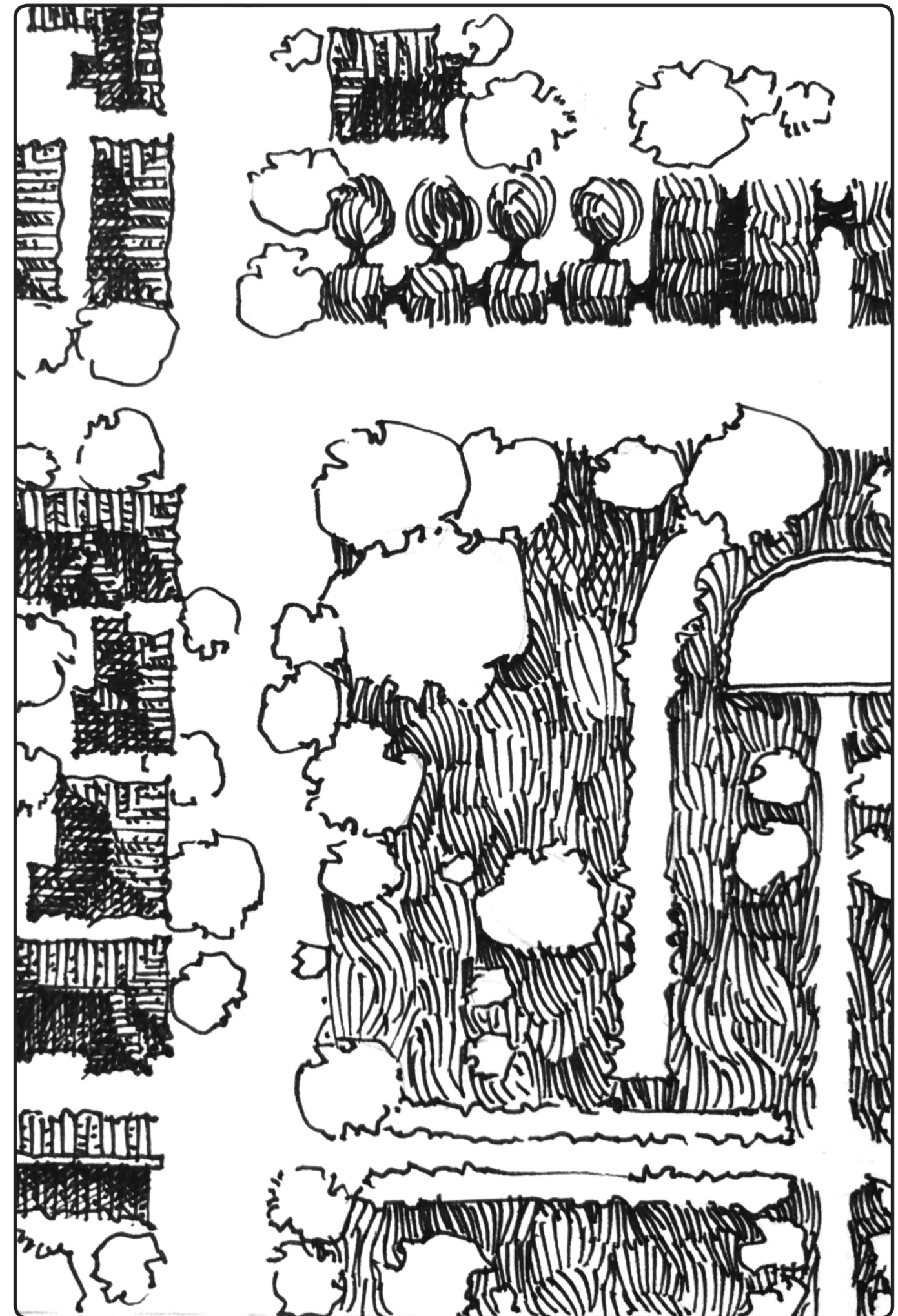CHAPTER

04

A GARDEN
IN THE CITY

Understanding the site and surrounding Arcadia in the
interest of contributing to its character of place.

4.1
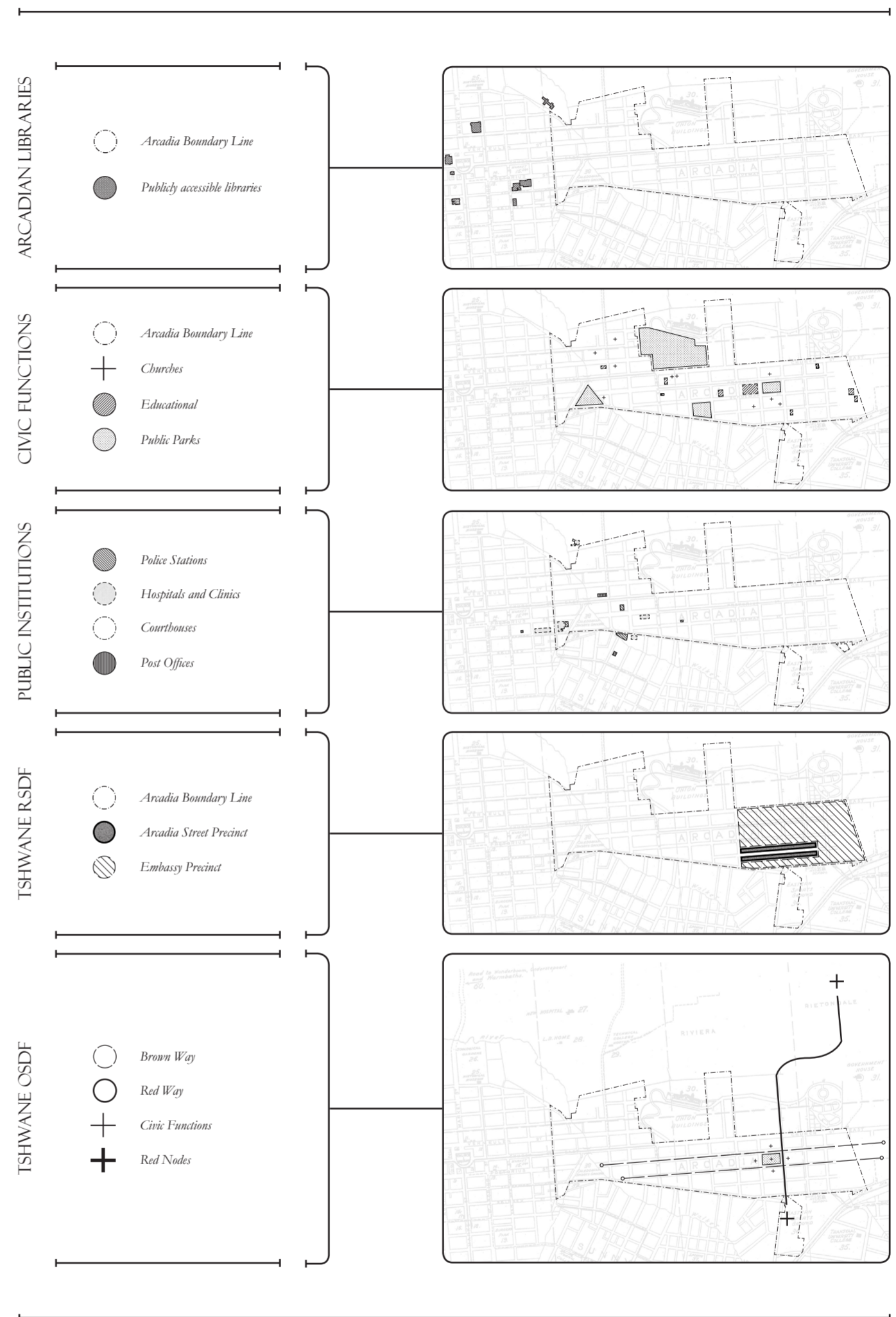
4.2

ARCADIA

A FUTURE ARCADIA

Arcadia is a historic suburb just east of the Pretoria inner city that originally housed the administrators and clerks who formed the governmental workforce of the capital city. Named after the original farm upon which it was established, the word 'Arcadia' alone conjures images in the mind of an idyllic pastoral landscape and a utopic relationship between this perfect realm and those who inhabit it. The reality of Arcadia as a visually picturesque place exists not too far from this nomenclative ideal, containing a high concentration of historic houses and embassies as well as the presence of no less than three large public parks and a diversity of street tree species (Tshwane 2017:100, Tshwane 2005:63), it is these physical conditions along with the communities that occupy it that create for the suburb its well defined identity and unique quality of place. Along with having this distinct character of place, Arcadia is to be injected with various new programmes including institutions as part of a larger framework for the future development of the area. This overlap of a strong sense of place and the necessity for institutional functions within the suburb, means that Arcadia provides the ideal conditions for an investigation into a place-based approach for the creation of civic institutional architecture.

The call for the injection of civic institutions into the Arcadian built fabric is advocated by the City of Tshwane in their RSDF document. In response to this identified need, this investigation situates itself within the imagined future context outlined by the RSDF. The framework proposes a mixed-use region referred to as the Embassy Precinct that would enclose the eastern half of Arcadia and a small sliver of Hatfield whilst containing a low density mix of residential, commercial, retail and institutional functions whilst retaining the areas many embassies (Tshwane 2017:104). The precinct is understood in the framework as a lesser node that acts as a transitory space between the greater nodes of the Hatfield Core and the Inner City, the consequences of such an approach limits development to smaller scale interventions within the precinct (as compared to a rapidly growing and rapidly homogenising neighbouring Hatfield)(Tshwane 2017:99), a condition that aids in the conservation of the Embassy Precinct's existing fine grained and suburban character of place.

Figure 4.1 - Urban mapping of Arcadia

ARCADIAN LIBRARIES

Arcadia Boundary Line

Publicly accessible libraries

CIVIC FUNCTIONS

Arcadia Boundary Line

Churches

Educational

Public Parks

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Police Stations

Hospitals and Clinics

Courthouses

Post Offices

TSHWANE RSDF

Arcadia Boundary Line

Arcadia Street Precinct

Embassy Precinct

TSHWANE OSDF

Brown Way

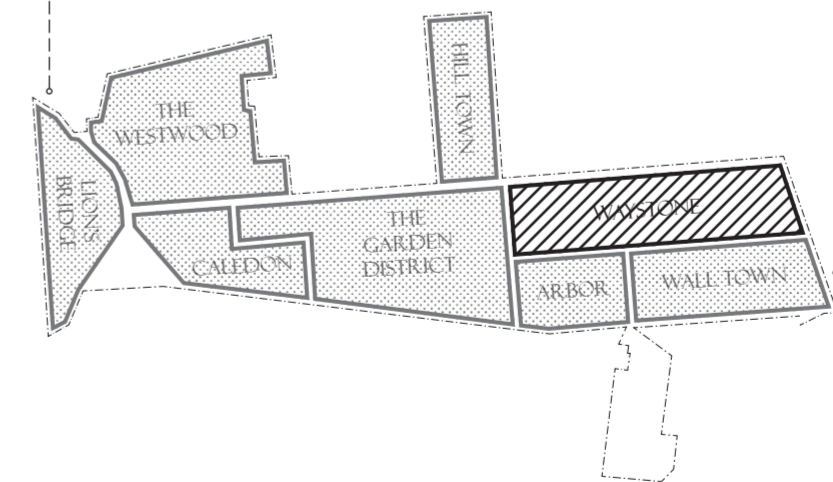*Red Way*

Civic Functions

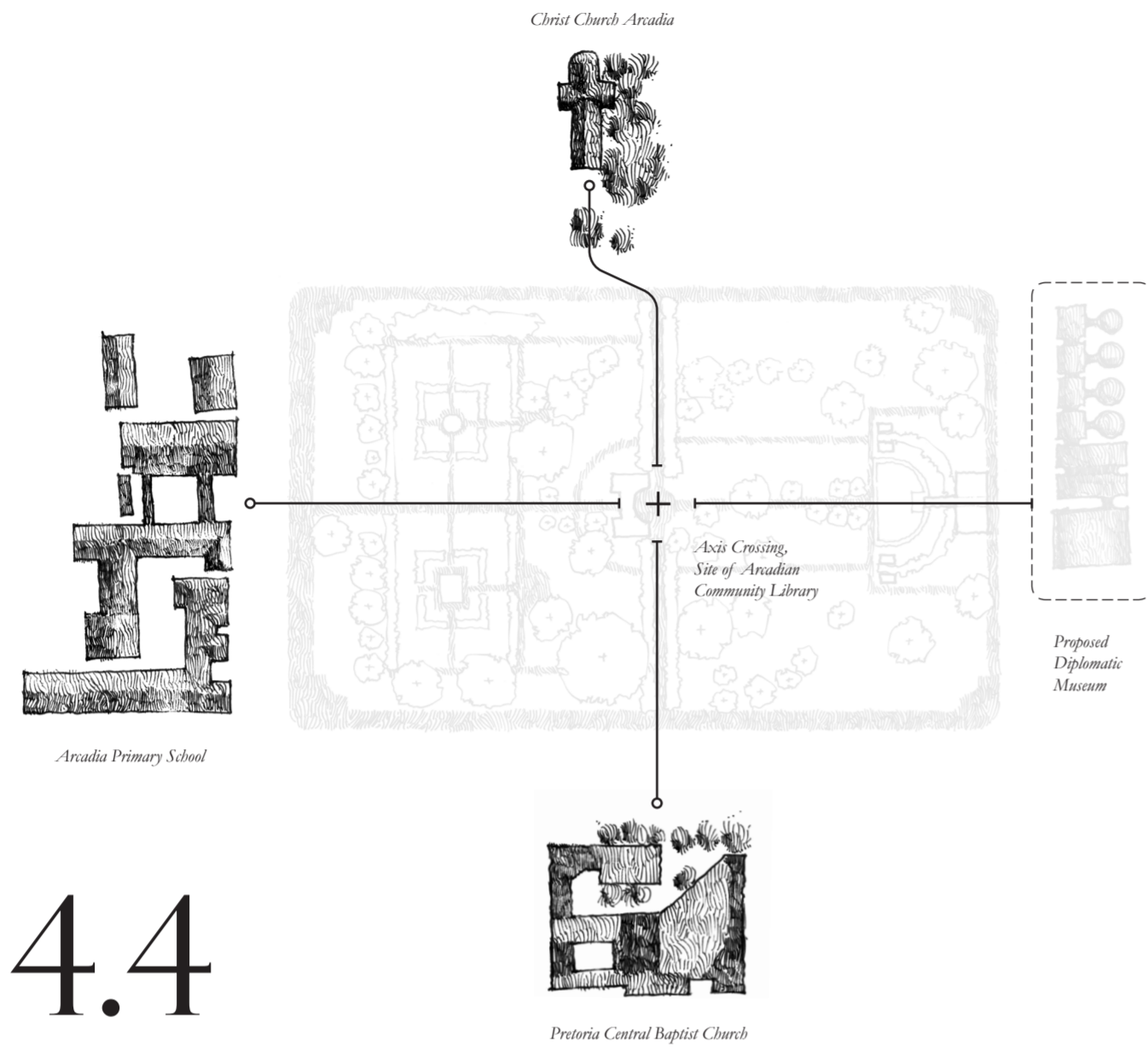*Red Nodes*

4.3

A NEIGHBOURHOOD APPROACH

From the insight gained from the mapping and qualitative understanding of the suburb, the urban vision which forms the context for this investigation acts as an elaboration for the existing RSDF proposal for the area. The elaborated urban vision situates itself within the RSDF whilst addressing a scale of investigation neglected by the existing RSDF. Where the existing framework addresses issues at a large scale (that of the precinct) and at a small scale (the treatment of individual streets) there are no proposals for dealing with an intermediary scale that would effectively mediate the scale of the urban zone with the scale of the human user. In response to this, the elaborated urban vision advocates a neighbourhood approach, proposing that Arcadia be broken up into a series of distinct neighbourhoods or districts, each legibly defined and having their own character of place, similar to the neighbourhood condition that characterises other large cities such as New York or Barcelona. This defining of the proposed neighbourhoods acts as a formalisation and celebration of the existing experientially distinct regions that make up Arcadia. The subdivision of a single homogenous region into various smaller ones is an approach informed by Harries (1997) who argues that humanity demands defined regions, boundary and spatial heterogeneity at a human scale in order to meaningfully associate with places and claim ownership over them.

An issue identified in the process of mapping Arcadia's public institutions was that of the sparse distribution of certain types of public institutions such as hospitals, courthouses and police stations as well as the total lack of any public libraries across the entirety of the suburb. This issue provided an opportunity to strengthen the individual character of place of the proposed neighbourhoods through the architectural expression of the institutions injected into institutionally impoverished neighbourhoods. Leon Krier (1983) argues that it is not just the urban grain, nor just a place's monuments and civic structures that create a sense of place but rather, place is defined by the interaction between these two conditions. As such, these proposed neighbourhoods provided the ideal context for the injection of institutional interventions concerned with the creation of place and contextual sensitivity.

Figure 4.2 - Proposed urban vision overlaid onto Tshwane RSDF and OSDF and the reintroduced historic tram lines

Christ Church Arcadia

Axis Crossing, Site of Arcadian Community Library

Proposed Diplomatic Museum

Arcadia Primary School

Pretoria Central Baptist Church

4.4

A CIVIC HEART

In response to the call for institutional development in the area by the RSDF, existing Arcadian public institutions were mapped in order to gauge their distribution in order to determine the appropriate siting for an intervention. Along with this mapping, a qualitative analysis of the greater Arcadia was undertaken as a means of developing an understanding of the physical and the atmospheric qualities of the context on an urban scale.

Through the interrogation of these studies, the formally designed Venning Park was identified as the ideal site for intervention. A trio of civic buildings around the perimeter of the park terminate its crossing axes, establishing a subtle relationship with one another and the open public space that binds them together. Along with the central placement of the park in relation to surrounding embassies, schools and homes, the conscious placement of the institutions in the ensemble in relation to one another defines a distinct and identifiable urban region around and within the park which holds the potential to develop into a future civic heart for Arcadia East.

Figure 4.3 - Axes relating the park to its context

Figure 4.4 - A sunken garden in the park

Figure 4.5 - Locality map of site

St. Albans Hostel

Christ Church Arcadia

PRETORIUS STREET

Eastwood Village Shopping Centre

Arcadia Primary School

Indian High Commission

United States Embassy

Pretoria Central Baptist Church

FRANCIS BAARD STREET

4.5

VENNING PARK, A BRIEF HISTORY

4.5.1 - A STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Originally named Eastwood Square when it was established in 1890, Venning Park is one of Pretoria's oldest parks and is exemplary of the city's historical character of place. Used as a park since 1912, the construction of the formalised layout of the park began in 1932 when slate paths, stairs and retaining walls were built according to the Arts and Crafts tradition and as a reference to the gardens of the nearby Union Buildings (Easton 1985). Along with the few extant trees that were planted when the park was established, this stonework is the most historically significant contributor to the atmosphere of the park. The park remained relatively unchanged from when its original layout was completed in ca. 1939 until 1981 when new rose gardens were designed to fit within the historic formal layout (Easton 1985). Although the addition of the new rose gardens was sensitive, the park underwent a heavy and somewhat ham-fisted remodelling in 1983 which resulted in the park as it can be seen today. The original layout was changed in the interest of improving the flow of foot traffic within the park and new public toilets, shops and a café were built in an eclectic post-modern style. All of these buildings now stand empty and the public frequently take shortcuts across the lawns rather than use the paths on site.

In order to retain the historic character of Venning Park and its significance as a place, several aspects of the park's design need to be respected by any new interventions on the site. The presence of an ordered, formal layout, palm lanes and pruned trees lend the park its recognisability within the city and signify its membership in a larger network of large historic gardens in the city of Pretoria. The historic stonework and relationship between the park's axes and the surrounding civic buildings root the park into the surrounding context of Arcadia whilst its vegetation in the form of mature trees, pond lilies and rose bushes references the parks own history. Although the rose garden was added in living memory, the presence of roses in the park references a 19th century Pretoria known as 'the city of roses' for the rose bushes and water channels that lined its streets (Easton 1985). These rose bushes also link the park to other rosariums throughout the city, such as Burger's Park, Meyer's Park and Franzina Park. The final aspect of the parks character of place is the presence of a café. Although only added in 1983, the café has rooted itself so strongly in the public associations with, and memories of, the park that the presence of such a function has been deemed worthy of conservation.
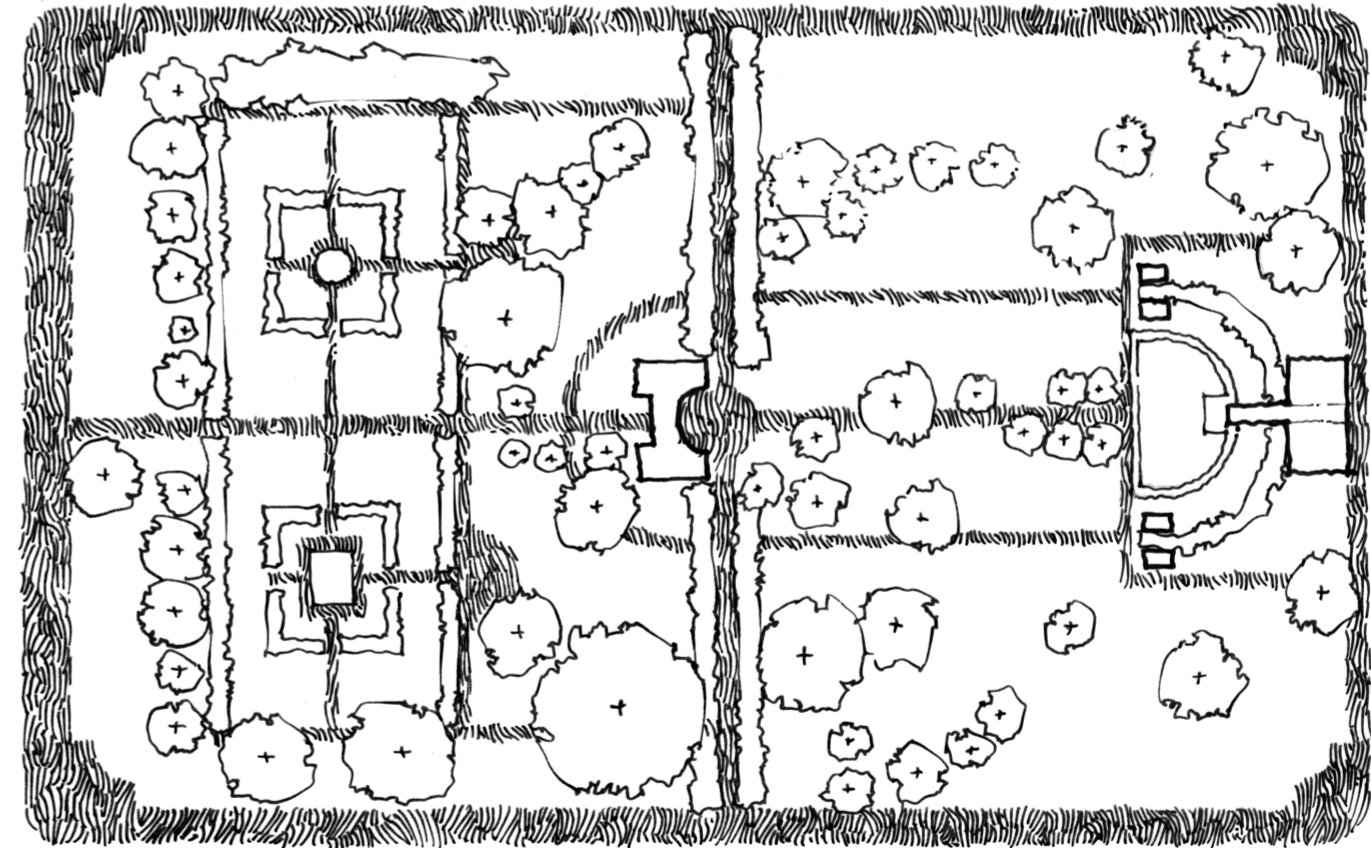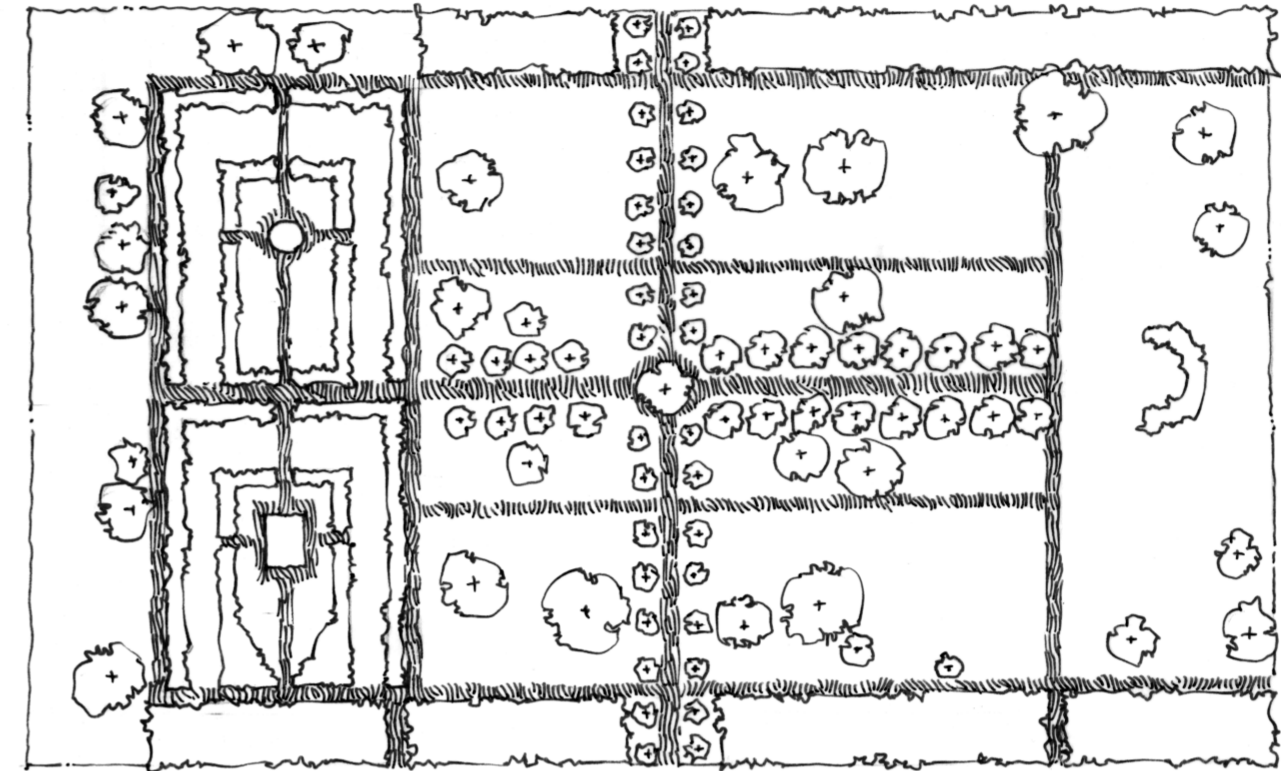
4.6

THE OSDF

Parallel to the RSDF within which this investigation situates itself, the Tshwane OSDF will also be responded to as a vision for the future context of the city, specifically regarding the siting of the study in a public open space in the form of Venning Park. The OSDF characterises the various types of open spaces that comprise the fabric of the city into a taxonomy of different types of nodes and ways (fig.4.1). The most relevant of these categories when referring to Venning Park are the red and brown categories. Venning Park itself is considered as a Red Node flanked on its northern and southern boundaries by two prominent Brown Ways that link the Hatfield core area to the inner city. Crossing these Brown Ways, Eastwood Street takes the form of a Red Way which links the Loftus Red Node in the south to the Pierneef Ridge node in the north with Venning Park existing as the halfway point (Tshwane 2005).

4.6.1 - RED NODE - VENNING PARK

Red Nodes are defined by the OSDF as irreplaceable place-making elements within the city's urban fabric and that their significance depends on their role of lending the city its unique character and sense of place. With this description of Venning Park as place, the character of the site needs to be considered worthy of conservation as opposed to subversion or reinvention due to the role it plays and its irreplaceable nature. In addition the OSDF states that developments surrounding Red Nodes should be of a

landmark quality and therefore retail and commercial developments are inappropriate. As such Venning Park provides the ideal location for the development of institutional functions with the aim of celebrating the node as a defined civic heart for the precinct.
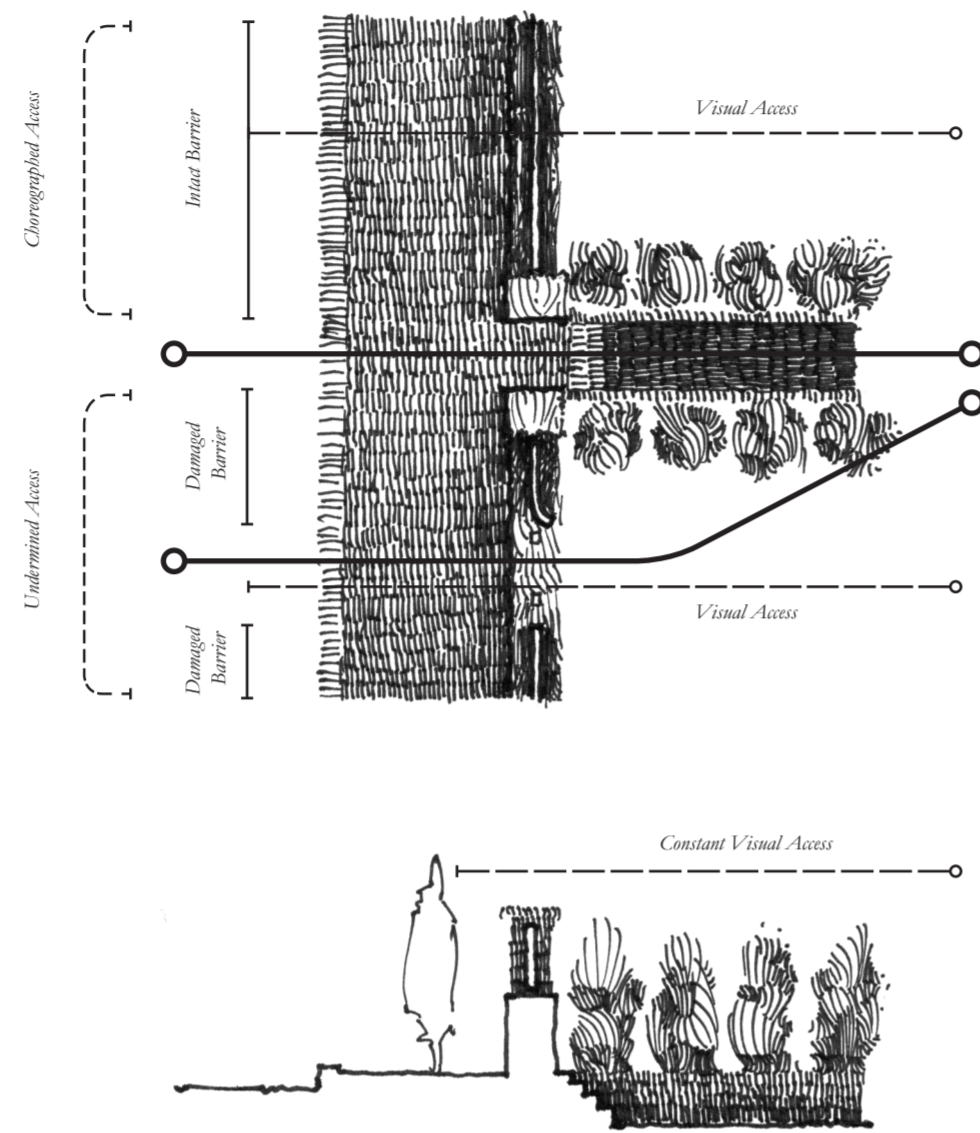
4.6.2 - RED WAY - EASTWOOD STREET

Red Ways are described in the framework as processional or ceremonial paths that connect spaces of significance within the city. The Eastwood Street Red Way running past Venning Park will be imagined as a formalised, landscaped boulevard catering for pedestrian traffic as per the recommendations of the OSDF. Such a condition makes it critical that the eastern entrance to the park be carefully considered due to the heavy flow of users walking past it.

4.6.3 - BROWN WAY - PRETORIUS STREET AND FRANCIS BAARD STREET

As per the RSDF recommendations regarding the transitory nature of the Embassy Precinct, the two Brown Ways that flank the site acts as linkages or urban corridors that connect two other precincts by crossing Arcadia. The OSDF recommends that Brown Ways be public transport and pedestrian oriented paths making the treatment of the northern and southern entrances to the site an additional consideration for this study.

Figure 4.8 - Venning Park's character as a place

Choreographed Access

Intact Barrier

Visual Access

Undermined Access

Damaged Barrier

Damaged Barrier

Visual Access

Constant Visual Access

Distinct smell of faeces

A camping chair

Rose Bushes

Empty

School children wait across the road instead of in the park

Many discarded beer bottles and broken shoes

Cafe abandoned, several windows broken

Rose Bushes

Rose Bushes

Empty

Toilet gutted by fire

Shops are empty, homeless people sleep here

Empty

Rose Bushes

Rose Bushes

Unused Playground

Skip used as toilet

Masonry destroyed, replaced by barbed wire

Hedge blocks line of sight

Rose Bushes

Figure 4.10 - Landing observations of the park

Figure 4.11 - Short-cut routes across the park

Taxi Stop

4.7

A STATE OF DERELICTION

Upon visiting the site for the first time, as a means of beginning to understand its condition, some direct observations were recorded relating to the existing use and state of the park. Regarding its current use, the park is primarily used as a short-cut for people wishing to cross the block, as its accessible paths neatly subdivide the city block into four easily walkable quadrants. There are also fewer individuals who linger within the park itself than those who merely cross it or linger along its periphery, even the learners from the neighbouring school avoid waiting within the park itself and remain across the road on the pavement in front of the school buildings. In addition to the abovementioned condition (or possibly the cause of it) the park currently exists in a severe state of disrepair, bordering on dereliction (fig. 4.12 - 4.15). All of the buildings within the park are permanently locked with many having had their windows broken and one even totally gutted by fire
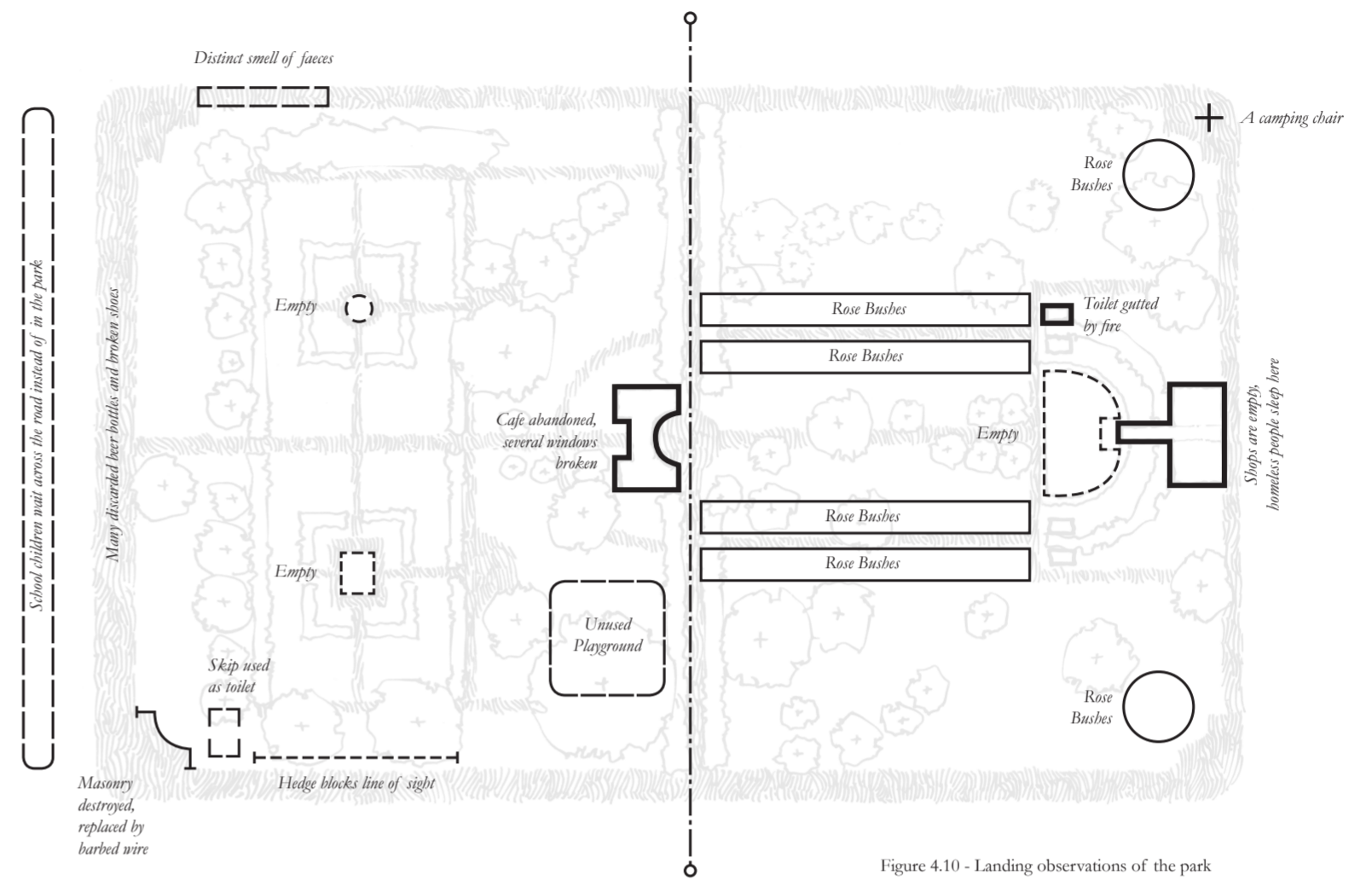
with only the external skin left standing as a ruin. Several Arts and Crafts movement stone retaining walls and steps have also been damaged along with portions of the perimeter fence having been torn out or cut away, presumably to be sold as scrap. Although the lawn is mowed and the park is relatively clean within, the entire perimeter of the park is heavily littered with the signs of human occupation left there by the small community of homeless men who have made the empty ponds and sealed off buildings their home.

Figure 4.9 - Accessing the park

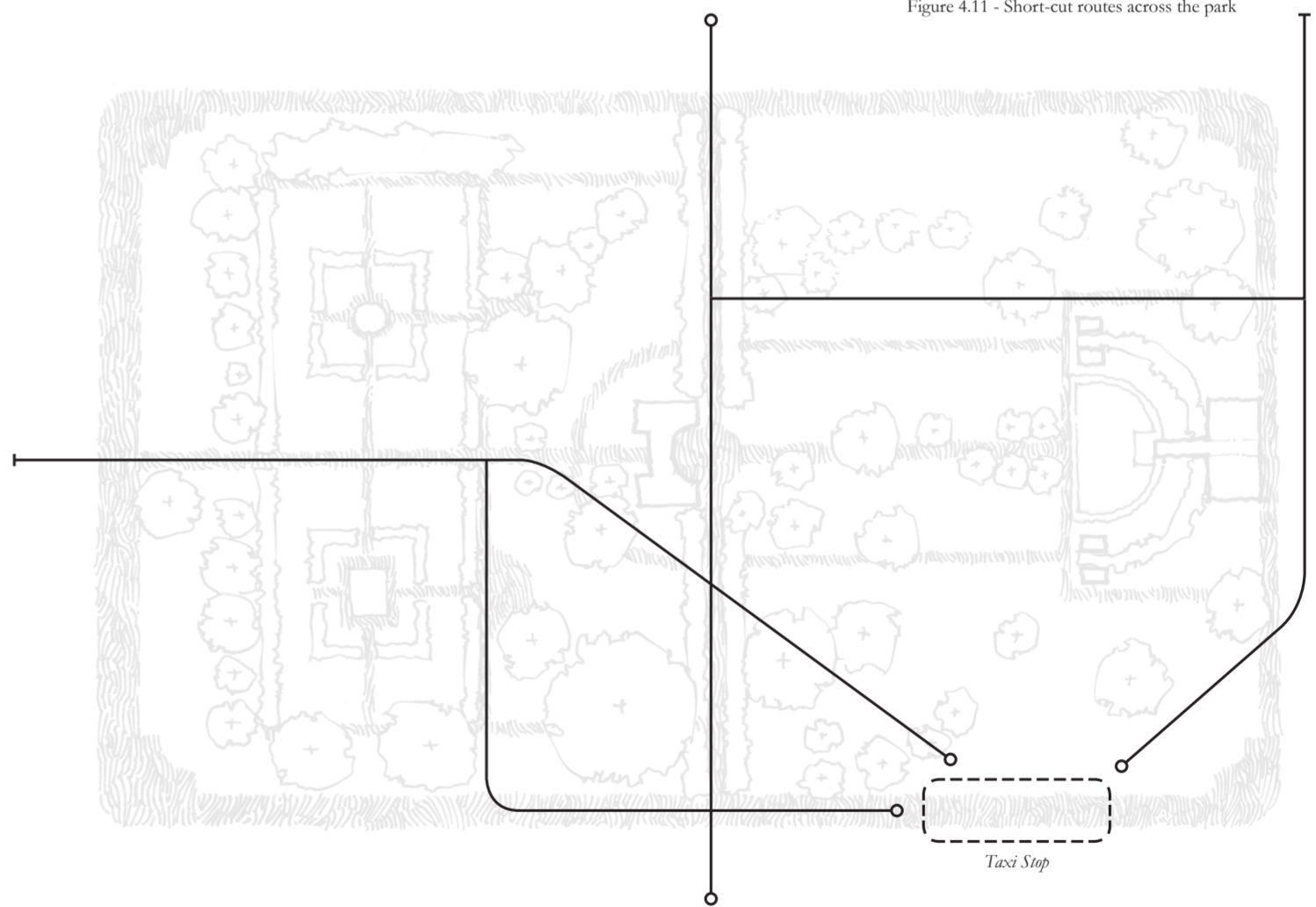## 4.7.1 - A NOTE ON THE APPROPRIATE

Figure 4.12 - Signs of human occupation

Figure 4.13 - The fire-gutted ruin on site

Figure 4.14 - Destroyed boundary walls

Regarding the overlap of the site's existing state of dereliction, limited public use and 'Colonial' or 'Western' layout, it might seem logical to assume that this overlap is what has caused the current state of dereliction. Due to the fact that the park was well used until as recently as 2014, this dissertation would argue that there exists no correlation between the levels of public use and appropriation of a spatial intervention, and its architectural style. In support of this argument, one need only compare the physical state and levels of appropriation between two other public landscapes in the city of Pretoria, namely the gardens of the Union Buildings in Arcadia and Freedom Park on Salvokop. The latter example exists in a similar state of repair and use (although not as severe) as that of Venning Park, with a high concentration of litter, many lighting fixtures and handrails being pulled from their brackets, inoperational water features and empty landscapes defining ones experience of Freedom Park, a condition that persists regardless of the sites architectural aspiration to denounce all Western influences and define a new, more appropriate(able) African style. In contrast to the condition of Freedom Park however, the Union Building gardens exist as a well-used and well-maintained public space that serves the Arcadian community regardless of its unashamed Neo-classical expression. From the comparison of Venning Park, the Union Building Gardens and Freedom Park it is clear that an 'appropriate' style will not create an appropriated place, as such the existing architectural style of Venning Park will not be considered as a condition that has influenced its ongoing dereliction or levels of use, ownership and appropriation by the local Arcadian community.

Figure 4.15 - Venning Park's state of dereliction

4.8

EXPERIENCING THE PARK

Aside from its historical significance, the experiential qualities and atmosphere of the park also defines it as a distinct place within the city. A low wall surrounds the edge of the park, which offers constant visual access into the park, with the wall only breaking to allow one to enter the park at specific points where the axes reach the edges of the site. Upon entering the park at either of the two axes, one is made aware of the fact that they each facilitate a distinct spatial experience of the park, with the north-south axis lined with tall palms framing the eye's perspective encouraging a rapid, forward focused movement across the park (fig. 4.20). The east-west axis by comparison is loosely defined and lined with flower beds and shrubs along either side, encouraging the eye to wander from side to side, taking in the visual spectacle of the park as opposed to directing the gaze and steps towards the terminus of an axis (fig. 4.21). On an urban scale the axes are terminated by surrounding civic buildings. When one

reaches the edge of the park, the termination is less obvious, instead one is only vaguely made aware of the prominent building across the street, tying the park gently into its surrounding context. The distinct character of the axes that define the park's spatial quality also divide the park into smaller 'rooms'. This division is most prominent regarding the presence of the north-south axis where the tall, regularly spaced trees form a high wall that splits the park down the middle into two distinct rooms. These rooms each have an identifiable character: the eastern room with its diverse planting palette, open lawns, high concentration of rose bushes and post-modern pavilions gives one the impression of a pleasure garden, a picturesque landscape where the enjoyment of a tea party would not seem out of place (fig. 4.19). In contrast to its eastern neighbour, the western room contains a far more limited planting palette, with rose bushes replaced by stone retaining walls. The defining features of

this room are the symmetrical sunken gardens, their monumental quality giving the room a sense of austerity suggesting a place of contemplation as opposed to celebration (fig. 4.18). In comparison to its counterpart, the east-west axis achieves a far more subtle sense of separation, indicating the effectiveness of the various spatial tools used to define space within the landscape. These tools can be broken up into two broad categories, namely the three dimensional free standing elements such as trees, hedges, buildings, low walls and sunken spaces as well as the two dimensional surface treatments which address the ground plane, like paths, planting beds, ponds and expanses of lawn (fig. 4.22).
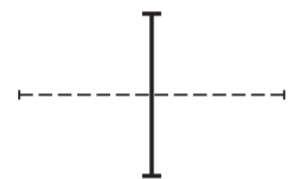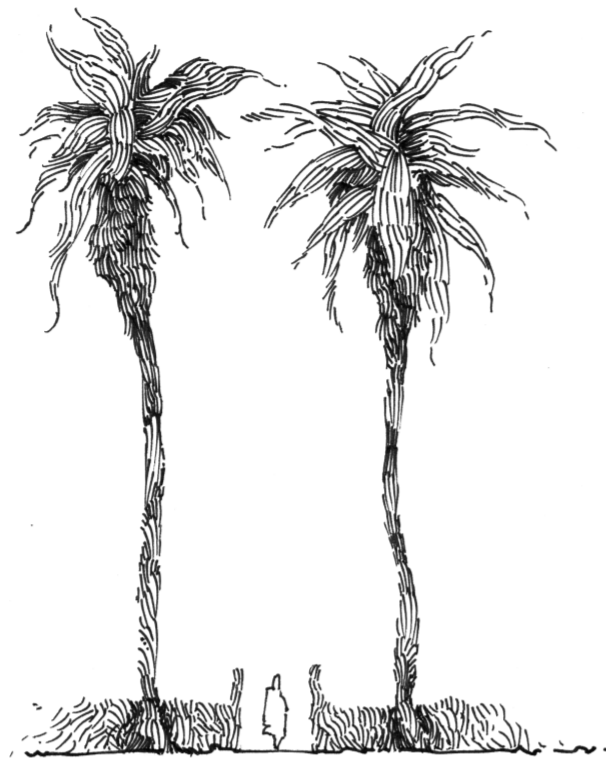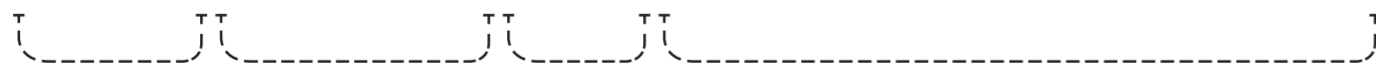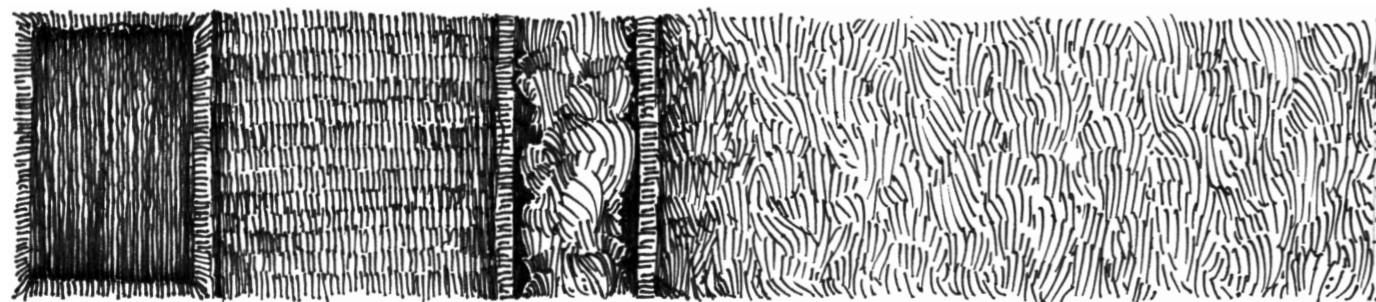

The Monument   *The Tea Garden*
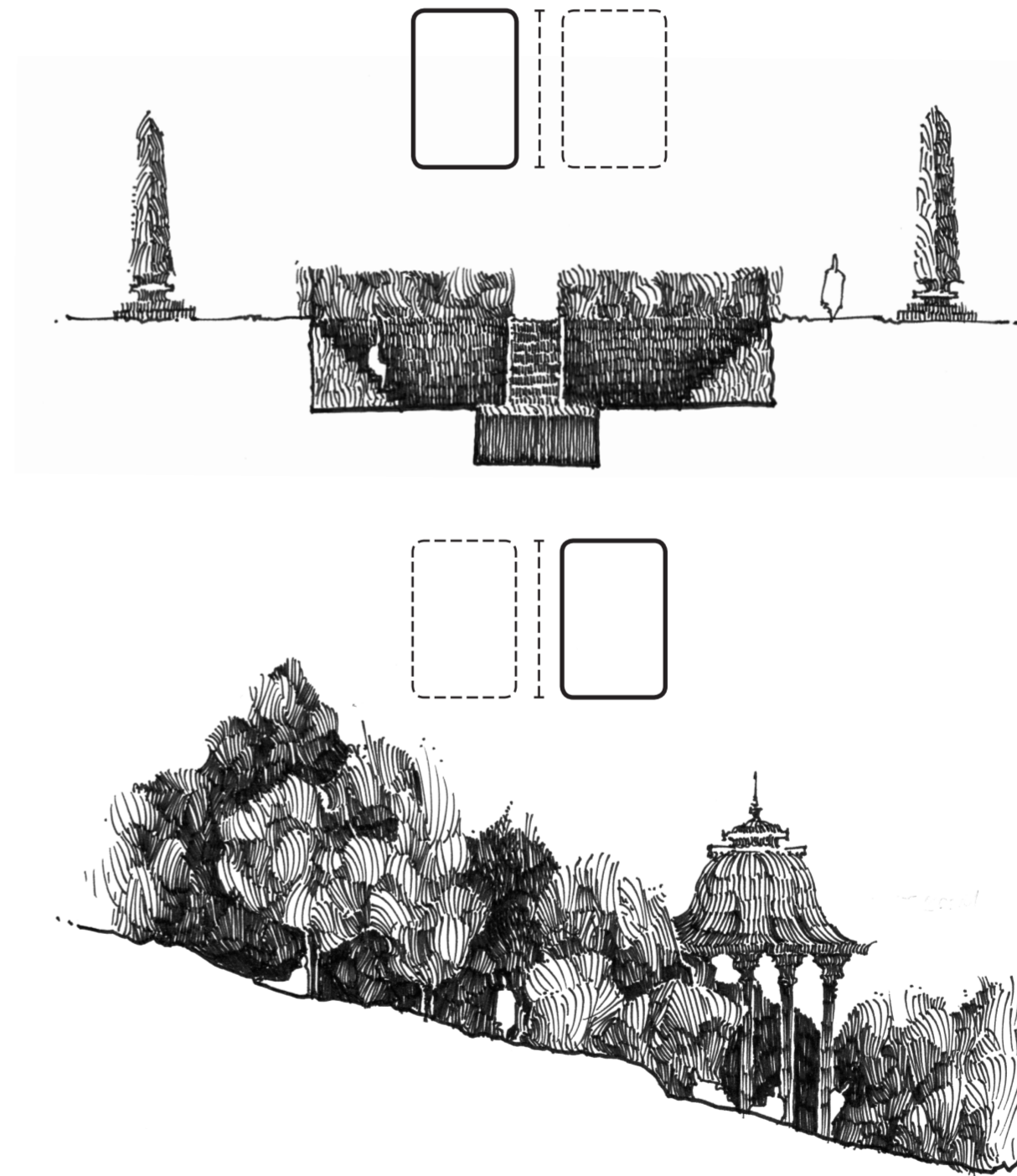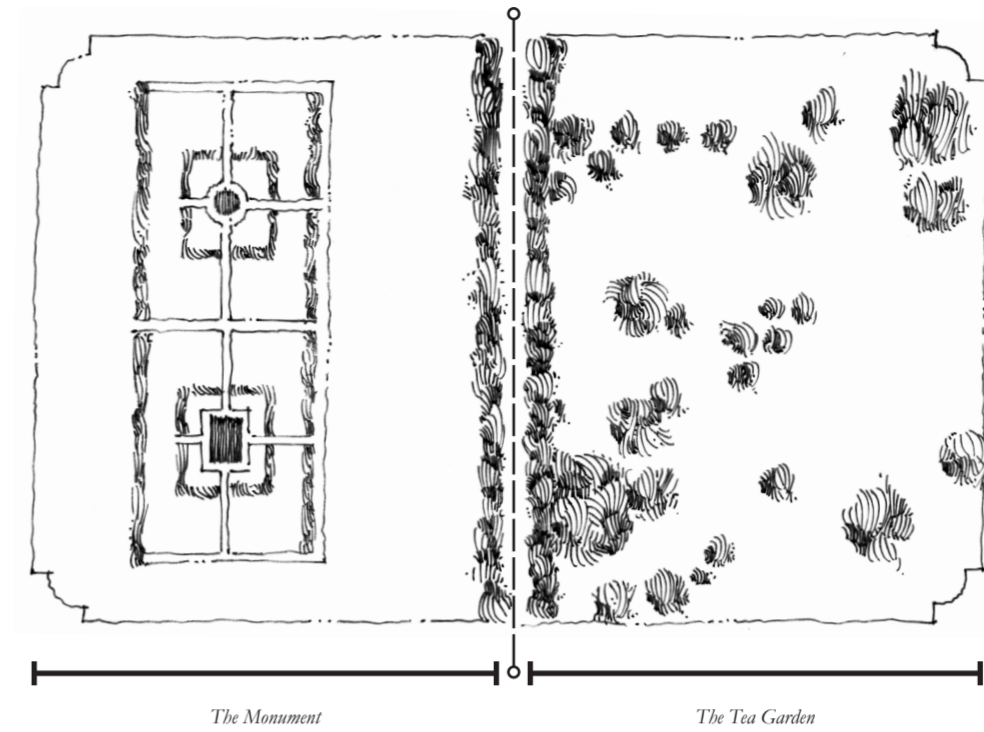
Figure 4.20 - Experience of the north-south axis

Figure 4.21 - Experience of the east-west axis

Figure 4.22 - Space defining elements of the park

Figure 4.23 - The east-west axis

Ponds   *Pathways*   *Planting Beds*   *Lawns*