

I'm not there: on the *ex-situ* experience of landscape architecture in texts

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An understanding of the relationship between text and landscape can benefit those who design and envisage landscapes to create places – physical or imagined – that have meanings beyond the veneer. It is argued that contemporary landscape architectural practice and theory often perpetuate the nihilistic world view; outdoor spaces are designed and experienced as being *thin*. Following this, it is suggested that a cause might be the strict use of a graphic notation system for design development and communication; outdoor spaces are designed with and represented as mere pictures. This paper serves as a reflection on the author's use of text as a non-graphic tool for the design of various leftover outside spaces in the inner city of Pretoria in *stadskrif* [city text], a Master's degree dissertation. Based on the results of that study, it was concluded that the use of text has limited value in the design process, but promises much use in the extension of the virtual existence of landscapes. This concept is expounded by briefly discussing one pre-modern and one modern text that serve as historic examples of the reciprocal text-landscape relationship, respectively Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* [Romance of the Rose] and *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* [Strife for love in a dream] that was possibly written by Francesco Colonna. The paper concludes with a statement of suspicion that the experience of landscape when outside the physical place, but inside its literary incarnation, is more fulfilling and in a sense more real than when being there, and *vice versa*.

Keywords: landscape architecture theory, landscape representation, *sehnsucht*, Medieval garden design, Renaissance landscape design, *Roman de la Rose*, *Hypnerotomachia poliphili*

'n Begrip van die verband tussen teks en landskap kan diegene wat landskappe skep en verbeeld baat om plekke te skep – fisies of verbeeld – met betekenis dieper as die blote skyn. Dit word voorgehou dat eietydse landskapargitektuur-praktyk en teorie die nihilistiese wereldbeskouing voortdra; buiteruimtes word as *dun* ontwerp en ervaar. Hierop word voorgestel dat 'n moontlike oorsaak die uitsonderlike gebruik van 'n grafiese notasiestelsel vir die ontwerp en voorstelling daarvan mag wees; buiteruimtes word as blote prente ontwerp en voorgestel. Hierdie artikel dien hierop as 'n terugblik op die outeur se gebruik van teks as 'n nie-grafiese ontwerphulpmiddel in die ontwerp van talle oorskietruimtes in die middestad van Pretoria in die Meestersgraad verhandeling *stadskrif*. Die uitkoms van daardie studie had die gevolgtrekking genoep dat teks 'n beperkte rol in die ontwerp van ruimtes kan speel, maar belowend vir die uitbreiding van die virtuele werklikheid van landskappe is. Hierdie gedagte word uitgebrei deur kortliks 'n pre-moderne en 'n moderne voorbeeld van die wedergewende teks-landskapverhouding te bespreek, onderskeidelik Guillaume de Lorris en Jean de Meun se *Roman de la Rose* [Romans van die Roos] en *Hypnerotomachia poliphili* [Die droomstryd na liefde] wat moontlik deur Francesco Colonna geskryf is. Daar word as gevolgtrekking bespiegel dat die ervaring van landskap in sy buite-ruimtelike, literêre gedaante meer vervolmaak as tydens fisiese teenwoordigheid is, asook andersom.

Sleutelwoorde: landskapargitektuurteorie, landskap voorstelling, Middeleeuse tuinontwerp, Renaissance landskapontwerp, *Roman de la Rose*, *Hypnerotomachia poliphili*

J.R.R. Tolkien (2001: 77) once described the frustration he experienced as a child when being enlightened by adults that he would find as much enchantment and wonder in the natural world, and even more so, than in the land of *Faërie*: “Snowflakes are fairy jewels,” they would say with scientific exactitude in an effort to entice the young boy away from the old wives tales of the pre-modern world to the glistening *reality* of modernity; away from super-nature to nature. Yet “there is a part of man which is not ‘Nature’...and is, in fact, wholly unsatisfied by it.”

The thin world (*I am here*)

Isn't it enough to see that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it too? (Douglas Adams quoted in Richard Dawkins' *The God delusion*).

“God is in the detail,” I have heard in the studios of design and cannot help but suspect an echo of the demand burdened on a young Tolkien: to be a merely *natural* man. And not only demanded of me, but *by* me: as a landscape architect I ask of clients and students to find beauty in a line, in a space, in a materiality, in a surface, in a contemporary spirit (ironically), in

a folded horizontal plane, in a deconstructed grid...to be accompanied of course by images of good looking people having picnicks and pushing prams. It is as if there is a deliberate attempt in contemporary landscape architecture to negate the elusive quality of beauty and find satisfaction in the immediacy of *here*; an attempt to find consolation in the beauty of the veneer to avoid grappling with it as well described by John Millbank (2003: 1-2):

Since we never entirely bring away from the object all its beauty, this implies that even when we stand before the beautiful object, we are ‘held’ by something that binds us only in its not-quite arriving. To experience the beautiful is not only to be satisfied, but also to be frustrated satisfyingly...¹

It is perhaps this elusive quality of beauty that lies at the root of the elusive quality of landscape – that construct which all who approach it earnestly will sympathise with American geographer J. B. Jackson’s (Vroom 2006: 178) frustration: “For more than twenty five years I have been trying to understand and explain that aspect of the environment we call landscape...and yet I must admit that the concept continues to elude me.”

However, a glance through the extensive *1000X Landscape Architecture* (2009) reveals that contemporary landscape architecture in general, with eutopian (after Barzun 2001: 117) photographs of completed projects or lavish collages and computer renderings of proposals, is focused on what is expected or can be predicted to *arrive* for the occupants of outside spaces: provocative forms, blooming vegetation, historic references, places for events, shade and water and artistically affected infrastructure. No reference is made, as we find in Medieval representations of landscape, of allegorical figures, deeply rooted symbols or any other signifiers of a super- or even sub-natural world. James Corner (1990: 64), a leading landscape architectural academic and practitioner has also lamented the overt realism of contemporary landscape representations in comparison with older practices:

For example, the symbols by which early medieval painters depicted nature bore little relation to actual appearance. Instead, nature was represented in the form of icons symbolizing godlike ideas and episodes in sacred history...These paintings and gardens were understood as symbols of divine perfection; idealized nature, eternal and godlike, as distinct from everyday life.

Grappling with the more-than-here in landscape architecture has been relegated to the design of “memorials, sensory gardens, and meditation courtyards” by authors Katherine Crewe and Ann Forsyth (2003: 48) and classified by them as a typology of contemporary landscape architecture termed “spiritual landscapes.” Six percent of work that was covered by the *American Landscape Architecture Magazine* between 1997 to 2001 has been attributed to this type. (*ibid.* p.41)

We should however not be surprised at this general refusal of the invisible in the visible (after Millbank 2003: 2). In *Die nihilisme: notas oor ons tyd* (2007) Danie Goosen elaborately paints our world as one drowned in nihilism: a world in which atoms (after Houlebecq) float freely according to no rules but those of chance (2007: p.9); an unmediated world which censors communication beyond its borders. Although not thoroughly analysed, it is probably not too far fetched to suggest that the ‘veneer complex’ (the satisfaction with *here*) within landscape architecture is a symptom of the nihilistic *zeitgeist*.

It will be interesting to observe whether the content of the 2009 IFLA [International Federation of Landscape Architecture] congress, thematised as “Green infrastructure: high performance landscapes” perpetuates Corner’s (1990: 75 and 1991: 116) critique of the profession in the early 1990s:

In contemporary theory, a technological ‘ecology’ replaces poetic dwelling...After all, symbolic and poetic intentions are often rendered naïve in a scientific world, where pragmatic values of efficiency and optimization are often considered more ‘real.’

Landscape architecture historian John Dixon Hunt (2004: 37-38) has expressed a similar concern about contemporary landscape architecture’s inability to produce places that are more than mere environments, and

remind us that landscapes are as much experienced as virtual realities as the physical realities which enjoy the profession's apparent wholehearted attention:

Among its [landscape's] least analysed paradoxes is precisely its 'virtual reality' – this combination of a felt experience of both organic and inorganic materials with a deliberate creation of fictive worlds into whose inventions, systems and mythological or metaphorical languages we allow ourselves to be drawn. A garden is nothing if it does not seduce us, it is equally nothing if it does not insist on its own tangible existence.

It is precisely this inability, or lack of will, of design to capture the virtual existence of landscape that once frustrated the present author to such an extent as to proclaim: "...die landskap kannie design word nie." (Prinsloo 2006, in prologue) [...the landscape cannot be designed." Translated from the broken Afrikaans by the author.]

For his experience of landscapes in the songs of the folk poets, their green fields and wandering maiden forests, the railway tracks of Woody Guthrie, the rising sun houses of New Orleans, the New York streets of Dylan and Ginsberg, the far out roads of Kerouac and Kombuis, dark woods of the dusty childrens book on the shelf, the Paris Bohemian nights from who knows where, climbing up the Alps on an elephant in a glass bottle, finding the skeleton keys in the rainless plains of the Meseta on the Camino de Santiago...were more enchanting than sitting on a bench looking at children play in Chicago's Millenium Park. For all those landscapes were not of mere plants and stone, but also of words not *here*.

If that is reason enough to attempt to find a way to create landscapes that are more than *thin* veneers and go beyond the immediacy of the *here*, then a strategy would be to investigate the cause of the thinness and seek to cure it.

Towards a thickening (*I am there*)

It seems to me an interesting idea: that is to say the idea that we live in the description of a place and not in the place itself, and in every vital sense we do (Wallace Steven).

Significantly, during the same period in history that paved the path for a nihilistic world, the Renaissance, (if we associate modernity with nihilism) graphics became the prevalent system for design generation² - specifically architecture, but also for designed landscapes. The use of graphics might thus not be considered a cause, but rather a symptom of the world view that enforced and perpetuated the tendencies of an aestheticised designed environment. If there is, as argued before, a need to counter the latter, then looking towards a non-graphic notation system for design can be beneficial to the cause. In *stadskrif* (2006), the present author stated the hypothesis (as a reaction to the said frustration with veneer landscapes and graphic-centred design practices) that text can be used as a non-graphic design tool to enhance both the form creation process and the experience of the created landscapes: text was explored as

- I. a mediator between form and phenomenological experience,³
- II. a way to thicken *in situ* and *ex situ* landscape experiences,⁴
- III. a way to alter landscape perceptions,⁵
- IV. a way to thicken landscape as signifier,⁶
- V. and as a graphic *in situ*.⁷

The above applications of text were synthesised into a hypothetical design process and tested in the design of a number of left-over spaces (rooftops, alleyways, courtyards and dead walls) in the inner city of Pretoria. The design process called for two types of text to be created by the designer: a *phenomenological text* and a *story*, acting respectively as mediators between quantitative and qualitative form generators, and the standard graphic design explorations; steps to narrow the dark void (all designers have stood on its edges) between the accumulation of possible design inputs and the created form. The requirement for two types of text originated from the author's brief analysis of landscape architecture (throughout its existence, i.e. from the

dawn of the twentieth century to the then present) oscillating between rational, process driven design strategies (epitomised by Ian McHarg) and banal, avant-gardesque attempts at creating poetic spaces (epitomised by Martha Schwartz) and rarely reaching a balance between the plan diagramme and the collage; designed landscapes are often functionally and ecologically sound, but lack poetic quality and *vice versa*.

The *phenomenological texts* were written as reactions to the analysis of the sites and programmatic requirements, and evolved into descriptions of the organic and material qualities that every site should possess; descriptions of what would *arrive* for the occupant. Many of these qualities of space are difficult, and in some cases impossible, to conceive or convey graphically: the smell and sounds, atmosphere and light, cannot be held by a picture...“this is not a pipe.” The intention was that these descriptions would act as baselines against which the ensuing graphically generated designs would be measured to ensure that these qualities are not negated in the drawing of pretty pictures. A courtyard in the Department of Public Works building was, for example, described in the phenomenological text as a place of respite (accessible from multiple levels) for the workers from the dimly lit offices, based on the potential of the site identified through site analysis. The courtyard also formed the milieu in the story (entitled *agterstraatgeskrif* [loosely translated as *alleyway story*]) as a place of escape from the building, based on the initial atmosphere felt during the initial site visit (what Christophe Girot would call *landing*.)

Reacting to these texts (as the texts reacted to the qualitative and quantitative contexts of the site) – one realistic, the other surrealistic (not yet supernatural) and both poetic – the design developed as a courtyard space providing shade and water, vertical greenery for the offices on the higher floors, light coloured surfaces at different angles for light reflection and other *phenomenon*. The courtyard also became “‘n binnehof uit ‘n ander wêreld uit” (Prinsloo 2006: 57) [“an other-worldly courtyard”] and the description in the story of the two characters’ flight from the bureaucratic maze of the DPW inspired the imagining of an expressive whirlwind of sticks (for lack of a better description) that broke from the regular grid of windows fronting the existing courtyard. Measured against the ‘baseline’ of the *phenomenological text*, the form was adapted and re-worked to become a coherent design expressive of both types of text.

This process was repeated for all the chosen sites and a sub-cultural landscape, hidden from the main streets and African-Nationalistic visions for the city, emerged on the fringes of Church Square:

Pretoria, het jy ons verlaat, omdat ons jou gelos het? Pretoria, gaan jy ons nooit vergeef dat ons jou strate verleeg het? Ons lewe gelieg het? Vat ons terug, met voorwaardes: ons word die agterstrate, daar loop ons rond. Die mainstream streets is lankal nie meer ons nights, maar weggeste ke kafees kruip ons na; onder die skadu’s van Mamelodi jazz en African vibes wat oor ons kla. ‘n Dun geflikker van neonlig – eens die sinjaal van hoere en dobbelkastele – lei ons van die hoofstrate af, na ‘n gathering in die nag – daar kan ons hardop lag [sic] (Prinsloo 2006: 65).

It had to be concluded that the spaces envisioned became the milieus for a subjective and even selfish story of inner city Pretoria gentrification. Collages can lie, but poetry swears. The value of the texts in terms of form generation was also questioned and it cannot be said with any amount of certainty that the design of the forms would have been less successful had the texts never been written. However, they would have certainly been different: “a landscape park is more palpable but no more real, nor less imaginary, than a landscape painting or poem” (Cosgrove & Daniels 1988: 1) and it was also concluded that the certain value of the texts were that therein those visions of a suburban-Afrikaner dreaming of another Pretoria – that will never be built - found a place to exist and he often goes *there*.

The question thus arises whether the text-landscape relationship is one not more akin to *ekphrasis* where a text, often as a poem, enhances the reading of a painting, but does not influence the creation of a painting (e.g. W.H. Auden's *Musee de Beaux Arts* on Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*); whether texts can translate and enlighten landscapes, but not affect the conception of their form.

To further explore this question, we can turn to earlier examples of text-landscape relationships. It has already been said that it can be argued that the Renaissance was a watershed between a pre- and nihilistic world and also a watershed between design driven by non-graphical language and graphic language (drawing). The following paragraphs are brief discussions on two examples exemplary of the world on both sides of the line, the Medieval *Roman de la Rose* [RR] and the Renaissance *Hypnerotomachia poliphili* [HP].

Searching for Polia (*I am here*)

I must use the vulgar speech, and not the Roman vernacular, because we are degenerate and lack that thesaurus by which we might explain all the details of such a work; so we shall use whatever crude terms of this kind survive. (HP: 47)

It was a rare work, this proud fountain erected with keen ingenuity, with its perfect harpies and the rare dignity of the support for the three brilliant golden figures, all executed with the highest artistry and finish. I could never make a brief and lucid exposition of it, much less describe it all. It was no work of merely human skill, but I can freely testify, calling the gods to witness, that never in our age has there ever been a more graceful or admirable sculpture, nor even one equal to it (HP: 91).

As hinted above, the text of the HP displays that veneration of the Humanists for Antiquity (and irreverence for their own and Medieval ages) which fueled the Renaissance project of recovering the lost civilisation of ancient Rome (and indirectly Greece) through the texts of a library of writers lead by Cicero, who happened to describe Roman gardens in his letters. The move was towards a secular world (Barzun 2001: 43-44); towards Man. The abstract world of the Middle Ages (or Dark Ages as introduced by Petrarch) – always fixed on eternity, albeit with two feet on the ground – was left behind in favour of a world “in which reason and will can be used both to improve worldly conditions” (Barzun 2001: 43-44). This spirit of worldliness flowers in the estate “somewhere on a little mountain” with its “marvelous gardens” to where the young ladies and gentlemen of Boccaccio's *Decameron* retreated from plague ridden Florence⁸ (1977: 14).

In writing the HP, Francesco Colonna followed this pattern by envisioning a series of landscapes of earthly delights under the influence of the Classics, yet not ignoring his contemporary and Medieval authors. The narrative – Poliphilio searching for his beloved Polia in a dream – inverts the Medieval ascension of carnal to spiritual love we find in Dante who, in the *Divine Comedy*, is exalted to the *Empyrean* through the vision of Beatrice; Poliphilo ends in Polia's arms. His dream journey takes him through a succession of spaces that culminates on Cythera where, with an allegiance to Venus, the lovers embrace, Polia vanishes and our hero awakes. The places described are rich in architectural detail (from Vitruvius and Alberti), botanic diversity (from Pliny's *Naturalis historia*) and erotic pagan symbolism and ritual (from Apuleius' *Ausinus Aureus* [*Golden Ass*]). Unlike the garden descriptions of Alberti and Erasmus that imitated the ancient texts (Toman 2007: 42), Colonna's are entirely original: “It provides not just a depository of architectural memories, but a method for reusing memories creatively – a genetic method...” (Lefaiivre 2005: 46).

As can be expected from a Renaissance text, the focus is not on the spaces (a modernist obsession), but on the artefacts (in ruin) which Poliphilo encounters. He is so overwhelmed by their beauty *arriving*, that his lavish descriptions become tedious for the C20 reader. It is perhaps these lengthy, sensuous and semi-erotic verbal representations that provoked a Prof. Weiss to

declare the HP “a serious runner-up for the title of most boring work in Italian literature.” Nevertheless, the landscape of the HP is more than a mere milieu in which events unfold, but, especially in Book I, the very object of the narrative and has influenced Western landscape design since its publication on the eve of modernity, 1499.

Physical landscape incarnations or translations of the text can be found, not as complete gardens, but as scattered elements which adorn many Renaissance and subsequent gardens. Examples include elements of the gardens of King Francis I of France at Fontainebleau (Toman 2007: 43), the Venus grotto of the Boboli gardens, Florence (Godwyn 2005: xvi) and Mansart’s colonnade at Versailles (Hunt 2004: 59).

The question at hand is whether these landscapes – designs conceived from text – can be described as non-nihilistic and thus be valued as precedents for the discussed contemporary predicament of a *thin* world. The answer is negative by intention: as already mentioned, the Renaissance fixation on the worldly is resoundingly evident in the HP. Although Poliphilo continually (often with humorous effect) reminds us that the “vulgar speech” of his native Italian and his inadequacy as a narrator render the descriptions of the Beauty he perceives incomplete, *his* experience thereof is not and the artefacts express little “beautiful beyond being” (see note 1). In fact, the obsession with the *veneer* is even stronger than the image driven designs of contemporary landscape architecture and the text, on a paradigmatic level, achieved exactly what this study was *not* looking for: the establishment of the “aesthetic value” in the world of design. (Lefaivre 2005: 3) For Poliphilo is not interested in the real meanings of the symbols, he is not interested in the contexts in which the forms evolved, but merely displays, as Corner (1991a: 75) has said of contemporary landscape architecture “an overly aestheticised attitude [that] displaces the power of symbolic content.” It is no judgment of guilt, for that was the intent, but as we find the emptiness of (Modern) Post Modern’s symbolism of symbols, the signifiers in HP and the resulting physical translations, lead us not through the door leading to divine glory (*Glori dei*), not even to worldly glory (*Gloria mundi*), but to Venus (*Mater amoris*) where we find nothing more than our bodies. (Poliphilo encounters these three doors in HP: 135) This nihilistic reading of the text is supported by Harbison (2000: 76) who describes it as “an extended experience of emptiness” and thus “a prime document for understanding the Renaissance attitude towards artifice” (Harbison 2000: 77).⁹

Since every object is described in exact detail, it is argued that the HP “is offered in place of a building” (Harbison 2000: 76) and the distinction between text, graphic woodcuts and physical incarnations is vague; the verbal gives little that graphic representations cannot. It therefore comes as little surprise that it is the imagery of the woodcuts that have become more enduring and one can speculate that the designers of the said landscapes imitated not the texts, but the book’s fine graphics (figure 1).

In our search to find whether the use of text in the design process can *thicken* the landscape, we have to sound even deeper depths and undust the Medieval texts.

Searching for the rose (*I’m not there*)

Then I entered into the garden, without saying another word, that lady Idleness had opened for me, and, when I was inside, I was happy and gay and full of joy. Believe me, I thought that I was truly in the earthly paradise. So delightful was the place that it seemed to belong to the world of spirit, for, as it seemed to me then, there was no paradise where existence was so good as it was in that garden which so pleased me (*Romance of the Rose*, 629 – 640).

He who believes that his country is here is very much a wretched captive and a naïve fool. Your country is not on earth (*Romance of the Rose*, 5025).

Dante awakes (as did Poliphilo) in a dark forest from where he begins his journey, Palamon (and later also Arcite) gazes from his prison cell from where he sees the city

And eek the gardyn, ful of braunches grene,
Ther as this fresshe Emelye the shene
Was in hire walk, and romed up and doun (*Canterbury Tales*, 1067-1069).

This relationship between landscape and text is particularly important for us when looking at examples of designed Medieval landscapes, since these *only* exist in texts. They were most often walled gardens (third nature) – beyond the walls lay the cultivated lands “the flours on feeldes flavryng swete, the corne on þe croftes y-croppid ful faire” (second nature) on the borders of *wylde nesse* (first nature). A value of the text-landscape relationship is hereby revealed – the preservation of landscapes beyond their physical existence. Another important aspect is highlighted by the illuminators of Medieval texts in that these artists all interpreted the texts differently (especially since they worked in different ages and regions); the essence of the landscape is captured by the text without limiting the interpreter’s freedom.

The writers of Medieval landscape-texts sought less for originality in their interpretations: from Chaucer to the anonymous troubadours of Provence, from Chrétien to the authors under present scrutiny, the descriptions of walled gardens differ only in detail. The “arbor, the sanded alley walks lined with low railings, the turfed benches” (Pearsall in MacDougal 1985: 245) are standard ingredients. Even plant species differ not from those described in Cicero and Seneca – even when the contexts would not allow for their cultivation. How unlike the myriad of design solutions we find in our age, bent on a revolution with every project? We might find the reason for this in a characteristic of the Medieval world: a respect for the old books. The intellectual life of the Middle Ages was not, as is sometimes popularly perceived, ignorant of the Classic (and other) texts, albeit the corpus was a fractured one. The great works were a synthesis of – after tidying up paradoxes and resolving conflicts - ancient Hebrew, classical Greek, classical Roman, decadent Roman, barbarian [Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse, Old High German, Celtic] and early Christian works (Lewis 1966: 44) resulting in the encyclopedic nature of Medieval literature (nothing must be excluded), including that describing gardens. Unlike the spirit which fired the HP, where precedent was used freely and originally, the Medieval writers (e.g. Albert Magnus) were less careless with the old voices - why defy the prescriptions of the past masters? The places so lavishly described in the HP had to be illustrated in detail, since no one had seen these fantastical places, whereas the design elements of a walled garden was well known and its exact replication unimportant. Text, not graphics, was thus the medium through which garden design ideas and prescriptions were communicated and explored since Antiquity to the Renaissance.

This analogous nature of the Medieval garden (physical and/or textual) is true only for the pattern of design, and not for its meaning: we can roughly group the meanings of medieval gardens into that of the *hortus conclusus* (paradise garden) as an allegorical setting for chastity associated with the Virgin Mary, and *hortus deliciarum* (pleasure garden) as an allegorical setting for courtly love. The same setting was thus described as an allegorical milieu for the expression of either spiritual or carnal love. There was no attempt, as in the landscape incarnations of the HP, to translate the ideas embedded in the texts into physical forms other than those inherited from past writers; the texts *carry* the meanings of the gardens, not the elements therein. This does however not imply that the physical elements of a garden had no meaning for the Medieval mind apart from that breathed in from the texts. The opposite is true: “The Middle Ages never forgot that all things would be absurd if their meaning were exhausted in their functions and their place in the phenomenal world, if by their essence they did not reach into a world beyond this” (Eco 1988: 139). Every object in the garden was symbolic – since a lily was a symbol of

Mother Mary (or the noble lady as a secular variant) there was no need to design and create a statue of Mother Mary. These were thus the universal meanings of gardens (although differing between the religious and secular realms); allegories *in factis*. An additional layer of specific meaning was inscribed through texts; allegories *in verbis*.

As the study of nature moved beyond an inquiry of the purely symbolic into the structure of things *in themselves* “the symbolic vision turned into a naturalistic vision” (Eco 1988: 141). It was perhaps the emptiness felt in the growing symbolic vacuity which rendered the planting of mere lilies too *thin*, and paved the way for statues of Venus. We can observe this move to supplant symbolic natural elements with symbolic artifice in the replacement of the “well-watered stream” (Miller in MacDougall 1985: 153) of the Medieval garden of Petrarch and RR with the sculptural fountain of the fourteenth century found in Boccaccio (*ibid.*) and ultimately the “proud fountain erected with keen ingenuity” of HP. (It is interesting to note how 15C illustrators depicted the fountain of RR as a sculptural fountain.) The non-nihilistic pre-modern landscape is, unlike the gothic cathedral, one in which no sculpture stands; “beauty beyond being” is communicated by natural elements and translated by texts. There were no mere veneers.

We should not be surprised though, for as an “organizer, a codifier, a man of system” (Lewis 1966: 44) medieval man ‘put everything in its place’ to structure a model of the universe “of a still more rigorous unity than that which modern science can offer” (Huizinga in Eco 1989: 140). In this model there was no room for an implosion of things as we find in contemporary thinking: a building was not a landscape, a garden was not a text and earth was not heaven. In one way thus the Medieval garden was less than our contemporary designs in that “the pragmatic goals of medieval gardeners were more modest” (Miller in MacDougall 1985: 152 comparing Medieval gardening with that of the Renaissance), yet it was more in that no phenomenon perceived within the walls were *ex nihil*.

The Romance of the Rose [RR], a medieval allegory on courtly love and set in part in a *locus amoenus*, “haunts the literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance” (Fleming in MacDougall 1985: 201) and is therefore a suitable example for this inquiry. The first part of the book was written by Guillaume de Lorris *circa* 1230, and the second by Jean de Meun *circa* 1275. Much has been written on the *Romance*: Charles Dahlberg’s English translation (1995) includes an extensive bibliography and C. S. Lewis’ *An allegory of Love* (1935) is the work that inspired the revived interest in the poem in the twentieth century.

Similar to HP, the narrative is primarily concerned with the Lover’s quest to conquer his beloved, the allegorical Rose with the (painful) aid of The God of Love (i.e. Venus) – a reminder that the world of Antiquity was not foreign to the Middle Ages, at least not to the scholar with his “twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed, of Aristotle and his philosophie” (*Canterbury Tales*, 294-295). The RR is encyclopedic in its references to Classic authors and Medieval scholars and much effort is spent to paint the ordered world mentioned earlier.

Much effort is however *not* spent in the verbal painting of the walled garden and the reader’s *ex situ* experience of the space is an inversion of that found in HP, for we find only “a cliché, a rough outline expecting the reader – represented for us by the illustrator – to fill out his sketch with the resources of the imagination and of cultural expectation” (Fleming in MacDougall 1985: 201) and not the intricately described gardens that wooed Poliphilo into rapture. Unlike the latter’s obsession with the veneer, in RR there is “so little in it that seems specific, tactile, visual” (Fleming in MacDougall 1985: 201).¹⁰ As described earlier, this surprisingly simplistic description of design is to be expected of the Middle Ages where the walled garden can be

described as a *type* which assumes different *characteristics* scripted by different texts; same (physical) place, different meanings.

Our experience of that garden walled in from the vices (depicted on the exterior) of the outside world is however interrupted in De Meun's part of the poem: Genus reminds the Lover of the model of the universe and the place of the pleasure garden therein: it is but a faint mirror of "the park of the lovely field where the son of the virgin ewe in all his white fleece leads his flock with him" (RR, 19 931) – the "short circuit" (after Huizinga in Eco 1989: 142) between the earthly paradise garden and the eternal paradise is made, the universal hierarchy is ordained and of the lesser garden he is reminded (RR, 20 351):

Tho thinges in that garden smale
Nis but lesinge and trotevale.

The experience of "beautiful beyond being" in the garden is evoked through the awakening of an image of a place where

They have only one day with no approach whatever to evening, and morning cannot begin there, no matter how far the dawn can advance...It has no temporal measure, the day that is so fair, that lasts forever and smiles with present brightness. It has neither future nor past, for, if I sense the truth well, all three times are present there, and the present encompasses the day...the future is of such stable permanence that it will never have presence (RR, 20 002 – 20 014).

The reader here does thus not experience an *ex situ* longing for the place described in the text (as in HP), but for the longing for a place described in the text. In this sense, the text of RR acts as a mediator between the immanent walled garden and that "which lies beyond the 'sensuous curtain' and to that, not only hell and sin and courtly love, but the world and all that is in it, and the visible heaven, are but painted things – appearances on the outside of the wall whose inside no one has seen" (Lewis 1935: 152).

Conclusion (*I'm not there*)

One rosy summer evening, when the wall opposite her window was flaked all over with rosiness, she threw herself down on her bed, and lay gazing at the wall. The rose-colour sank through her eyes and dyed her brain, and she began to feel as if she were reading a story-book. She thought she was looking at a western sea, with the waves all red with sunset. But when the colour died out, Alice gave a sigh to see how commonplace the wall grew. "I wish it was always sunset!" she said, half aloud. "I don't like gray things" (MacDonald 1999: 04 from *Cross Purposes*).

At the very least, the above discussion on the RR and HP affirms that texts were integrated, as more than mere *ekphrases*, in the design and experience of landscapes from Antiquity to the Renaissance. Although not discussed here, we also know that text played an important role in the primitivist poetics of Romanticism, albeit to a lesser degree. This has changed, and texts have been relegated to reports, specification documents and cheap sales talk. (To such an extent that Marc Treib, the editor of a recent book *Representing Landscape Architecture* (2008), could not summon an essay on language as a landscape representational tool.) The idea of landscape as language is popular and expounded in works such as Anne Winston Spirn's *The Language of Landscape* (1998), but we must recall Ricoeur to remind us that any analogies of text are limited. Where text is fused with design, as in the works of Maya Lin and Ian Hamilton Finlay, it is usually used *in situ* and not as separate, complimentary works. Criticisms of projects in books, journals and magazines act as (unintentional) *ekphrases* of landscapes. There is thus much to explore in the additional applications of text in the design and afterlife of contemporary landscapes, especially as an alternative or complimentary design tool to the graphic notation system, since "the advent of software programs such as Photoshop has granted an enormous power to designers in terms of realism and accuracy, but these may be achieved at the expense of a sense of life and a confusion of detail for idea" (Treib 2008: xix) and there is "a call for

representation to be linked to thinking rather than to the mere creation of special effects that capture the eye without necessarily effectively engaging the brain.”

Whether, to return to the question at hand, these applications can help towards the envisioning and creation of non-nihilistic landscapes is unanswerable. This simply because the question is non-sensical: nihilism is not to be ‘solved’ through a technique, but through a belief in a hierarchical theological model of the universe in which communion can exist; no amount of mediation can create a “short circuit” between the immanent and transcendental if the latter is *a priori* held to be non-existent, or as in deconstruction, non-reachable; no matter of application alone can create an incarnate symbolic order as found in the Middle Ages.

From the examples (and partly the author’s own experiments), text can, on a less ambitious level, act as a mediator between the visible and the invisible to amplify our experience of Beauty in landscape as something “not-quite arriving.” And this especially when we ourselves have *not* arrived, for I suspect that the most fulfilling experiences of landscapes are akin to *sehnsucht*: a German word with no equal in the English language, but more or less signifies a sense of longing with the knowledge that the thing longed for can never be attained; the longing for a home country never yet seen. It is this unfulfilled desire [Beauty] which is desired – hints of “the ‘other world’ not of religion, but of imagination; the land of the longing, the Earthly Paradise, the garden east of the sun and west of the moon.” (Lewis 1935: 75) But that place (the eternal garden in RR and Antiquity in HP) is by definition always around the bend, it is always experienced *ex situ*, but needs a vantage point to be seen (longed) *from* and that is the saving grace for the design and making of landscapes: a text may lead us to a place desired, but it requires the shattering of the illusion once we enter the garden gate – the experience becoming purely phenomenological – to make us see that we are not *there*:

However, it is never a matter purely of desire for concealed goodness. We cannot abstract the desire and the teasing pleasure either. They do indeed exceed the apparent formed, proportioned integral object; yet they are the excess of *this* object, a luminosity immediately resulting from the manifestation of the form (Milbank 2003: 2).

To conclude from the author that introduced us to the necessity of having fairies at the bottom of the garden, a line from *Leaf by Niggle* from J.R.R. Tolkien (2001: 111): “He had never before been able to walk into the distance without turning it into mere surroundings.” That part of us which is not natural imagines the eternal garden around the corner; our natural part, on entering the garden, perceives only the phenomenon, the curtain, the outside of the wall (for we are always outside) and we once again long for *there*.

That perhaps explains why walking, not sitting, is the best way of experiencing landscapes - the landscape is always one step ahead.

Plea for indulgence

This paper, I confess, has attempted too much; the topics covered deserve volumes of research and debate. In its defence, I hope it does serve as a day spent in Paris would: a restless and haphazard rollick through beautiful streets, stopping to observe nothing in detail, hoping to return some day and give every corner the time it deserves. May these words act thus, and I hope I will in future be able to relate the ideas touched upon here with greater care and thoughtfulness.

Notes

1. This definition echoes that of Pseudo Dionysus: “That, beautiful beyond being [Gr. *hyperousion kalon*], is said to be Beauty – for it gives beauty from itself in a manner appropriate to each, it causes the consonance and splendour of all, it flashes forth upon all, after the manner of light, the beauty producing gifts of its flowing ray, it calls all to itself, when it is called beauty” (in Eco 1988: 24).
2. The oldest drawn plan for a building in Europe is that of the St. Gall monastery complex in 820 (Turner 2005: 132) and thus antedates the Renaissance by six centuries. However, “only with the Italian Renaissance, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, did drawings become a significant feature of building production with the newly emerged manifestation of the ‘art’ of architecture. (Forty 2000: 29) The use of drawing in the Middle Ages was perhaps not a design generation tool, but one of documentation.
3. Text can be used to describe “...everything that they [architects] find difficult, or choose not to be precise about – nuances, moods, atmosphere...” (Forty 2005: 38). Generating design using text thus forces the creator to describe the quality of *phenomenon* in addition to their mere appearances before form is generated graphically. This was experimented, for example, by Archizoom in the 1960’s:

“Listen, I really think it’s going to be something quite extraordinary. Very spacious, bright, really well arranged, with no hidden corners, you know. There will be fine lighting, really brilliant, that will clearly show up all those disordered objects.

The fact is, everything will be simple, with no mysteries and nothing soul-disturbing, you know. Wonderful! Really very brilliant – very beautiful – very beautiful, and very large. Quite extraordinary! It will be cool in there too, with an immense silence.

My God, how can I describe to you the wonderful colours! You see many things are quite hard to describe, especially because they’ll be used in such a new way. ... You see, there’ll be a lot of marvellous things, and yet it will look almost empty, it will be so big and so beautiful... How fine it will be... just spending the whole day doing nothing, without working or anything... You know, just great...” (Ambasz in Forty 2005: 34).
4. For example, the *in situ* experience of eighteenth century Romantic landscapes was and still is greatly enriched by a knowledge of the Greek elegies which partly informed the landscapes’ content – scenes from the Ancient texts, embodied in statues and structures, unfold to the beholder as one moves through the landscape, reminiscent of Tschumi’s *Cin gramme Folie* (Prinsloo 2006: 30). The reverse is also true: one often finds an *ex situ* experience of a landscape, when transported there through a text, to be more enriching than when being there.
5. Perceptions of landscapes, influenced by the metaphors associated therewith (Spirm 1998: 24), greatly affect the way that they are experienced – physically or virtually. For example, Burchell’s “desolate, wild and singular” Karoo of the nineteenth century was later transformed by poets such as N.P. Van Wyk Louw into a place of rich phenomenology. In describing the unique characteristics of a landscape, texts are powerful means to unlock beauty and alter our perceptions of landscapes – often a requirement before there is a felt need to transform a place through design.
6. Texts can be successfully used to act as depositories of complex and conflicting ideas. As argued in the discussion on Medieval landscapes, texts can carry some of the content of a landscape without the need to translate – as is often the desire – every idea associated with the landscape into form. By thus linking a design and a created text, the two stand together in a reciprocal relationship – the landscape signifies the ideas captured in the text and the former is thereby not cluttered with content, yet not void of meaning.
7. The most common use of text as a design tool in contemporary landscape architecture, is the physical placement of words in spaces. These texts can refer the occupant to an external source (e.g. words from a poem or names of dead soldiers) or relate purely to the immediate context (e.g. create a tension between the content of the word and the content of the space.)
8. It must be noted that this secular shift is a generalisation, and that the garden as an embodiment of the transcendent was advocated in the Renaissance by writers such as Erasmus in his *Colloquia* (Toman 2007: 42).
9. Poliphilo is however reminded, almost scorned, by Logistica (a trace of the Medieval use of allegory) that the tactile experience of architecture/ landscape is only one half of our experience and the contemplation of idea is equally important:

“Poliphilo, I want you to know that things perceived give more enjoyment to the intellect, than to senses alone. For this reason, let us go into this place as to satisfy both modes of perception.” As Genus reminds the lover of RR of the eternal garden, Poliphilo is reminded that the mere indulgence in the veneer is folly.

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