



Landscape Architecture
& the Blood of Philosopher Kings

CITY AS LANDSCAPE

A POST-POSTMODERN
VIEW OF DESIGN AND PLANNING

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THE BLOOD OF PHILOSOPHER-KINGS

Landscape design theory has been rotting away, peacefully, like a garden temple, since the close of the eighteenth century. The Director of Landscape Architecture Studies at Dumbarton Oaks gives poverty as the explanation:

This ignorance or cavalier disregard of history is part and parcel of a larger poverty of discourse; as Steven R. Krog has written, landscape architecture is 'a discipline in intellectual disarray' and with a 'deficiency of theoretical discourse'. Of all the modern arts none has displayed such a meagre command of analytical, including rudimentary philosophical, language as landscape studies. (Hunt, 1992)

Therefore:

... if you find yourselves in agreement with somebody about a beautiful design in landscape architecture, this happy accident can be explained in more cases than not by a shared class background or education rather than by any examinable philosophical criteria ... Modern designs, perhaps to escape this solipsism, have insisted both upon design as problem solving and specifically upon designing for groups or the community.

There is sufficient justice in these remarks, by John Dixon Hunt, for us to return to the Socratic questions that lie at the heart of any professional or artistic activity: 'What are the means?' and 'What are the ends?'. Spurning the trite answer that 'landscape architecture is what landscape architects do', it becomes necessary to review the history and philosophy of the art. According to

Hunt, it is essential to have an appreciation of what happened around 1800:

The crucial moment of modernism occurred not circa 1900 but rather one hundred years earlier ... The failure to identify and understand that watershed contributed substantially to the historical and theoretical inadequacies of those who prompted modernist landscape architecture.

Walker and Simo see the modern development of landscape architecture, after 1945, as 'classically tragic'. America had a great natural wilderness, limitless wealth, leaders, writers, gifted planners and highly talented designers. But, with notable exceptions, the result was progressive 'environmental impoverishment' (Walker and Simo, 1994). What went wrong?

DECAY

While not disagreeing with Hunt, I believe his analysis to be over-sophisticated and unbalanced in its emphasis on the role of landscape design as a fine art. Pure works of art do not have functions. Landscape designs, generally, do have functions, while they may also be works of art and significant interventions in the environment. It is easy to confuse these roles. Having spent much time working in design studios, I am very conscious of the dilemma in which designers without a workable theory are likely to find themselves. The journeyman designer is often, as Christopher Hussey wrote of Lancelot Brown, a practical man in the grip of a theory (Hussey, 1967). Good theories may lead to good designs. Bad theories

are a regular cause of bad designs. 'What to do' and 'how to do it' are the chief problems for landscape theory.

Stylistically, the landscape designer's nineteenth century dilemma may be likened to that of a young artist commissioned by a great nobleman to undertake a painting of his ancestral home in a far-away country. After an arduous journey and many perils, he arrives on site to find his patron's mansion decayed and overgrown. The artist has several choices: a painting of scrubby vegetation enlivened by fragments of fallen masonry; a swindling copy of another property; a reconstruction of the original property made without understanding the details or principles of its composition. After the crisis of circa 1800, each of these alternatives was attempted in those Western countries that came under the influence of the English landscape movement, which means all Western countries.

English landscape design developed within the Ideal Theory of Art. This derived from Aristotle's interpretation of Plato's Theory of Ideas. Everyday objects were seen as imperfect copies of universal Ideas, and the artist's job was to get as close as possible to the ideal. When an artist, Croton, was commissioned to produce a painting of Helen, he held an inspection of naked maidens, chose five of them and selected the most admirable points from each, to compose an ideal. Bellori, in 1664, conceived the true artist as a seer who gazes upon eternal verities and reveals them to mortals. Poussin and Claude applied this principle to landscape painting, seeking to represent ideal places. Reynolds, in his *Discourses*, argued that the artist's goal is to imitate nature. By nature, he meant universal nature: 'to paint particulars is not to paint nature, it is only to paint circumstances'. Painting ideal nature would, he believed, bring about moral improvements in the viewer.

Before 1800, landscape design was firmly based on the Ideal Theory of Art. Practitioners used the Neoplatonic axiom that 'art should imitate nature'. John Barrell, to whom Hunt directs our attention, gives an illuminating account of the theory of painting between the early eighteenth

and early nineteenth centuries (Barrell, 1986). It parallels, in several dimensions, the evolution of landscape theory. Shaftesbury, writing in 1711, was troubled by Plato's criticism of painting, that it tends to destroy the rational part of the mind. Shaftesbury believed that painting should have a public role in fostering virtuous behaviour. He thought history-painting the genre most likely to achieve this goal, because it can represent the universal ideals of virtue and heroic action. A century later, after 1800, it was thought that the painter's aim should be to engender private satisfaction, rather than public virtue. The general interpretation of the Neoplatonic axiom, that 'art should imitate nature', had changed. Sir Joshua Reynolds, in the *Discourses* delivered to the Royal Academy between 1769 and 1789, held to the classic, but waning, eighteenth century view:

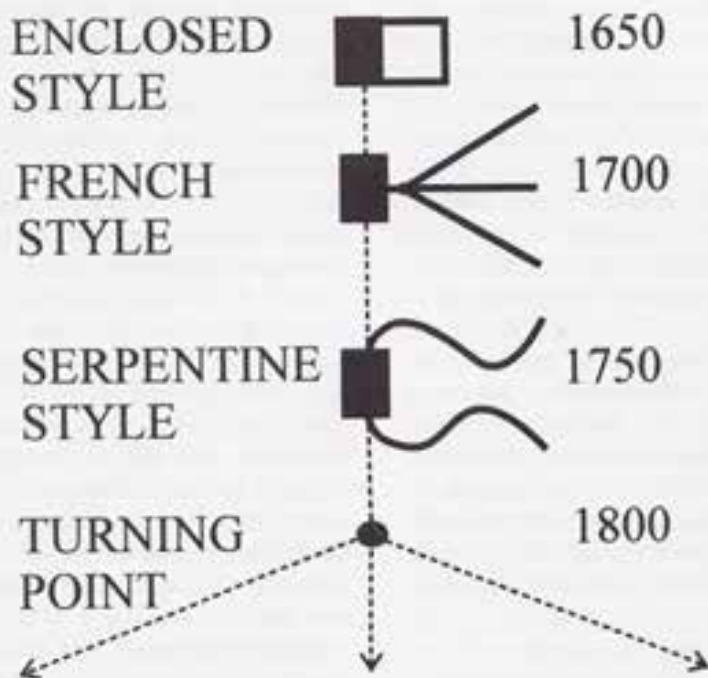
... the great style in art, and the most PERFECT IMITATION OF NATURE, consists in avoiding the details and peculiarities of particular objects. (Barrell, 1986)

William Hazlitt, in a group of essays published circa 1816, held a contrary view, that one can show general truths only by representing the particulars:

... the highest perfection of the art depends, not on separating, but on uniting general truths and effect with individual distinctness and accuracy. (Barrell, 1986)

Both writers believed that artists should 'imitate nature', but they differed in their interpretations of 'nature'. For Reynolds, nature meant the ideal world of the Platonic forms. For Hazlitt, nature was far closer to the world of empirical reality, which included 'both masses and details'. Their interpretations are the consequence of an epochal swing, from classicism to romanticism, from rationalism to empiricism, from universalism to individualism. The change caused a profound crisis for landscape theory.

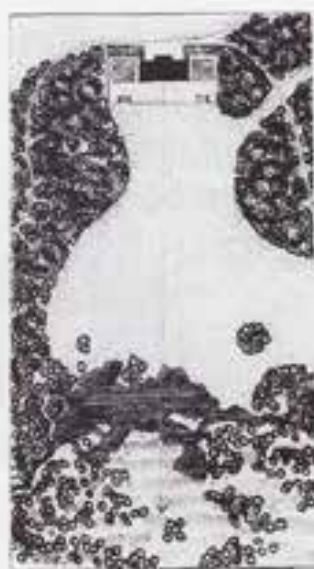
The Neoplatonic axiom had borne especially rich fruit for landscape design during the eighteenth century. As the predominant interpretation of 'nature' changed, the arts of garden and land-



**IRREGULAR
STYLE**



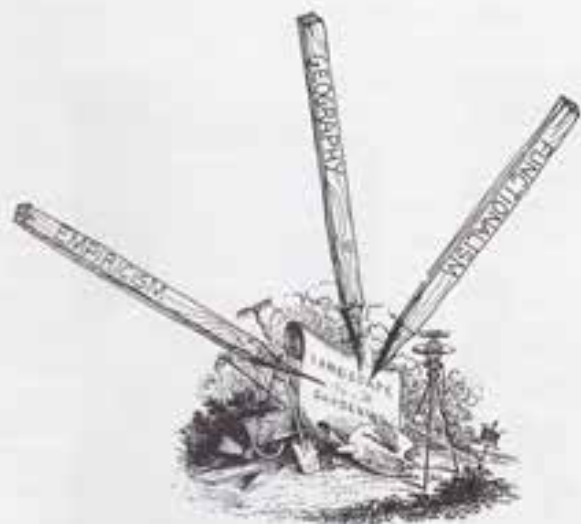
**MIXED
STYLE**



**TRANSITION
STYLE**

1 The Great Turning Point in English landscape design.

scape design could not do other than change with them. Plan styles became progressively less regular, as shown in the upper part of Figure 1. The eighteenth century was a period of dynamic stylistic evolution. In 1700, the predominant sense of 'nature' in garden and landscape design derived from Plato's Theory of Forms. 'Nature' meant 'essence', as it still does when we speak of 'the nature of the case'. Imitating nature meant *mimesis* of the Platonic forms. As the most perfect forms were considered to be the sphere, the circle, the cube and the square, it was necessary to base the most perfect gardens on these shapes. Honselaarsdijk, in Holland, was the finest flower of Platonic idealism in garden design. In 1700, any young man setting out to 'imitate nature' knew that he must look 'upwards' to the world of ideas. This provided an eminently workable theory. During the nineteenth century it suffered fatal blows.



2 Three stakes, driven into the heart of landscape theory.

THE THREE STAKES

A first stake was driven into the throbbing heart of landscape theory by changes in the Neoplatonic axiom that 'art should imitate nature' (Figure 2). So long as 'nature' had meant the world of ideas,

the axiom worked satisfactorily. By the end of the eighteenth century, when 'nature' came to mean 'the natural world', as it usually does today, it became ridiculous to make gardens that imitated nature. To have done so would have meant filling gardens with weeds, rocks, broken branches and wild animals. The French Neoplatonist, Quatremère de Quincy, declared that if the objective of landscape gardening was to imitate wild nature herself, then landscape design could not be admitted to 'the circle of the fine arts' (Quatremère de Quincy, 1837). The great ship of Neoplatonism had run aground in a garden of rocks. The practical men had no theory. For landscape designers, this was the immediate and practical cause of the watershed that Hunt identifies. Three main styles evolved from the dilemma, as shown in the lower part of Figure 1. Another possible way out would have been to interpret 'nature' in yet another way, and to have represented the individual's 'inner nature' in gardens. Hunt would like to have seen a 'marvellous flourishing of ad hoc, idiosyncratic, or vernacular gardens' (Hunt, 1992). Some owner-designers, like the Earl of Shrewsbury at Alton Towers and James Bateman at Biddulph Grange, walked down this path. But most professional designers remained lost in the theoretical maze.

A second stake was driven into the weakened heart of landscape theory by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, when they inadvertently chose landscape architecture as a professional title (Turner, 1990). Their choice would not have mattered, but for the fact that the predominant use of the word 'landscape' was changing, as had the predominant use of 'nature'. In 1860, a landscape was still, more or less, an ideal place. By the twentieth century, it had become any place at all that results from 'shaping processes and agents'. When the picturesque theorists of the 1790s spoke of 'making a landscape', the word represented a Neoplatonic ideal. When the word 'landscape' was adopted by geologists and geographers, it came to mean 'the product of topographic evolution'. If the 'landscape' in 'landscape architecture' is understood in a geographical sense, instead of a Neoplatonic

sense, then the profession's title becomes a patent absurdity: as tyrannical as it is sacrilegious as it is preposterous. Tyrannical, because it requires a despot's power to control the environment in any way that resembles an architect's power to control the production of a building. Sacrilegious, because God, or Mother Nature, is the architect of the visible world. Preposterous, because it is not given to humans to wield such awesome power.

A third stake was driven into the now-rotting cadaver of landscape theory by the advance of scientific functionalism during the twentieth century. Shaking off the historicist styles of the nineteenth century, architects and other designers came to see design as 'a problem-solving activity'. 'Form follows function', they proclaimed. Such slogans are still heard echoing betwixt blank walls and blank faces in the design studios of the world. Landscape architects were attracted to the new rationalism, but faced two immediate puzzles: What were the problems to be solved? Where were the functions to be followed? This is when the 'desire line' assumed such portentous eminence in landscape teaching and practice. Too often, the 'function' of a space was conceived merely as a route from an origin to a destination. The 'problem', therefore, was to find an alignment that pedestrians might wish to follow. Not too difficult, though many got it wrong.

Having dealt with desire lines, landscape architects began to look for other 'problems' to solve. They discovered needs for 'shelter', 'enclosure' and 'visual screens'. This was no basis for a fine art, an applied art, or any other kind of art. Should anyone believe the approach can produce art, let them look through a book of modern design details. Theodore Walker's ever-popular *Site Design and Construction Detailing* (Walker, 1992) is a good example. The details are functional in the worst sense of the word, though one has no assurance that they actually work any better than the twentieth century buildings that are ridiculed by critics of modernism. Even if they do function, the majority of the details are heartless, soulless, plain, vacant and even downright ugly to the non-professional eye. They are

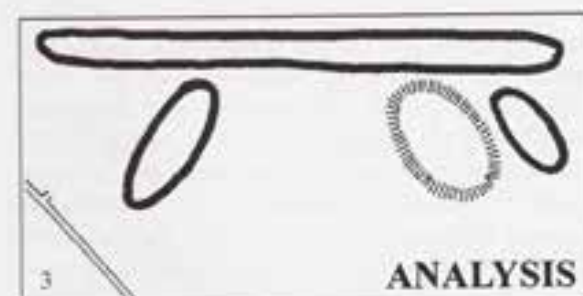
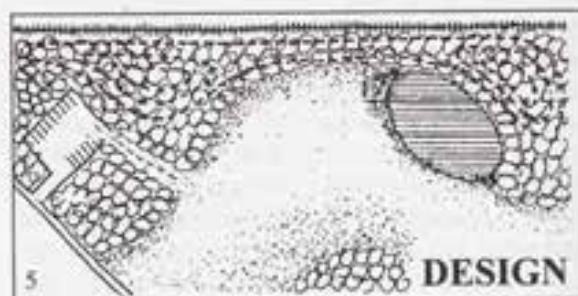
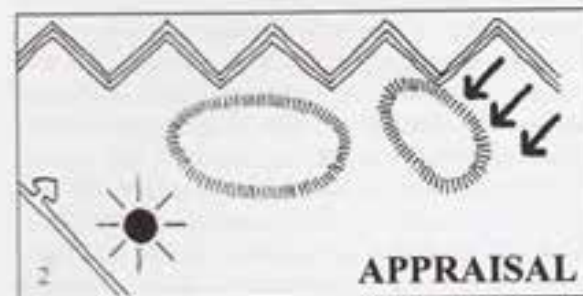
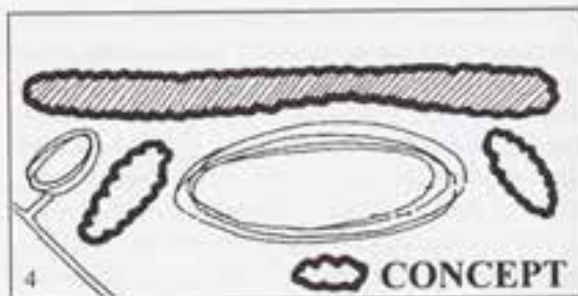
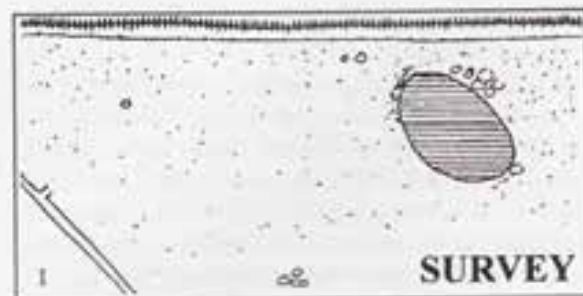
the outdoor equivalent of hotels in the International Style.

The survey-analysis-design (SAD) procedure is an aspect of functionalism that is well known inside the design professions but poorly understood by outsiders (Figure 3). It would be advantageous if experienced planners and designers were to write about it, as Sturt wrote of the wheelwright's craft. Future historians will have to understand this procedure if they are to understand twentieth century cities. The SAD method of planning began with Patrick Geddes. As a scientist, a sociologist and a geographer, he was disenchanted with the engineers' and architects' approaches, which saw city planning as a technical exercise. Take the example of a new street. To the engineer, it was a traffic artery. To the architect, it could also be a visual axis. To Geddes, it should be a vital component of civic structure, affecting regional development, history, culture and everything else. Geddes therefore required a full survey and analysis as a prelude to plan-making. Undoubtedly, he was correct. The problems arose when SAD came to be used by less-enlightened people. Engineers were delighted with the SAD method. Before planning a new street, they surveyed and analysed the existing traffic. If vehicular flow was surveyed at twice the volume of existing street capacity, they doubled the size of the street. Similarly, architects surveyed the function of a building before producing a plan. This led to the notorious idea of a house as a 'machine for living'.

Lewis Mumford, who admired Geddes, recognized Ian McHarg's *Design with Nature* (McHarg, 1971) as a scion of Geddes' *Cities in Evolution* (Geddes, 1915), and agreed to write an introduction to the book. In it, Mumford praises the empirical foundation of McHarg's ecological method:

He seeks, not arbitrarily to impose design, but to use to the fullest the potentialities – and with them, necessarily, the restrictive conditions – that nature offers.

As the ecological method rested on 'imitating nature', McHarg was led to believe that 'any man,



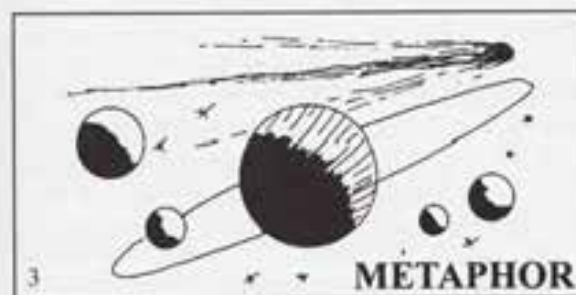
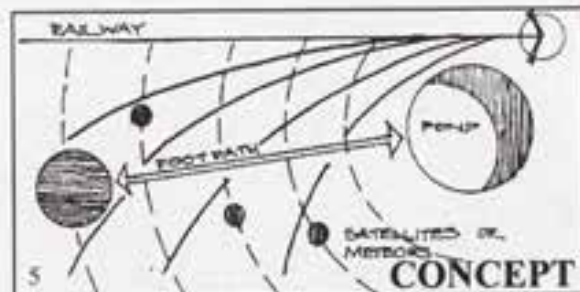
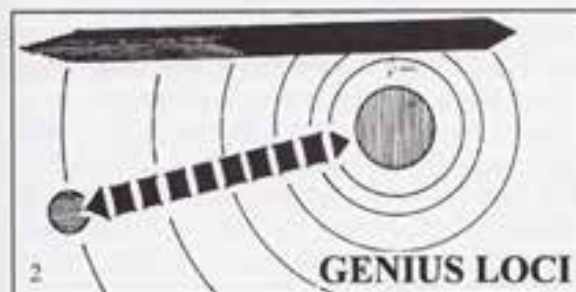
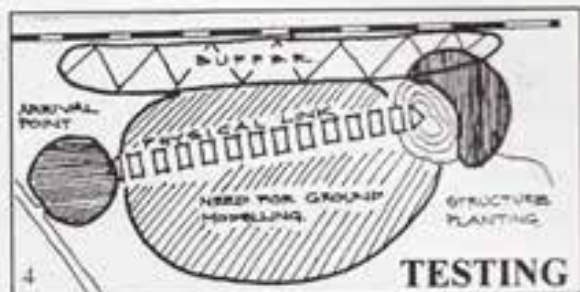
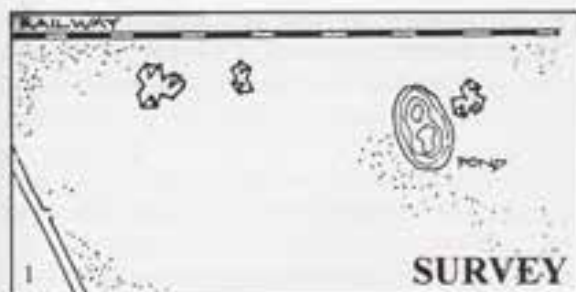
3 The modernist landscape architect's SAD method.

assembling the same evidence, would come to the same conclusion' (McHarg, 1971). This is naked determinism, red in tooth and claw. Much as I admire Geddes, Mumford and McHarg too, this particular claim appears wholly misleading. The two excellent features of McHarg's method are his single-topic analytical drawings and his Suitability Maps. Conventional Master Plans look to some point in the distant future. They are incomplete for a quarter of a century and out of date thereafter. McHarg's Suitability Maps are modest by comparison: they imply a desire to guide the future, not to exert control.

The deductive aspect of McHarg's ecological method needs to be reconsidered. If landscape

design is, to any degree, a fine art, then it simply cannot use a deterministic methodology. Neither ecological determinism nor any other kind of determinism will suffice. Davies and Shakespeare (Davies and Shakespeare, 1993), after working on a project in Paris, declared that:

Landscape design is a form of artistic expression. Designers need freedom to explore the realm of the imagination . . . We believe the Billancourt project was a triumph for the use of metaphor . . . By abandoning the SAD method, the groups were able to determine the direction of their schemes very early on. Predictability was broken by taking this high risk route. Ian



4 A metaphorical design procedure (by Rob Shakespeare).

McHarg might have commented that 'every group assembling the same evidence has come to a completely different conclusion'.

Like John Dixon Hunt, they overemphasize the role of landscape design as a fine art. The above quotation highlights the role of metaphor and gives tertiary patterns a key role in the design process. This does not detach the process from the existing site but it does effect a considerable widening of horizons, towards the world of ideas. It also rests upon inductive logic at least as much as upon deductive logic. The relationship between the SAD and metaphorical approaches is shown by a comparison of Figure 3 with Figure 4.

Both begin with the existing site, but only the SAD procedure is constrained by the existing site. The SAD procedure derives a design from a small input of information, because the design process is limited by the boundary of the existing site. Metaphorical approaches draw in more information.

Another problem for the survey-analysis-design method is that it does not accord with our knowledge of how designers actually operate. Schemes often spring into designers' minds at an early stage. After being recorded on the back of an envelope, or a wine-stained table napkin, the scheme is developed over months and years. The

process is not linear: it follows different paths. When experienced practitioners recommend the SAD method, it is usually a case of 'Do as I say, not as I do'.

RESURRECTION

So how can landscape theory be resurrected, and with it, perhaps, the arts of garden and landscape design? Hunt (1992) has three suggestions, each of which has merit. First, designers must bother to find out 'what people really want of private or public gardens'. Second, they should 'establish a new agenda of meanings'. Third, they should 'exploit locality' as 'some of the most intriguing recent designs' have done. I arrived at not dissimilar conclusions by a different route. Using the terminology proposed in a previous essay, my version of the points can be phrased as follows. First, designers should respond to human patterns. Second, designers should respond to the sorts of criteria and patterns that influence artists, writers and poets. Third, designers should respond to natural patterns. Hoping the reader will pardon a little autobiography, I shall explain how I arrived at these conclusions.

My interest in landscape theory began at a party, in 1969. Frank Clark, my teacher and a pioneer of landscape studies in Britain, told me that it would be of great benefit if someone could devise a better name than landscape architecture for the profession we had adopted. 'Nobody understands us' he complained. I set out, working backwards, to discover how this wretched term had come into use, and if there were any alternatives. It did not take me long to discover that every member of the International Federation of Landscape Architects who uses the term does so in consequence of the capricious decision by Olmsted and Vaux to adopt the title 'landscape architects' in 1863. It then emerged that all those Americans who claim Olmsted as the inventor of the term are misinformed (Turner, 1982). It was devised in 1828 by Gilbert Laing Meason, a friend of Sir Walter Scott. Meason used the term to praise the

type of *architecture* that is found in the great Italian landscape paintings (Meason, 1828). His book is illustrated by engravings of architectural drawings culled from works by the great painters of Italy.

I then spent some time trying to devise a better title for the landscape profession. My favoured proposal was 'topist' (one who makes places). But then my historical investigations resumed, now into the meaning of the word 'landscape'. I found that it had dropped out of Middle English but had been re-introduced from Dutch in the sixteenth century, as a painters' term, linked to the Ideal, Neoplatonic, theory of art. A 'landscape' was a special kind of place: an *ideal* place. The theory derives from Plato, who, believing the Form of The Good is the proper goal of human endeavour in life as in art, argued that philosopher-kings are the people best suited to rule society. Plato's Theory of Forms, or Ideas, led directly to the Neoplatonic axiom that 'art should imitate nature'.

I was not sorry to detect the blood of philosopher-kings coursing in the profession's ancestry, and became convinced that 'landscape', correctly understood, should be the profession's headword. *The aim of landscape design is to make good outdoor places.* A full appreciation of this point can be the starting point for a revival of landscape theory. But exponents of the art should work as practical philosophers, not philosopher-kings. Kingship is a dead idea from a bygone age. Professionals can be king-like only when someone entrusts them with a task, not by virtue of their qualifications. Offering to make a 'landscape' or a 'garden' is a special kind of offer to the public. Many professions use words in specialized ways. 'Invest', for example, means 'clothe' in the College of Heralds, 'lay siege to' on the field of battle, and 'employ money for profit' on Wall Street. When used by landscape-makers, the word 'landscape' has a favourable evaluative connotation: it means a good place, not just any place, not the end product of topographic evolution. Words have to be used with precision. You would hardly place your spare funds with an investment consultant if you thought the cash

would be spent laying siege to a city. Potential clients, seeing advertisements for 'landscape architecture', may be deluded into thinking that their funds will be used for tyranny, blasphemy or absurdity.

Had Frank Clark lived longer, my answer to his plea for a 'better' name would have been that it is only necessary to define a professional usage for the word 'landscape'. After that, the profession should adopt 'design', instead of 'architecture', as the most general name for the art it promotes. This would, at least, enable the landscape profession to understand its own objectives; explaining them to the public would still be a problem.

If you agree that the aim of landscape design is to make good places, the next task is to determine what characteristics make places good. They are many. The great periods in the history of garden and landscape design have been those when designers have reached out and forged links with artists, scientists and philosophers: Rome in the first and sixteenth centuries, Japan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, France and Holland in the seventeenth century, England in the eighteenth century, the Americas in the twentieth century. The long drab interludes have been when one or other interest group, usually horticulturalists, has made design a province of their own domain.

PLURALISM AND PATTERNS

The poverty of discourse that Hunt identifies is paralleled by a poverty of inspiration. But how can the world of ideas be fused once more with that of garden and landscape design? How can art be married to function? The worlds of ideas and of functions have become so vast that no individual can know very much. J.C. Loudon, in the 1820s, was expert on gardening, architecture, horticulture and agriculture, not to mention political economy and philosophy. In the 1990s, one could hardly pretend to more than a patchy expertise in a minor department of one of these disciplines. I believe there are two ways forward: to downplay the role of the individual in land-

scape design and to up-play the use of patterns. Patterns should become what the computer fraternity knows as a data interchange format.

In the 1820s, the members of an artisan family could have built their own home, grown their own food and made their own clothes. A small hamlet might also have had the capacity to make the necessary tools and obtain its raw materials from the locality. Today, we have a much wider net of economic interdependence. There are many countries that cannot make vital categories of product, such as aircraft. This state of affairs would not be possible without a currency. Nor could the computers that handle information flows operate without data interchange formats. The broadly based arts, including garden and landscape design, require a currency to facilitate information interchange. Patterns, as proposed in a previous essay, can perform this role. They have a long and honourable place in the history of design. The entire industrial process is based on their use. So was 'architecture without architects' in pre-modern societies. So was the production of most housing in nineteenth century Europe.

Patterns can be a currency for environmental planning and design that stands comparison with the use of money in economic exchange. Markets bring knowledge and skills together. Instead of each manufacturer having to perform each stage of the manufacturing process, components and skills are purchased from other organizations. Instead of there being One Right Way to manufacture widgets, set by the Central Widget Committee, all manufacturers devise their own improvements. For markets to function, there must be a currency with the following roles.

- **Standard of value.** Money is the standard of value for industrial products. Patterns could be a standard of value for planning and design. For example, an overall map of agricultural value can be used to judge the relative quality of individual land parcels.
- **Medium of exchange.** Money facilitates the exchange of goods and services in an economy. Patterns facilitate the exchange of information about places. For example, when vehicular and

pedestrian movement patterns have been mapped they can be compared.

- **Store of wealth.** Money can be used as a store of financial wealth. Patterns can be used to keep records of the value that exists in places. For example, when aquifer-recharge areas have been mapped they can be protected.

The first patterns recognized by a newborn child may be those of hunger and thirst. As the child develops, more and more patterns come to be known. Skill in pattern recognition is one of the most central human capabilities, and one of the most difficult for computers to replicate. The most able people are often those with the greatest skill in identifying, manipulating and creating patterns, be they formed by words, numbers, musical notes, human behaviour or visual images. These patterns are akin to universals. Thinking about design, four groups of pattern were discussed in the previous essay: primary/natural patterns; secondary/human patterns; tertiary/aesthetic patterns; quaternary/archetypal patterns. Patterns therefore enable *ideas* of nature, art and human life to be restored to the foreground position that they once enjoyed in design circles. This was before the advance of rationalism and of scientific empiricism pushed them out and cluttered the foreground with spurious 'facts'. Landscape design is a process of embedding new ideas into old landscapes. Nature is not a white sheet at the outset. A 'landscape design', like a 'town plan' is but a small step in a cycle of perpetual change. It can never be complete.

Human use is fantastically varied, but falls into patterns. Primitive man made paths through the wilderness. Modern man follows desire lines through the urban jungle, which we pave. Yet it would be impossible to produce a complete list of functions, even for a small outdoor space. Backyards are used for sunbathing, snowballing, outdoor cooking, pets, nature watching, repairing gadgets, hobbies, entertaining friends, growing plants, children's play, storage, exercise, solitude, and much else besides.

Tastes differ and tastes change. Theories evolve. We all have conceptions of what fine art is, and

few would dispute their importance to the applied arts. Landscape designers must learn to conduct a trade in ideas, for which they need a currency. Patterns can become that currency. Landscape design is a wide-reaching activity, with multiple inputs, hosts of outputs, and a need for procedures to guide the efforts of practitioners. The concept of pattern deserves a central position in the designer's trade, but the designer is no author-god.

Claims to 'authorship' of a landscape design carry little conviction: the climate will be unchanged; the land will have existed for billions of years; the fauna and flora evolved long before man; many other designers may have worked on the site; several clients may have dictated the design; most of the component artefacts will have been made by others. What does our modern 'designer' claim to have done? Not much. But modest changes to the landscape can result in valuable improvements. Designers should not worry about the use of patterns compromising their individuality.

DESIGN SEQUENCES

The modernist design procedure can be described in the terminology of patterns. It made use of natural, social and aesthetic patterns, but only within the locale of the existing site. Natural patterns were the focus of the survey stage. Social patterns had some importance at the analysis stage. A creative leap was then permitted, to produce a design, which resulted in aesthetic patterns. Ideas were largely excluded. The conceptual boundaries of the survey-analysis-design (SAD) procedure were curtailed by the site and by the client's functional requirements. As deductive logic was strongly emphasized, the SAD procedure took on a sad inevitability, like the interpretation of the scientific method on which it was based. Using patterns can place ideas at the centre of the design process.

Walter De Maria's 'Lightning Field', illustrated on the front cover of John Beardsley's *Earthworks and Beyond* (Beardsley, 1984), is a sublime

project that illustrates a different design procedure. Beardsley relates that De Maria

wanted a place where one could be alone with a trackless earth and an overarching sky to witness their potent interchange through apparently wanton electrical discharge. (Beardsley, 1984)

Note that he 'wanted a place': a vision of how the work should look led to the selection of the site. The image came first. This is not the modernist procedure, at all. From Beardsley's account, the design process went idea-design-analysis-survey, as shown in the accompanying diagrams. It began with an aesthetic pattern, made by a flash of lightning (Figure 5). De Maria then searched for a natural pattern – a landform where 'one could be alone with a trackless earth' (Figure 6). The means of attracting lightning to the earth was a grid of 400 stainless steel poles (Figure 7), which could serve as an archetypal pattern for similar projects. The result was unquestionably a work of fine art (Figure 8), because it has no function. Social patterns had no place in the design process.



5 The pattern made by a flash of lightning.

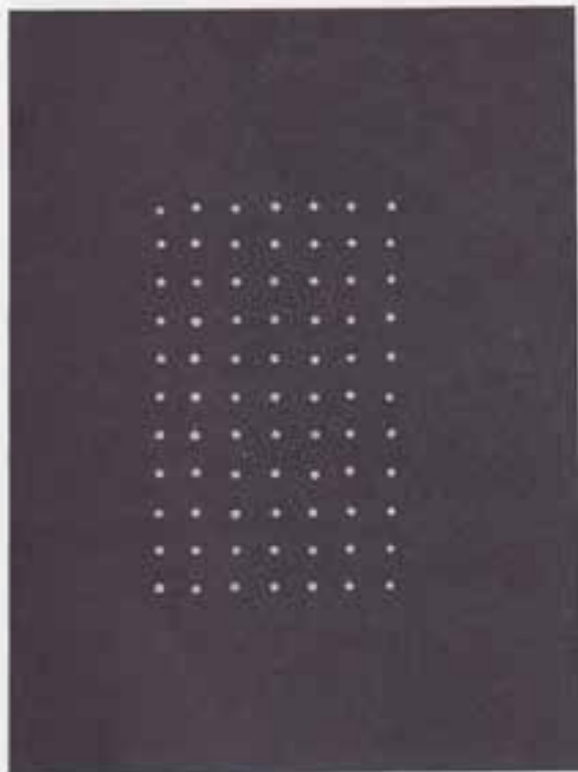


6 The pattern of the natural landscape.

Other projects in Beardsley's book do have functions. One of my favourites is the 'Mill Creek Canyon Earthworks' by Herbert Bayer:

Development of land along the creek had resulted in an excessive flow of water during periods of heavy rain, and the city needed a way of containing it and allowing it to recede slowly through the town. Bayer's design provided them with a high berm that stops the water. (Beardsley, 1984)

This reads like a landscape architecture programme, but the outcome (Figure 9) has a cosmic interest, reminiscent of Davies and Shakespeare's diagram. There is 'a bridge that is poised between a berm and a conical mound', another earthen ring 'seemingly suspended in a circular pool of water', and a 'high berm topped with another cone'. It is an abstract composition, dominated by



7 An archetype for fields of lightning.

a tertiary pattern that plainly derives from the artist's imagination, not from the existing site and not from the client's programme. A Design Idea occupies pride of place in the design procedure, as the Neoplatonists would have wished. It is even based on circles, which Neoplatonists considered the most perfect forms. Beardsley believes that 'if art is thoroughly subsumed under other disciplines or a completely functional intent, it is bound to lose some of its particular magic' (Beardsley, 1984). Perhaps the magic can survive when an artistic idea is accorded a high and privileged position in the design process.

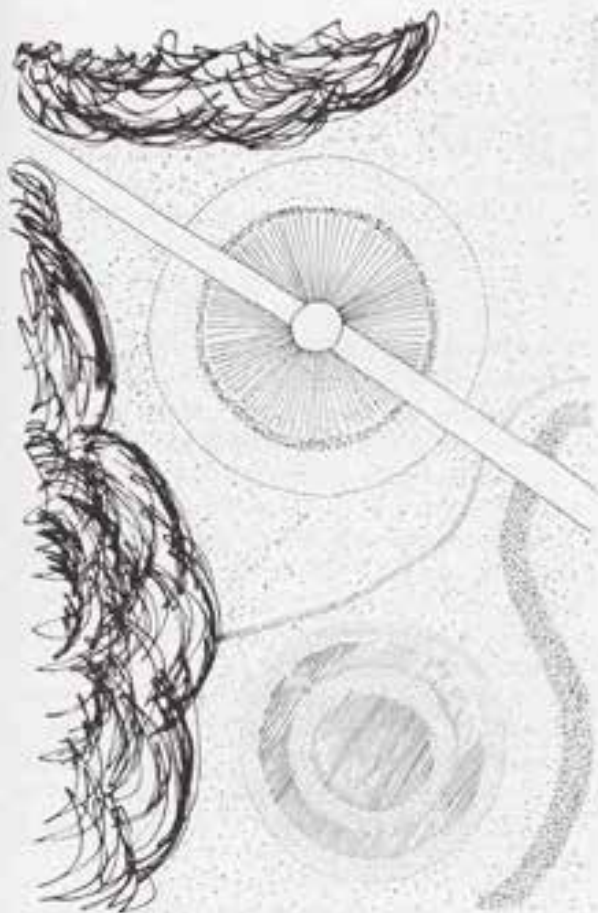
To professional designers, the least satisfactory way of producing a design is to start with quaternary patterns. Architects scorn books of house plans. Landscape architects may have an even lower opinion of the 'typical plans' that appear in popular gardening books and magazines. But most of the world's buildings are not designed by



8 A diagram of the Lightning Field design.

architects, even in advanced industrial countries, and most of the world's design decisions are not taken by trained designers. Quaternary patterns have great value for makers of objects and places who have not undergone a formal design education. Their use was crucial to the craft design methods that preceded the modern fad for design-by-drawing. Modern, in this context, means post-Renaissance. As discussed in an earlier essay, Alexander's pattern language begins with quaternary/archetypal patterns.

Although it was not recorded on paper, the waggon-builder possessed a complete *pattern* for his work, encompassing all the technical, environmental, aesthetic, and functional criteria for 'farm waggon or dung-cart, barley-roller, plough, water-barrel, or what not'. The shapes he followed were 'imposed upon us by the nature of the soil in this or that farm' or by 'the gradient of this or that hill'. Each waggon 'grew into a thing of beauty,



9 Mill Street Canyon has a cosmic interest.

comparable to a fiddle or boat'. This is how most design has always been done, in most countries in most historical periods. To think the craft method obsolete would be wild folly. For outdoor steps, the craftsman's pattern that twice the riser plus the tread should be 450 mm continued to be taught in modernist design schools, regardless of the increased size of the human body. Designs should be people-specific and place-specific.

CONCLUSION

We can now return to the Socratic questions that were posed at the outset of this essay, and offer Platonic answers. In landscape design, what are

the ends and what are the means? The ends can be defined with confidence: 'The aim of landscape design is to make good places'. The means vary. Sometimes, the old 'modernist' survey-analysis-design procedure will be best. At other times, even older art-based and craft-based approaches will be correct. On yet other projects, a post-Postmodern approach may be used, celebrating the death of *the* designer, beginning at any point, concluding at any point, taking advantage of CAD and GIS, allowing forms to come before functions, considering each layer as an independent design, celebrating design clashes as one does the meeting of wind and water, water and rock, heat and cold, sun and rain. How does one choose between the alternative means? One consults the Genius of the Place. She has to be consulted. She need not be obeyed. Practical philosophers require sympathetic oracles.

The pattern approach to landscape design is put forward as a way of dealing with the multiple inputs and multiple outputs that should characterize landscape design. It uses both inductive and deductive logic. The former works from the particular to the general, to identify patterns. The latter works from the general to the particular, making use of patterns. Inputs can be brought into relationship with each other by being represented on pattern diagrams. Alexander states that 'If you can't draw a diagram, it isn't a pattern' (Alexander, 1979) Outputs can be read as different sets of patterns. Instead of the project being a Master Plan by an author-god, it becomes a feast for the viewer. Just as one can read a novel from the viewpoints of literary style, philosophical outlook, characterization, narrative or social history, so one should be able to read a plan from the viewpoints of colour harmony, ornament, composition, proportion, social value, conservation value, symbolism, mythology, narrative. Any of them or all of them. It is a layered approach to design, and it fits remarkably well with the layering capabilities of computer-aided design (CAD) and geographical information systems (GIS). Ideas, representable by patterns, should lie at the intellectual heart of landscape design and planning.

CITY AS LANDSCAPE

A POST-POSTMODERN VIEW OF
DESIGN AND PLANNING

TOM TURNER

A new age of planning is on the horizon. Taking multi-layered views and using geographical information systems (GIS), designers, planners and community groups can make specialist plans: the city of tomorrow will shine as a feast of landscapes.

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Tom Turner, a town planner and landscape architect, has written previous books on *English Garden Design* (1986) and *Landscape Planning* (1987). He teaches at the University of Greenwich, is Chairman of the Landscape Institute's Open Space Policy Group and has written a report on *Towards a green strategy for London* (1991).

*Alexander was right:
a city is not a tree.
It is a landscape.*

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