

CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to formulate a landscape approach based on landscape theory. This will facilitate in a “golden thread” for the project and in design decision making.

4.1 Theoretical approach

The current paradigm in landscapes has seen a re-emergence of two approaches to landscape architecture, not new to the profession but used to celebrate a site while solving related real-world issues, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. The first is the use of Picturesque aesthetics within landscape architecture, especially in parks.

“[...] or parks that feature abandoned refrigerator towers, still tread upon the familiar territory of the Picturesque” (Herrington 2016).

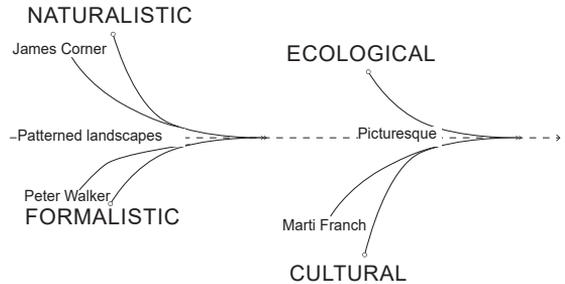


Figure 4.1 Paradigm comparison (Author 2017)

The other is one of Patterned landscapes and the use of pattern for systems design and process as pattern (M’Closkey 2013).

4.2 Picturesque for the “not conventionally pretty”

“The recognition of Picturesque aesthetics in contemporary landscape architecture is important now because during the past century the study of human interactions and experiences with landscape has been dominated primarily by environmental psychologists preoccupied with landscape preferences and behaviours” (Herrington 2006:23).

In Susan Herrington’s article *Framed Again: The Picturesque Aesthetics of Contemporary Landscapes*, Herrington recognises that the re-appreciation of landscapes for the bettering of the human psyche has been a recent point of interest in other professions. She attributes this to the re-emergence of picturesque qualities and ideologies.

“These projects are captivating because they create the possibility for appreciating landscapes that are not

conventionally pretty” (Herrington 2006:29). This emotive evoking design towards industrial (synthetic) landscapes engages the users on an emotional, imaginative level as well as evoking memories of place. By doing so, these projects participate in Picturesque aesthetics (Herrington 2006).

Socio-political conditions have been a symptom of this Picturesque ideology but Herrington is critical of the lack of attention given to the Picturesque as an aesthetic and that other studies on the matter have only investigated Picturesque as a historic style. Herrington goes on to identify Three Faces of Picturesque: Picturesque style; Picturesque ideology; Picturesque as aesthetic (Herrington 2006).

Picturesque style is defined as an important defining element of this style. Inspiration was drawn from Roman artists and their techniques. These techniques were



Figure4.2 Author collage of experience of site with a vision for site (Author 2017)

incorporated into landscape design such as extending the ground plane. This created a formal quality within the work of this style (Herrington 2006).

Picturesque ideology is a movement within the Picturesque where the owners of large properties and wealth attempted to “naturalise” their wealth through mossed-over buildings and rolling landscapes, which created an authorless appearance. These spaces gave the user an impression of informality and a sense of natural order, which only the rich could afford (Herrington 2006).

Picturesque as aesthetic is the face of the Picturesque identified most in contemporary landscapes. The three major identifiers as Picturesque as aesthetic response according to Herrington are: “(1) the primacy given to the role of the imaginative spectator; (2) the use of artefacts that would be deemed unsightly or even ugly without picturesque aesthetics; and (3) content in these works that is typically unfamiliar to a 21st century, service-oriented culture” (Herrington 2006).

It is often argued that with Picturesque landscapes such as the Stourhead Estate, it is important for the user to



Figure4.3 Author collage of potential ‘look and feel’ of site (Author 2017)

have sufficient knowledge of Virgil's Aeneid and King Alfred to appreciate the landscape (Herrington 2006). It is prevalent that Picturesque landscape is created from a poem, artist's expression or a story.

In these landscapes, the structure or checkboxes for creating such is not as tangible as that of, for instance, the modern movement where applying the five principles will achieve a modern "styled" landscape, but rather depends on the user experience and emotive response to the landscape. These emotions might be that of nostalgia or melancholy (Herrington 2006).

The site that once represented the might of the gold industry that moved tons of earth for the search of wealth and an improved life, is now a visibly degraded, neglected piece of earth representing the damage of years of ill-managed mining practises (Lieverink 2017). Can these left-over heaps have an emotive impact and add to the Picturesque aesthetic of site? See Figure 4.3. To not just *tabula rasa* the site, as warned against by John Ormsbee Simonds. Rather, by re-imagining these (industrial) sites with a focus on a theoretical enquiry, rather than an exclusive artistic exploration, could the

ugly become the picturesque now (Herrington 2006)?

4.2.1 The emotive landscape of the 'not so pretty'

Jacky Bowring entered the discussion on emotive landscapes with her book *Melancholy and the Landscape: Locating Sadness, Memory and Reflection in the Landscape*. Investigating the emotions of melancholy and tragedy, she explores the definition of landscapes and its all-encompassing meaning that can possibly include everything seen outdoors: buildings, cities, parks, etcetera. and the rich history we as humans endured in defining landscape. How then have we reduced landscapes into reality shows where landscapes are installed in backyards in a few hours? She argues that recent mainstream landscape works have been reduced to "eye candy" projects. Important notions such as tragedy and melancholy are avoided but, in her opinion, it is an important emotion (Bowring 2017).

"Defining melancholy is evidently impossible"(Bowring 2017). With this, Bowring suggests that landscape architecture is no stranger to difficult definition and that other challenging subject matters have been expressed in



landscapes such as romantic beauty, abnormal grief and so on. She states that an elusive term like melancholy is open-ended for interpretation and can add a richness to landscapes (Bowring 2017).

The site in the south of Johannesburg causes a definite emotive response. As identified by Herrington, an industrial landscape has hereditary emotive elements that need to be celebrated within landscapes. Having visited the site several times and with different individuals, the overwhelming reactions that I observed were that of awe and surprise. This is experienced especially as one travels from the built-up city centre to the industrial area of the site and the surrounding areas such as Booyens. Entering the site from Booyens Road, vast soil heaps of monotone yellow confront one in contrast with the corrugated iron and brick buildings surrounding the site.

A visit to similar tailings sites in the West Rand created a completely different emotive response. On this trip, activist Mariette Liefferink accompanied a group of mechanical engineers on a day excursion to different tailings sites at varying stages of degradation, reprocessing and standstill. Through her wide knowledge, understanding the effects of these sites on the environment and communities gave rise to a sense of angst and worry. The knowledge of the potential effect of these sites on one person and others as well as to the environment, created a different experience but left one still in awe of the vastness of these sites located in the midst of urban areas.

Based on the theory of the beautiful in the ugly, the proposed site development will engage with the pollutants on site. The proposed systems will play a central part on the site and, in dealing with it, the implementation of pattern as form making is explored.

4.3 The use of pattern

Furthermore, in reaction to an article by Karen M'Closkey, namely *Synthetic Patterns: Fabricating Landscapes in the Age of 'Green'*, a critical look at pattern making and the use of pattern as a design approach for the site and proposed system were undertaken. She wrote the article as a response to growing discussions in the landscape architectural field focusing on problem-solving approaches, and not how these landscapes can cater for expression, experience, and art (M'Closkey 2013).

What does it mean to use pattern in landscape architecture? Pattern is defined as a diagram of process (Bell 1999). Bell observed a relationship between every process or *façade* of activity and the pattern created by them. Thus, patterns occur naturally and can be observed from a micro scale, such as a DNA string, to a macro scale, such as galaxies (Bell 1999). Pattern is what helps us process information and make sense out of chaos (M'Closkey 2013).

"[...] pattern can be used as a bridging mechanism between a landscape's utilitarian and aesthetic functions: between systems and signs" M'Closkey.

The use of pattern, according to M'Closkey, can relate users to the landscape by the pattern that caters for the utilities on site. She states this as one of the benefits of the use of pattern in landscapes. Pattern in landscape provides order and structure to a landscape without

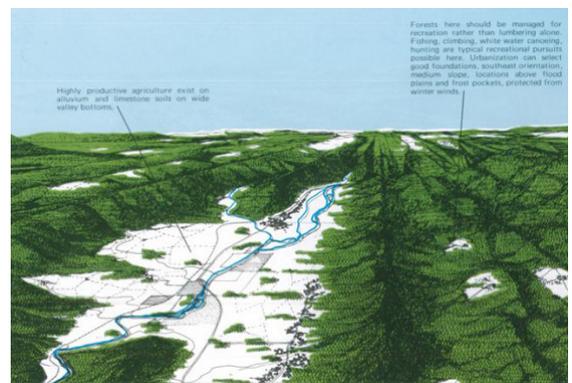


Figure 4.4 Ian McHarg, Design with Nature (McHarg 1992)

looking like nature. M'Closkey is critical of a landscape that imitates nature and its processes, in that natural landscapes lack expression and are only fully appreciated as views and not immersing the user in experience. As with Ian McHarg's approach to landscape, as seen in his book *Designing with Nature*, imitating nature is adopted as an approach to landscape design. See Figure 4.4.

Working with a synthetic site, the prospect of rehabilitating the site to a previous ecological state seems redundant as the new "ecology" of the site has a positive quality captured in years as the tailings have been exposed to natural and man-made processes and degradation. Can the pattern cater for a certain "new synthetic ecology" that will transform this derelict space into a more immersive landscape? Can pattern bring an identity to the site?

4.3.1 Potential pattern pitfalls

According to M'Closkey's research, some of the critiques on pattern in landscape are as follows (M'Closkey 2013):

1. Using Geometric shapes, pattern tends to be on a flat surface and thus considered to be visual and pictorial only.
2. Patterned Landscape implies repetition and thus these landscapes are monotonous. Variety should invoke difference in kind and not, as the case with pattern, difference in degree.
3. The use of computer-based drawing programs has made it easier to copy and paste a pattern on a landscape and patterns are uncritically adopted on site.
4. Patterns are too static and not mutable for the fluctuations of landscapes.
5. Applying a geometry to landscapes is self-explanatory by the geometry itself and thus not site-specific.

Some patterned landscapes focus more on the visual strengths of pattern, as the Trinity College Quadrangle by gh3 as seen in Figure 4.5. This is a patterned ground plain that serves an activity courtyard for formal and

informal events.

In my opinion, the pattern serves as a datum for the surrounding buildings. It is one-dimensional but still successful. The meaning of the chi icon that is repeated, connects the landscape with the cultural significance of the college as a place where students, staff, and alumni meet. The implementation of the landscape also ensured the survival of existing trees that were degrading due to root compaction, thus catering to some ecological function of a vertical fertilisation program, while still allowing for infiltration of stormwater. This project breaks one of the critiques on pattern and is still successful. So, what pattern can be incorporated on site? How would one express a system then with pattern?

4.3.2 Patterns on site

M'Closkey categorises recent patterns in landscape architecture into Pattern of Field and Pattern of Figure. 'Field' refers to pattern derived from a response of energy of the site, for example, a pedestrian route across a site with a type of vegetation growing on-site in clumps. "The changes from unstable high energy to stable low energy states, processes of weathering, erosion, transport, deposition, cycling, capture, release, growth, seed dispersal and so on, all directly or indirectly affect the patterns that emerge at any time" (Bell 1999). Field patterns are identified by gradual changes across their surfaces as opposed to a rhythmic repetition as seen in the work of Peter Walker (M'Closkey 2013).

Figure patterns are patterns derived from an image, seemingly unrelated to site, and incorporated to define spaces and hierarchy of the design. Like Parc del Este by Brule Marx, the patterns implemented were on different scales, repeating a figure with variation, ensuring that the pattern does not become redundant. The use of figure patterns is seen more in the use of expressing systems like water systems in landscapes (M'Closkey 2013).

Bell introduces a play on American architect, Louis Sullivan's 'form follows function' into 'pattern follows process' or even 'process follow pattern'. The site is

being created by various processes and needs processes to make it viable, implementing a figure pattern that pattern follows process.

Projects such as the Qunli National Urban Wetland done by Turenscape Landscape architects, as seen in



Figure4.5 Patterned landscape at Trinity Collage by gh3 (Landezine 2017)

Figure 4.10 is a key example of utilising field and figure as a generator of pattern. Figures were used to configure the water system and ensure a unity. The field generated the flows on site from main flow routes to meandering smaller routes.



Figure4.6 Turenscape concept sketch for park (Landezine 2017)

4.4 Conclusion

Creating a landscape that is dependent on technical solutions to make it viable, the approach can easily be driven by just the solution. Not negating the fact that the project will have an ecological and systems solution that need to be addressed, but approaching them in a more aesthetical approach such as that of the picturesque movement and pattern making, a pattered landscape can be aesthetically pleasing and an exciting emotive landscape that deals with the real-world problems.

Bell delves into aesthetics and concludes that the following elements ensure a landscape of some sort of aesthetical value namely: diversity/complexity, spirit of place (*genius loci*), mystery, multiple scales, strength (Bell 1999).

These approaches are an attempt at creating a unique

response that will create an identity of place and not just a bulldozed site with a landscape superimposed onto it. “Many recently acclaimed works purposefully frame the landscape to heighten its sublime qualities and awaken a chain of mental connections, sensations, and memory” (Herrington 2006). Having a strong ecological component to rehabilitate site, the first response might be to create a natural landscape (or a landscape resembling a natural one). As seen with the pattern making approach, this might not be the best approach for a synthetic site such as this. “To design with nature today, we should not attempt to camouflage the fact of our manufactured sites” (M’Closkey 2013).

