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Chapter 2

Theoretical Investigation



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Introduction

Latz (in Amidon 2001:2) describes the potential of landscape architecture as “the realization of abstract ideas about nature, ecology, and society.” Similarly, McHarg (in Vroom 2006:187) states that the landscape consists of three layers: the physical, the biotic and the human. The design of a successful landscape takes these layers into account and uses each in an innovative way to complement the other. It is important to be aware of these layers and their interrelationship, as well as the role of narrative in understanding and subsequent design of landscapes with regard to the natural features, processes and the memories associated with them.

Ecological Design

Natural processes are understood through analysis. Ecological design principles provide a foundation for the inclusion of these natural processes in the design process. Van der Ryn and Cowan (1996:x) define ecological design as “any form of design that minimizes environmentally destructive impacts by integrating itself with living processes.” Ecological design thus provides a link between nature and culture and offers three strategies: conservation, regeneration and stewardship (Van der Ryn & Cowan 1996:21). The idea of conservation refers to the sustainable use of resources in such a way that they last longer, restoration implies that some form of damage has been done to the site and requires active restoration of resources while stewardship refers to the management of these resources in a sustainable manner.

According to Van der Ryn & Cowan (1996:51), five principles are promoted to ensure an ecologically sustainable approach to design (1996:51). These principles are: solutions grown from place, ecological accounting informs design, design with nature, everyone is a designer and make nature visible. Through the application of these principles, the inherent landscape narrative is identified by providing a link between the understanding of the natural processes (through analysis) and the experience of landscape.

Landscape Narrative

The word narrative, from the Latin *gnarrus* and Indo-European *gna*, ‘to know’, implies knowledge acquired through actions and contingencies of lived experience (Turner 1981:163).

Narrative theory refers to the telling of stories, as well as to the way in which

they are told. Traditionally, a story is written by an author, possibly told by a narrator, read by a reader or viewed by a viewer. These 'conventional' stories have a beginning, middle and end where the author has full control of how the story may unfold. Narrative, however, does not stick within the strict parameters of a story. It may have neither a beginning nor an end, which results in it becoming open to various interpretations. The narrative is thus interpreted by how it is experienced and remembered. Prinsloo (2008) asserts that "landscapes are experienced to their greatest fulfillment, *ex situ* in memory".

We live our lives through stories and memories. Bruner (in Potteiger & Purinton, 1998:3) states that narrative is a fundamental way of thinking that is very different from the logico-scientific way of knowing. Paying attention to connections, coincidences and chance encounters and the subsequent selecting and sequencing of events, followed by the construction of a meaningful story is viewed as a more stimulating alternative than the searching for universal truth conditions which may be presented within a story. Narrative therefore can be expressed as a "language of time" (Ricoeur 1981: 166) or experience through time, delivering an "unpredictable end".

Narrative is inherently present in the landscape. The term landscape narrative, according to Potteiger & Purinton (1998:5), designates the "interplay and mutual relationship that develops between landscape and narrative". The palimpsest of the site, materials and natural processes all add to the intrinsic narrative of any landscape, which in continual flux, becomes the backdrop for the setting and telling of stories. Through thorough understanding of the site, its history and physical characteristics, the inherent narrative of the site can be understood. This narrative can then be used to provide a guideline for the development of the site and these stories become the memories of the experience of the place.

Narrative plays an important role in place-making. According to Johnstone (1990:120) places only exist because of the stories they have associated with them. Through this story based existence, the landscape is empowered to tell its own story. It is through this story that we are able to gain knowledge, and in the appreciation of place, memories are created. The Collins dictionary defines place as "a particular point or part of space or of a surface, especially that occupied by a person or a thing" (2004:1240), and therefore asserts that place should be experienced in a spatial capacity. Ricoeur (1981:167) however believes that narrative has the ability to combine the temporal and non-chronological configuration into spatial patterns and thus mediate the

crossing of temporal and spatial experience in order to compose place.

According to Rakatansky (in Swaffield 2002:136) “narrative need not be conceived as an explicit storyline grafted onto site”. Rather, it is embedded and contained in the landscape, inscribed by natural processes and cultural practices. These narratives, due to their nature, are in a constant state of progression through time and therefore become open narratives, dependant on changing environmental factors or institutionalised structures – these narratives, due to their nature, require “special attention, methods and time” in order to comprehend their story (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998:19).

The narratives of natural processes are important and should be taken into account as they represent a transformation of the landscape over time. Similarly, the narratives of ecology can be employed, through the use of metaphor, in order to communicate the intricacies of ecological processes (Potteiger & Purinton 1998:22). These processes have shaped the landscape over millions of years and will continue to be present and affect the landscape far into the future.

Conclusion

In essence, it is not possible to define a preconceived programme for the intervention at the Faerie Glen Nature Reserve based only on the scientific analysis of the site. Rather, through analysis and cultural understanding of the processes, past and present on the site, the layer of inherent narrative will emerge. The analysis together with the cultural reading will then guide the design process that deals with site specific conditions and will thus provide the conceptual link between nature and society enabling a memorable place to emerge (Figure 2.1).

The design interventions in the reserve will allude to, and bring to life the narrative of the site. Stories will be fashioned by the people that visit the reserve and these stories will live on as memories determined by the experience of the place.

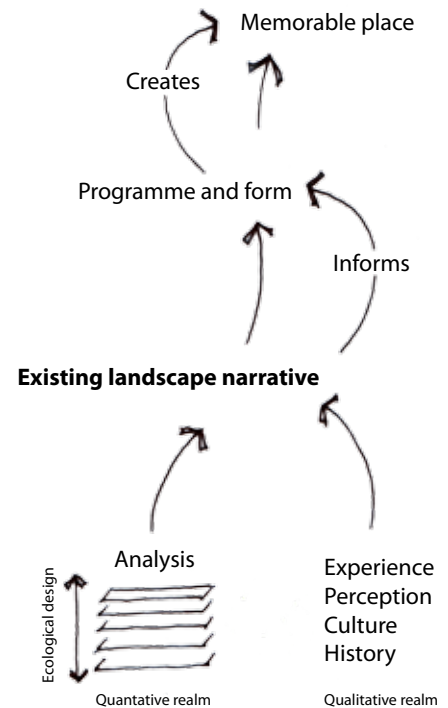


Figure 2.1 Landscape narrative