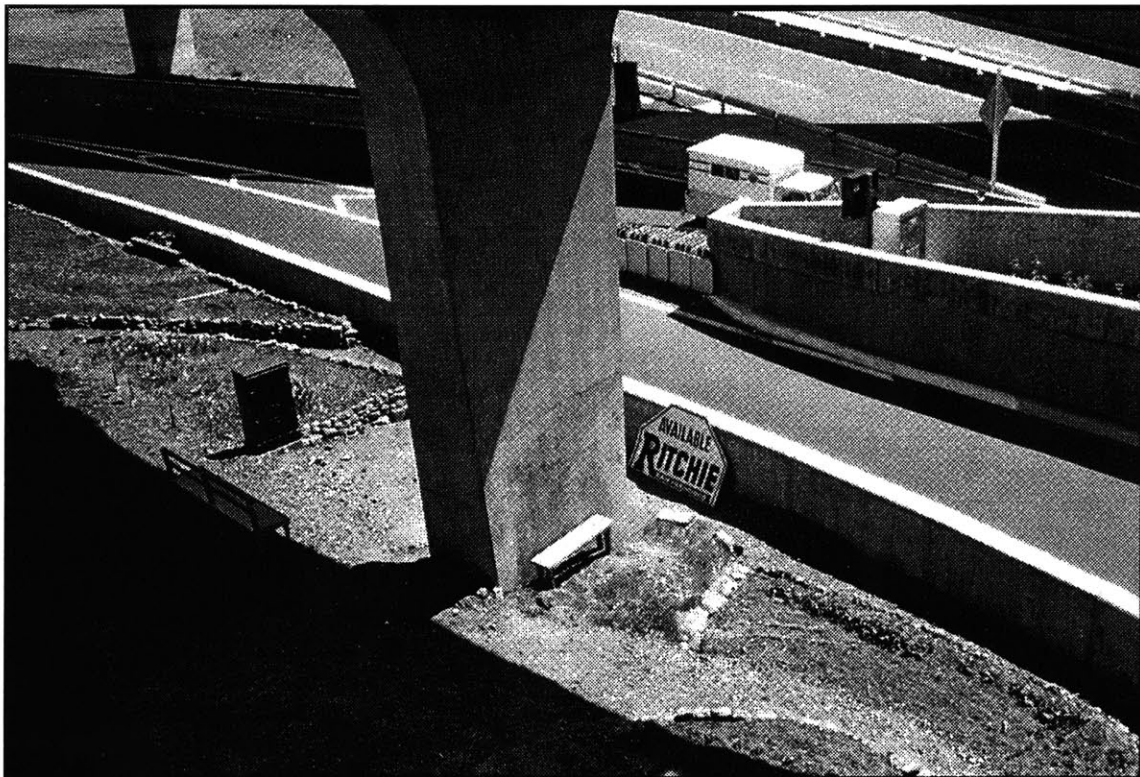


Fig. 20 Bonnie Sherk, *Crossroads Community/The Farm Before*

¹Jean Lave, *Cognition in Practice*, (Cambridge University Press: New York; 1988).

²Barbara Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies*, (Rizzoli: New York; 1992) p. 54.

The Farm (1974-80) as a multi-disciplinary environmental education center, integrating “art, agriculture, local culture, and ecology.” With its heavy emphasis on community involvement, *The Farm* provided a joining point between four different ethnic neighborhoods separated by the highway. *The Farm* offered, among other agricultural and artistic activities, “demonstration projects on responsible agriculture, children’s art and dance classes, [and] activities for psychiatric patients and senior citizens.”³ Sherk’s piece turned an ‘environmental and social artwork’ into a *de facto* community center and an ongoing performance art piece. While designing an agricultural landscape may not be the best model for changing attitudes about the natural world and its appropriate place to humanity’s needs, *The Farm* is an interesting example of an



Fig. 21 Bonnie Sherk, *Crossroads Community/The Farm*

expanded community role for landscape design.

A second possible direction for environmental design would be to focus on transforma-

³Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, (Pantheon Books: New York; 1983), pp.233-4.

tion by tapping into, and subtly resignifying, existing cultural interpretations of landscape. Designers could work on a very local scale with the relatively homogenous communities still found in some urban neighborhoods, often composed of recent immigrants. Another alternative would be to move to the opposite extreme and work with very general American values about the natural environment. One place to look for direction would be Leo Marx, whose work I discussed briefly at the end of the Introduction. His argument in "The American Ideology of Space" goes farther than a simple critique of the dominant American utilitarian, or "progressivist," as he calls it, attitude towards the natural world. Instead he argues that while there is a single dominant American ideology of space, it is characterized by the *tension* between the progressivist and pastoral visions of nature.

The pastoral vision, while distinctly less powerful than the progressivist, has nonetheless been favored by a substantial number of people, including many of America's most famous shapers of the built landscape: Olmsted, Sullivan, Wright, and Mumford among others. Among the colonists, pastoralists formed a large minority who believed that the New World provided "the first actual large-scale opportunity to realize the ancient dream of achieving genuine harmony between humankind and nature."⁴ Still embedded in American culture, pastoralism has traditionally provided a check against the ravages of progressivism. Designers who wished to resignify American attitudes toward the environment could start from pastoralist verbal and visual rhetoric.

A third way would be to combine the former two, involving people in transfiguring the meanings of a landscape. An excellent example of this is Lorna Jordan's *Waterworks Gardens*, part of the East Division Water Treatment Plant in Renton, Washington, less than half an hour from downtown Seattle. Originally hired to design on a much less ambitious scale, Jordan eventually convinced the engineers at the treatment plant to let her vastly expand the scope of their public art project to include functional parts of the water treatment system. She took bio-

⁴Leo Marx, "The American Ideology of Space," in Stuart Wrede and William Howard, eds., *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (H. N. Abrams, Museum of Modern Art: New York; 1991), p.66.

engineering classes at University of Washington, consulted with landscape architects, ecologists, and engineers, and then designed an eight-acre bio-filtration system to treat storm-water runoff and to function as a holding tank in the case of major storm events.

Combining ecological engineering with aesthetics and public access, Jordan has created a landscape that emphasizes public education by revealing the process of bio-filtration and encouraging people to get close and take a look. Instead of simply screening the water treatment plant from view, Jordan embraces the infrastructure, making it more ecologically sound, visible to the public, and also beautiful:⁵ The plant reports that they are now receiving requests from people who want to get *married* in the *Waterworks Gardens*.

Jordan's work fits into a long tradition of public art in Seattle and King County, includ-

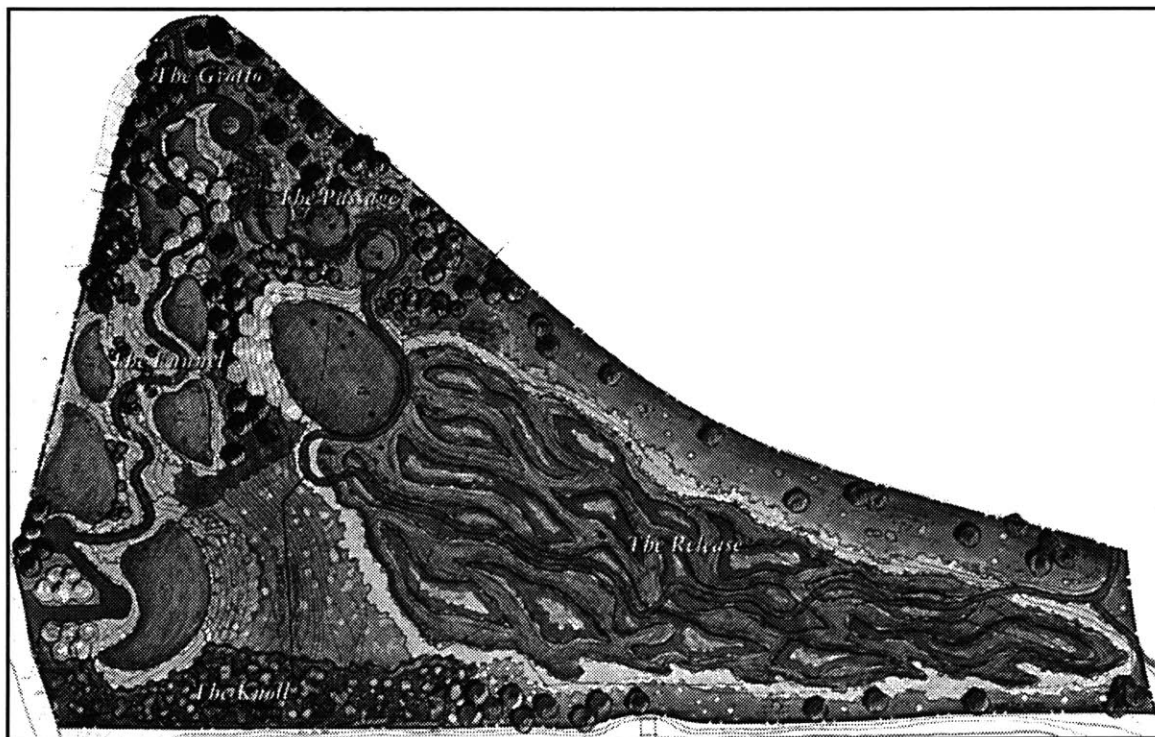


Fig. 22 Lorna Jordan, *Waterworks Gardens Site Plan*

ing the Robert Morris and Herbert Bayer projects described in Chapter One. In a recent cover story in *Landscape Architecture*, Michael Leccese points out that *Waterworks Gardens* goes, "be-

⁵Michael Leccese, "Cleansing Art," *Landscape Architecture* (January 1997) p.72.

yond these regional icons by creating a functioning public space with walking trails, imaginative seating areas, and a marsh rich with native plants and wildlife.”⁶ Jordan moves past Morris’ and Bayer’s projects in other ways as well. John Beardsley argues that Jordan’s innovation is in “her application of formal design principles to a place that generates habitat..., reconciling aesthetics with ecology. ‘Instead of relying specifically on the scientific model [of wetlands restoration]..., she’s drawn from garden history and mythology to create something that’s more visually interesting.’”⁷

Jordan’s design is intended to take visitors on a journey. Beginning on a cliff overlooking the plant and gardens (The Knoll, as Jordan calls it), visitors walk into the entry plaza through a colonnade of free-standing basalt columns reminiscent of the standing stones of ancient earth art into an entry plaza. The plaza, paved with red quartzite, is also home to a rusted grate set into the plaza floor which allows a view of the polluted water coursing into the

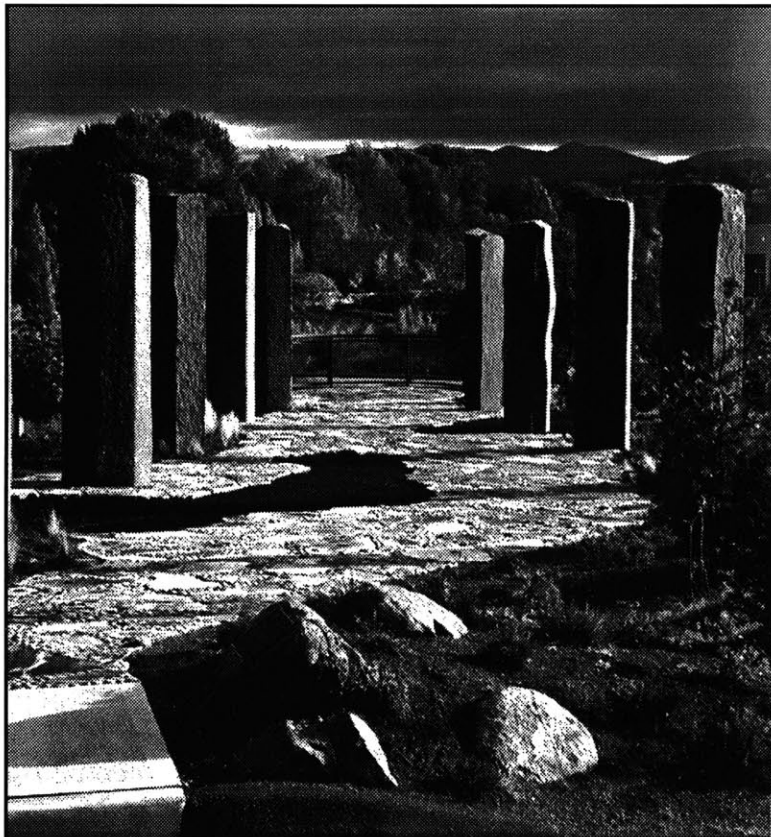


Fig. 23 Lorna Jordan, *The Entry Plaza at Waterworks Gardens*

facility. From there, a path winds down the hill past eleven leaf-shaped settlement ponds to The Grotto. Made from concrete hosed over rebar and shaped into wild, organically curving forms, the walls of The Grotto seem to be foaming up over the edge of an intricately tiled plaza. The mosaic covering the floor and benches of the plaza shows a seed sending vines out and up

⁶Op.Cit.

⁷Op.Cit.

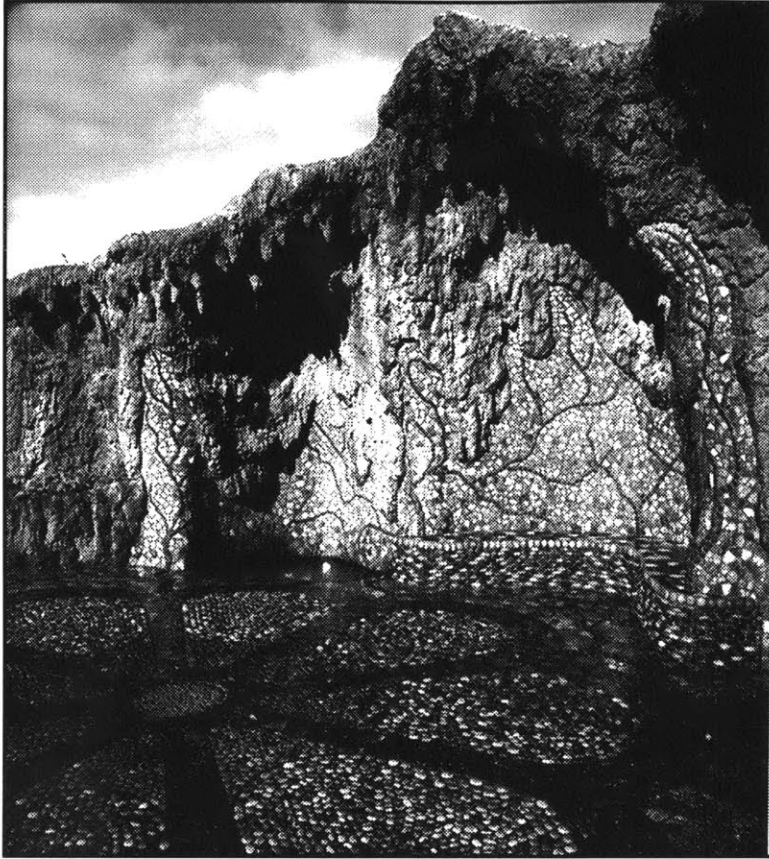


Fig. 24 Lorna Jordan, *The Grotto at Waterworks Gardens*

the walls. From there, the path moves along a curving row of poplars to an area Jordan refers to as The Release: the beginning of the braided marsh channels that complete the filtration process and release the clean water into a stream.

According to Leccese, Jordan has structured the landscape as a journey from the civilized to a wild. I think, though, that Jordan's refer-

ence to ancient humanity through the towering basalt columns makes it a slightly different journey: away from human technology as represented by the iron grating and hewn columns, and towards the more anarchic, seemingly 'untouched' landscape of the marsh. *Waterworks Gardens* as a whole are a fascinating and ironic combination of the artificial and the natural: native plants and wildlife are employed in an entirely human-made system of ponds and braided marsh channels; infrastructure (waste-water treatment no less!), that least romantic and most necessary of humanity's construction achievements, is provided by nature, the force infrastructure is supposed to overcome; clearly artificial forms representing nature (the seed pod and vines) seem to do battle in the Grotto with the organic forms of the clearly artificial concrete walls. The ironies of the project multiply on closer inspection.

Waterworks Gardens represents a fertile approach to environmental landscape design for several reasons. To begin with, there is the playful and inventive character of the design, which

is by all accounts a thoroughly engaging and interesting place to be. Secondly, the *Gardens* are an extremely successful combination of aesthetics, ecology, and education. Jordan takes on infrastructure as a site for landscape innovation, and in the process makes art into a working part of the landscape and a source of knowledge for visitors. Jordan's work suggests that infrastructure, as a meeting place between culture, technology, and environment, may in fact be one of the easier access points into cultural beliefs about our treatment of the environment. Lastly, the *Waterworks Gardens* make a serious attempt to rework cultural notions about the roles of technology and landscape, disturbing the seemingly fixed boundary between them with all the ironic reversals of nature and culture in the design.

All three of these approaches start from the premise of landscape's cultural importance and influence, rather than futilely attempting to inspire cultural change through purely perceptual or psychological channels. Presumably there are other potentially transformative avenues for designers to explore as well. The point is that they must acknowledge and work with the cultural meanings of landscape if their work is going to have any resonance on a cultural level. Only then will designers be able to create landscapes that are transformative in any serious way.

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