

Dramatic transitions for poetic spaces: notes on the potential of public walled gardens in cities

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Musing

In between the lazy hum in his head and the gradual heating of the afternoon, Jan Vlerk began to wonder why the walls of the buildings were so *thin*, why more and more facades were billboards, and why the surfaces of roofs and walls, field-ground and faces of people, began to flow into each other. And became light of weight, and began to float slowly up and down, to hang above the earth like the smog city air of a winter's morning; *untouchable*. Nothing was familiar and he could no longer find his house.¹

The landscape of modernity and the three natures

The implied pre-modern distinction between three types of nature² was largely perpetuated in Western modernity. The dark 'wylderness' of the Middle Ages was (along with the Vices such as Hatred, Villainy and Avarice) kept out of third nature.³ *The wall protected the garden inside*. In the Renaissance, poets such as Petrarch (1304–1374) elevated the wilderness to the beautiful, albeit with a limited rhetoric to describe landscapes.⁴ Designed landscapes acknowledged the *view* beyond the garden borders. *The garden wall could be breached*. Although also celebrated as *loci amoeni* in literature, areas of untouched nature remained a background to field and garden. English picturesque landscape designers imitated this venerable background when third natures were created as simulacra of first nature. *The garden wall was hidden in a ditch*.

The Romantic aesthetic was the preference of the first professional landscape architects (and remains a vision of verdurous Arcadia until today): the designers of public parks in the industrial cities of Europe and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to create pastoral scenes⁵ as an antidote to the 'congestion, confinement, and finitude of the city'.⁶ *The garden wall was buildings*.

In the *zeitgeist* of the 1930s, the modernist landscape architects Jean Canneel-Claes (1909–1989) and Christopher Tunnard (1910–1979) propagated reform: the manifesto of the AIAJM [*Association Internationale des Architectes Jardinistes Modernistes*]⁷ called for a landscape architecture that should not imitate first nature nor historic styles of garden design, but rather search for form in function and asymmetrical geometry; the modern urban landscape ought to be unambiguously readable as third nature. The city was no longer the antithesis of Paradise, from which to flee to the Arcadia of parks, but instead in itself held the potential of Paradise: buildings afloat in a radiant sea of green. This ideal was not reached and, after the Second World War (1939–1945), the great housing projects of Europe was to be led by architects and urbanists.⁸ Even though the city was thus not wholly

transformed by landscape design, it was punctuated by the 'democratic garden, the public park [and] the open space for the practice of sports'.⁹ Not only did the distinction between the three natures remain intact, but in urban planning schemes distinct 'green' zones were set aside as a remedy for the ills of urbanisation. *The garden wall was banished to California.*¹⁰

Ian McHarg was vocal in his stance against the design of landscapes that were visually distinct from first nature. He deemed decorative gardens as having been raped by humanist thought and therefore unnatural, and naively lauded Romantic gardens as being 'natural'.¹¹ This attachment of value to the aesthetics of first nature as *opposed* to formalist gardenry does therefore suggest that for the propagators of the ecological movement the distinction between the natures remained intact. *The garden wall was frowned upon.*

Throughout modernity second nature (the utilitarian landscape: by way of example, agricultural fields), has remained intrinsically separate from the idea of city, which, by definition, houses non-agricultural specialists. The Romanticised first nature has, in particular since the twentieth century, *separately* been deemed under threat and, in parts, protected in conservation areas.¹²

Thus, in each of the modern landscape design revolutions, the difference between the natures remained in place and has in fact been consolidated. The role of the landscape as an essential component of urban form has increased in importance, yet remains essentially as a separate endeavour from that of buildings and infrastructure. Current thinking, in the form of landscape urbanism, questions this *status quo*.

Landscape urbanism and the melting of the natures

It is not the aim of this article to define, motivate the merits or defend (or debunk) the emerging field of landscape urbanism, but, for now, merely to stress that what is called for is a less strict distinction between the natures and between landscape and city. Landscape urbanism is a creative mutation of the ecologists' emphasis on landscape as an ecological system, and the modernists' emphasis on its social and urban function; that is a synthesis between science and culture, nature and society; a widening of 'ecology' to include man and his technologies.

A *leitmotif* within the writings of landscape urbanism is the distaste for the formal historicism of designed landscapes and its mere role as that of urban beautification. James Corner has said that in order for us to grapple with rapid global urbanisation 'landscape may no longer be simply a passive, scenic background but more the actual engine in shaping new forms of urban settlement'.¹³ That 'background' is still largely shaped by the prevailing image of the picturesque idyll, which is, according to Richard Weller, an obstruction to a more holistic view.¹⁴

According to the landscape urbanist attitude, designed urban landscapes can no longer simply fulfil our need for reveries in green spaces, neither work toward the improvement of society, nor just protect ecologies from developers, but must now also fulfil the role of production and organising; first, third and second natures must thus become foundational

in the re-imagining of the city. Not, however, as distinct zones on a plan, but as *one* landscape in which these distinctions are dissolved.

The dissolution of the natures precludes a further barrier to be breached, namely that between nature and city. Landscape urbanism not only reacts to the inability of landscape architects to shape meaningfully the contemporary city by creating ‘scenic or semantically coded reserves’¹⁵ — image-orientated third natures — but also to the failings of urban designers in their creating of images of old cities, especially in the guise of New Urbanism. Charles Waldheim has described it as ‘an alternative to urban design’s ongoing nostalgia for traditional forms’.¹⁶ The following quotations by Richard Weller¹⁷ provide a metaphorical description of the spirit of landscape urbanism (all the italics are mine):

...Koolhaas reads the city as simply ‘SCAPE©’ — a condition in which architecture, infrastructure, and landscape are *undifferentiated* and subject to the same forces.

Rather, the contemporary, globally *interconnected* metropolis is a rapacious, *denatured tangle* of infrastructure problems and planning issues increasingly subject to base motivations.

The city in mind here is not a place or just ‘a’ system, but a part of *all* processes and systems, a *field* which covers and makes up the world at any given time.

The city of tomorrow therefore *is* landscape and in it we will not need gardens, parks or green belts, since the natures that used to be found outside the city walls or periphery will be entangled in its very urban fabric, thus rendering their imitation obsolete. I am no judge of the validity of such a vision, but its value for the future of our cities seems self-evident. *The garden wall is built at the ends of the earth* (see figure 1). However, from the literature on landscape urbanism, very little is written on the phenomenological implications of this novel thinking. Corner, especially, does constantly remind us that the ‘smaller, tactile scales of engagement’¹⁸ are important, yet the emphasis of plans, aerial imagery and equivocal collages make it difficult to imagine.

Dear reader, I propose a speculative and imaginary walk through a landscape urbanist future.

Our liquid landscape

The old car-smogged streets make way for pedestrian *surfaces* dotted with trees that follow the courses of storm water streams that gush over hydropower waterfalls. The old phallic buildings make way for landscapers¹⁹ covered by meadows that horizontally merge with the ground to allow unencumbered flows of movement through their airy spaces. The ‘congestion, confinement, and finitude of the [industrial] city’ make way for the free flow, open and endless global urban network of the future.

For the purpose of this essay I will, from now onwards, refer to this imagined landscape urbanist environment, of which fluidity seems to be a characteristic, as the *liquid landscape*. I borrow the ‘liquid’ analogy from the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, who refers to our current state of modernity as *liquid modernity*.²⁰

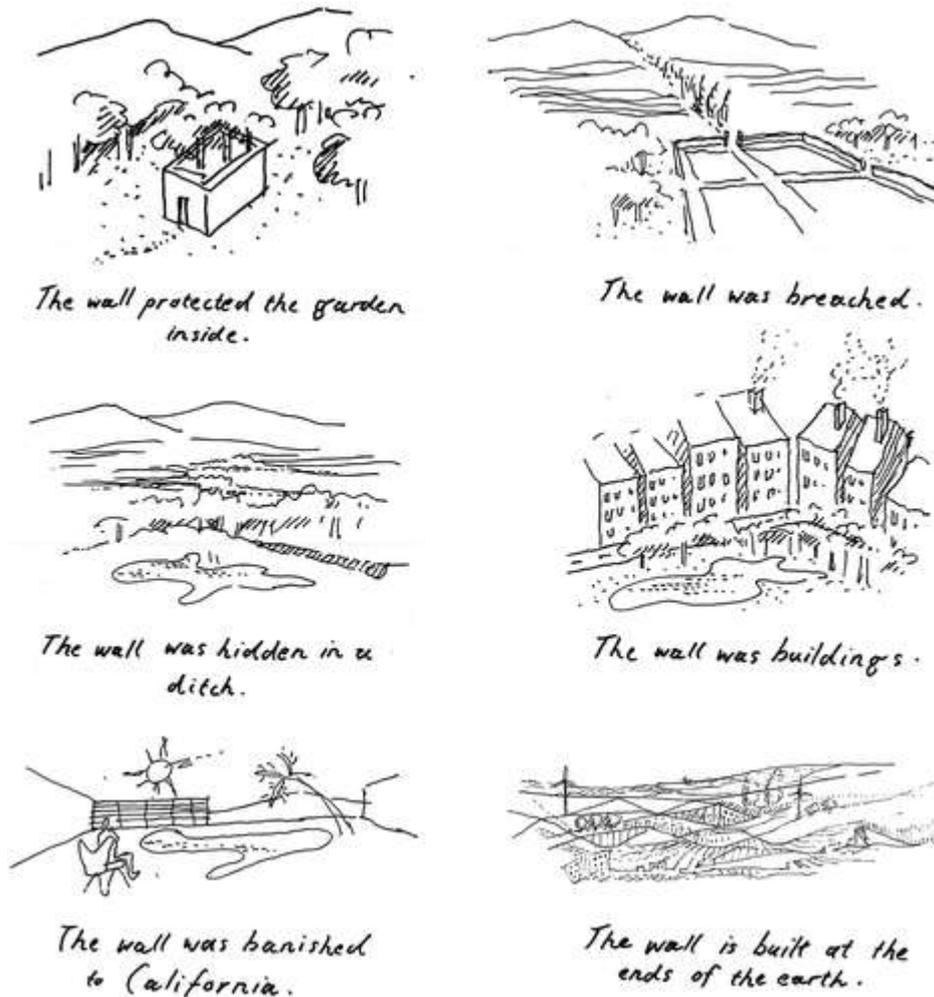


FIGURE 1. An abridged history of the garden wall. Source: Drawing by the author, Pretoria, 2010. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.

Spatially, we have thus much to look forward to, for our gaze in the liquid landscape is the horizon, and sometimes downward and from above. But, we seldom step *into* landscape (for all is landscape) and we hardly ever look *up*. Granted the benefits of the liquid landscape, we must however pause and ask ourselves whether we have not lost the *poetic experience* of entering through the garden gate.

The poetic necessity of strangeness

Writers such as Anne W. Spirn have compared landscape to verbal language;²¹ others, like Jane Gillette, have questioned the value of such comparisons.²² I do not regard landscape as language, but rather value the latter for its *ekphrasis* of the landscape experience and as a mediating role between idea and form in the design process.²³ For the present I do however wish to question whether one of the conditions for the experience of poetry is not also true for the poetic experience of landscape.

The philosopher Owen Barfield, in his study of *Poetic Diction*, describes the appreciation of poetry as a ‘felt change of consciousness’.²⁴ He defines ‘consciousness’ as that which ‘... embraces all my awareness of my surroundings at any given moment, and “surroundings”

include my own feelings'.²⁵ With 'felt' he means, 'to signify that the change itself is noticed, or attended to'.²⁶

When reading poetry or other suchlike texts, this change can occur when there is a discrepancy between your own and the author's consciousness. For a moment, one sees the world through his eyes. This can simply be reading the, unintentionally poetic, description of something by someone from a foreign culture or different time. Barfield gives the following Pidgin English expression used by South Sea Islanders (Australian descendants from islands in the West Pacific) as an example:

Thlee-piece bamboo, two-piece puff-puff, walk-along inside, no-can-see.

The description is of 'a three-masted screw steamer with two funnels'.²⁷ The ship is, for Barfield at least, described in a new light — for the South Sea Islander who uttered the description this phrase was jargon. In the case of intentional poetic writing, it is the metaphorical language of the poet which, and Barfield quotes Shelley, 'marks the before unapprehended relations of things'.²⁸ My 'liquid landscape' is an attempt at relating Bauman's analysis of current modernity to landscape urbanism's vision for urban landscapes. The very origin of 'landscape' was also once a poetic comparison of a certain kind of environment with a certain kind of painting. Imagine the poetic power when *vindauga* (Old Norse) was first uttered to describe the openings in a wall as the eyes (*auga*) of a building so as to allow in the wind (*vindr*)²⁹ — 'window' is now a technical term. 'Paradise' is *like* the enclosed Persian gardens called *pairidaēza* in the Old Iranian language, Avestan.³⁰ 'Dough' is *like* a kneaded paste, rooted in the Indo-European *dheigh*³¹ that means 'to form'. *Daēza* shares this root and refers to walls made from moulded clay bricks which girthed the Persian hunting grounds. Girth and garden are rooted in *gher* which means 'enclosure' — *Paradise is an enclosed garden where bread and bricks are baked*. Only through time and continuous usage do these (and all our) words become prosaic.

The effect of poetic diction to induce this 'felt change of consciousness' is often attained through what Barfield calls *strangeness*, which he qualifies:

... the strangeness shall have an interior significance; it must be felt as arising from a different plane or mode of consciousness, and not merely as eccentricity of expression. It must be a strangeness of *meaning*.³²

The description of the steamer is not strange in the poetic sense because of the 'odd' words (which might amuse), but because it signifies another consciousness's relation to a familiar object. Consider the first lines from a poem by Howard Nemerov below:

These are the original moneys of the earth,
In which invested, as the sparks in fire,
They will produce a green wealth toppling tall,
A trick they do by dying, by decay ...³³

The poet here 'marks the before unapprehended relation' between monetary economy and plant seeds as the unit for the earth's wealth, in *A Cabinet of Seeds Displayed*. My

consciousness, formed in part by my Western rational education, normally perceives 'seeds' as a biological component of animals and plants necessary for their procreation. Suddenly, from the reading of the title and the first line, I feel a change in my perception and for a few moments share in the poet's metaphorical image. This *strangeness* is one of meaning and is achieved by what Barfield described as the use of *technical* words out of context:³⁴ in this case, 'moneys', 'invested' and 'wealth' are all economic terms used here to describe an aspect of biology.

The poetic necessity of strangeness in the landscape

The dusty skies of the African savannah conjure poetic sunsets: the anticipation and fear of night briefly quieten the landscape, until the first howl of a jackal heralds the darkness. Sunsets are poetic, because the landscape is transformed briefly. Our consciousness, between the length of day and of night, is changed as during a rite of passage. It is *strange*, because it is *not* light, neither dark, *not* a time of work nor that of rest; the eye stares to the horizon (reminding us that Horus took the dead to the west), *not* to the fields of the earth nor the starlit sky. Fires are lit to take something of the dying sun into the night.

In Nicolas Refn's 2011 film *Drive* there is a scene in which the getaway driver takes his neighbour and her son on a drive in the channelled Los Angeles River. The three enter a piece of urban wilderness sprouting where the concrete has been eroded. The moment is poetic, not because the space in which they find themselves is *in itself* beautiful (it is littered with rubbish), but because a change of consciousness in the characters is assumed and shared by the viewer. The change is scripted not only by the dramatic *difference* from harsh city and channel to lush vegetation, but also by a deeper strangeness: the function of the channel, its infrastructural meaning, is re-imagined as a medium for biodiversity.

Such can also be said of seeing an oasis in the desert, walking on the strange moist sands between land and sea, entering the land of *Faërie* on the edge of town — these are, for me, poetic moments in the landscape, provoked by strangeness. When thinking of these moments, or longing for them, this *ex situ* appreciation of landscape is always poetic, because a memory always involves a felt change of consciousness.

Literary gardens have often been strange places. In Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams* (1907), Lucian visits the ruins of a Roman fort only to imagine walking through the mystical gardens of an Antique city in which his consciousness could escape the mechanistic world and 'squalid kraals of modernity'.³⁵ The garden of *The Selfish Giant* (1888) by Oscar Wilde is made strange when the Giant builds a wall around it — a place longed for by the excluded children attempting to play on the hard and dusty road on the outside. It became even stranger as the garden inside was frozen in a perpetual winter. The poetic moment is not when the *pairidaēza* is built, but when the children breach the wall and with them come spring and charity. The change of consciousness results from the strangeness of season, and the strangeness of the Giant's heart. The lost space found by Barbara in Monica Hughes's *The Refuge* (1987) is a wilderness, *not* the grey inner city of Edmonton in which the narrative takes place.

Material gardens also evoke changes of consciousness in many ways. One such way is through the strangeness of social custom. Michel Conan writes of how when the royal gardens of St James in London and the Tuileries in Paris were opened to the public, they 'offered a potential for experimenting with new forms of social life and transgressing usual norms of civility'.³⁶ Poetic, I imagine it was, to discard decency at the gate and open the lid on Pandora's box. Parks often offer respite from 'norms of civility': during the Apartheid era in South Africa, black youths would set up temporary 'People's Parks' to 'discuss political protest action'³⁷ — an activity illegal at the time. Since the democratisation of South Africa in 1994, chatting in parks about politics is no longer poetic, because it is no longer strange.

The most obvious strangeness in landscapes that make them poetic is that of spatial and sensory difference. Within the skyscraper landscape of lower Manhattan, there is a place in which the spatial language of vertical solid mass has been inverted to form a sunken void: the National 9/11 Memorial by Michael Arad and PWP Landscape Architecture on the site of the former Twin Towers. Even without the cognitive association of the space, its mere strangeness from the context will, I surmise, not having been there myself, evoke a change of consciousness. As a memorial commemorating the loss of lives, had the names of the deceased merely been listed on a signage board, it would not 'have produce[d] emotive responses from its visitors' as Susan Herrington likewise suspects.³⁸ Jane Gillette has asked *Can Gardens Mean?* and answered that it is the very suspension of intellectual thought that provides pleasure in gardens:³⁹ a change from an intellectual state of consciousness to one focused on the sensory; the poetry of un-thinking.

This introduces an important difference between the reading of poetry and the experience of landscape: the spatial-sensory nature of the latter. Whereas sensory experience constructs our consciousness and therefore influences the poetic moment in poetry (and afterwards our sensory experience might in turn be altered), it is not in itself part of the moment. In a landscape, however, we cannot, when there, loosen ourselves from the phenomenon. When Barfield thus calls for a 'strangeness of *meaning*' I wish to add for the experience of landscape, a '*sensory* strangeness', both often indistinguishable.

In the aforementioned examples of landscapes, the poetic change of consciousness is induced, at various levels, by an *estrangement* from their immediate tangible and intangible contexts.

The strangeness of solidity in the liquid landscape

A poetic experience within the liquid landscape would therefore require a moment in which part of what is, *is not*. It is especially important to ask what will be *strange* in the liquid landscape, since, as we have seen, it is essentially (in its ideal form), a landscape *sans* difference. It is almost by its own definition, unwittingly, unpoetic.

It is fluid and in flux, *not solid and timeless*.

It celebrates chaos and disorder, *not causality and order*.

It is the gradual transition, *not the dramatic turn*.

It is the horizontal continuity, *not the frame of the sky*.

It is made of folded surfaces, *not of distinct planes*.

It is the emergent form, *not* the **archetype**.
It is the ground, *not* the **wall**.

The liquid landscape will be frozen strangely by four solid walls containing a garden (see figure 2).

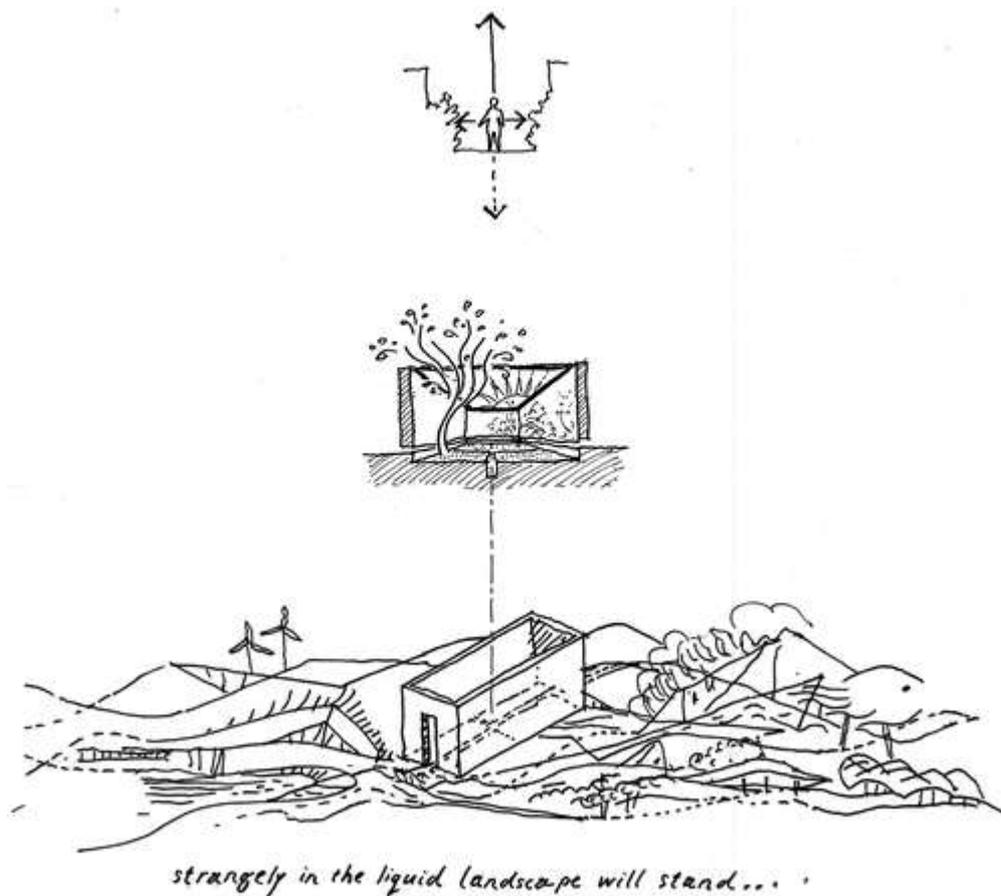


FIGURE 2. The estrangement of the liquid landscape. Source: Drawing by the author, Pretoria, 2010. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.

The sensory strangeness of the walled garden

Strangely there stands, in amidst the melancholic ruins of modernism and colonialism of Maputo, an enclosed garden (a defunct nursery) in the *Jardim Tunduru*.⁴⁰ On entering this concrete column-and-beam box, with infill timber lattice screens, I was convinced of my suspicions that the *hortus conclusus* has potential to be appropriated as *public* space. I can testify that I felt a change of consciousness on entering the space, probably prompted by the melancholy of ruin (the memory of an idealised past), the vertical focus and finding her there forgotten, Venus.

In South Africa, while I was working for the landscape architecture firm GREENinc, we designed the landscape of a new coal-fired power plant in the dry, savannah region. We anticipated the harsh conditions that would ensue from the operation of the plant and decided not to 'integrate' the context, but to shut it out in a series of enclosed gardens: walls to anchor the individual in a vast, undifferentiated landscape and mitigate noise;

overhead beams to provide shade; plants found in the ravines of the area to create a sense of shelter, like the *kloofs* [ravines] cutting through the endless Highveld.⁴¹ The creation of enclosed landscapes as places of respite is not common and perhaps explains the following statement from Steven Krog:

Luis Barragán's proposal that, in light of the environmental, social, psychological, and political chaos that is the twentieth century, it is the duty of every garden to offer a place of serenity. This, it seems to me, is one of the few truly provocative charges issued by a landscape architect in twenty-five years ...⁴²

The archetype of the walled garden is the antithesis of the emerging forms of the liquid landscape. Ever since the modernist ideas of open spaces has held sway, *public* encounters with enclosed landscapes has been the exception:

The garden did not in fact belong in the modernist world — neither as a paradise in a world that is itself ideal, nor as an introverted and secluded place in a dynamic world made accessible by the car, nor as a particularized space in a world where the everyday and ordinary have become the greatest good, nor, finally, as a defined and compact space in the modernist open city of light, air and space.⁴³

There are notable exceptions, examples of which are Jean Nouvel's *Parc del Poublenou* in Barcelona, Alexandre Chemetoff's *Jardin des Bambous* in Paris, and Peter Zumthor and Piet Oudolf's Serpentine Gallery design for 2011 in London. The latter is described by Zumthor as 'a place abstracted from the world of noise and traffic and the smells of London'.⁴⁴ Being set in Kensington Gardens, the *differentiation* with context might not be as dramatic, yet the route through dark passages should prepare the visitor for a poetic entry into the inner garden. Chemetoff's design is an important one, since it is *estranged* from a proto-landscape urbanist project, Bernard Tschumi's *Parc de la Villette* that was an attempt to erode the differences between city and site, building and landscape. Some, like Marc Treib, have commented that the park does not offer a variegated sensory experience⁴⁵ — perhaps it is caused by this erosion of difference. The sunken garden immerses one from the blandness of lawns into an 'image of a fairytale bamboo landscape'⁴⁶ juxtaposed with a 'number of crossing sewage pipes and a concrete wall [that] make the city manifest'.⁴⁷ The poetic moment of entering the garden is heightened by moving through the *Cylindre Sonore* (designed by Bernhard Leitner): a cylindrical chamber in which familiar sounds from the outside world such as birdsong strangely resonate. The aural experience is estranged by defamiliarising everyday sounds; background noise is transformed into music.

These examples illustrate the difference of sensory experience that public walled gardens may provide. They can be places of quiet next to a noisy street, places of solitude within a busy precinct, dry and open spaces within tropical surroundings, lush havens in the dust, ordered geometries in the wilderness, they might focus the eye to the sky where it is outside fixed on the horizon. In these spaces, the experience of landscape is less dependent on the visual (there are no *views*), and our perception through our other senses is heightened.⁴⁸ This intensification of sensory experience implies a change of consciousness as is beautifully illustrated by Albert Camus in a passage from *Love of Life* (translated from the French by Ellen C. Kennedy):

In the sharp sound of wingbeats as the pigeons flew away, the sudden, snug silence in the middle of the garden, in the lonely squeaking of the chain on its well, I found a new and yet familiar flavor. I was lucid and smiling before this unique play of appearances.⁴⁹

The exposure of Paris's infrastructure in Chemetoff's garden can be considered a strangeness of meaning since visible services are not expected in a place of respite. I will now further consider differentiation of meaning.

The strangeness of re-enchantment in the liquid landscape

To consider a generalised strangeness of meaning within the liquid landscape is difficult since it begs for an understanding of the general mode of consciousness of an anonymous group of people in an imagined future city. I here have neither the capacity nor the space to attempt such speculations, and will therefore position a potential strangeness of meaning within modernity and its 'disenchantment of the world'.⁵⁰

This disenchantment is the consequence of an evolution of consciousness that, as described by Owen Barfield in *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*,

... can best be understood as a more or less continuous progress from a vague but immediate awareness of the 'meaning' of phenomena towards an increasing preoccupation with the phenomena themselves. The earlier awareness involved experiencing the phenomena as representations; the latter preoccupation involves experiencing them, non-representationally, as objects in their own right, existing independently of human consciousness.⁵¹

The result of this non-representational experience of phenomena (idolatry) has been the loss of participation, with 'participation' defined by Barfield as 'the extra-sensory relation between man and his phenomena'.⁵² I have elsewhere⁵³ described this loss in the landscape as the inability to see the invisible in the visible, which is perpetuated by the objectification of our graphic notation system, notably the perspective drawing.

The world of modernity is experienced as a self-contained system and meaning in the landscape generated inside the individual positioned in a horizontal relationship with nature and culture. Environmental art, for example, has been identified by Stephanie Ross as the type of landscape that is 'every bit as serious as the greatest of the early eighteenth-century gardens'.⁵⁴ These installations that 'call into question our relations to landscape, nature, and art'⁵⁵ are thus exemplars of our grappling with the making of meaning of the landscape, that is by making interconnected references between parts of a closed system.

Modernity is thus characterised by a monistic conflation of differences between the transcendent and the immanent; the signified and the signifier; the eternal and the transient,⁵⁶ much as the liquid landscape is, on other levels, undifferentiated. If this is the general mode of 'being in the world' then I will supplement my summary of what the liquid landscape is, and what it is *not*:

It is profane, *not sacred*.
It seeks self-expression, *not transcendence*.
It is nihilistic, *not mysterious*.
It is the open sign, *not the participating symbol*.

The liquid landscape will be frozen strangely by four solid walls containing a universe re-enchanted.

The strangeness of Sehnsucht in the walled garden

The archetype of the walled garden provides fertile ground for re-enchantment: the Islamic *Chahar Bagh* foreshadows the paradisiacal afterlife, the Medieval *hortus conclusus* symbolises the Virgin Mary, and the *kara-sansui* Zen gardens with their ‘oppositions and contradictions’⁵⁷ suggest a ‘greater, all-encompassing reality’.⁵⁸ Whatever one may read into these gardens, their ‘expressive strength ... lies in a clear demarcation of the container’;⁵⁹ their enclosure begs the visitor to undergo a ‘felt change of consciousness’. Since they are experienced as a framed composition, like a painting, they are inherently concerned with meaning rather than with mere sensory pleasure.

Consider a poetic image of a thinker whom John Milbank describes as a proponent, together with others such as Kierkegaard, of a counter-modernity that ‘continues to shadow actual, secular modernity’.⁶⁰ The Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, used the walled garden in *Kubla Khan* (1816) as a symbol of ‘that transcendent numinous reality, which the soul inchoately and barely consciously seeks and strives for’⁶¹:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills ...

The walled garden is thus longed for as a place where a ‘mystical experience of a transcendent good’⁶² is found — a reflection of the Christian image of a prelapsarian Paradise. Barth has noted that this search for the numinous is found in all the great Romantics, though ‘[i]f it is not always the sacramental encounter with the mystery of the infinite, it is at least a sacramental encounter with the mystery of one’s deepest self, where, Coleridge might add, God also dwells’.⁶³ The experience of the transcendent, the *strangeness* I seek to suggest, is for Coleridge and other Christian and pre-Christian thinkers before him, ‘mystic’ since it cannot be grasped by discursive categories of thought; it cannot be attained by Reason.

One such thinker was the fifteenth-century Christian Platonist Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) who also, in his *Vision of God*, positioned such experience within the walled garden: the walls keep Reason outside and by looking *beyond* the walls ‘the mind becomes like its object

by divesting itself of difference in order to experience absolute unity';⁶⁴ one *enters* the garden only to look *out*, but not outside to the surroundings, but outside to *actual* Reality in which The Absolute is not a separate category of our thoughts. As in the *Vision of God*, the walled garden in *Kubla Khan* is not the account of a real place where numinous reality can be discovered. It is the description of a wild, Oriental garden city that stirs the Romantic *longing for such a place*. The desire is lit by the image that resonates archetypal (e.g. the heavenly city of Jerusalem), contemporary (travel literature of the time) and personal (opium-induced visions) symbols.

I think that a material translation and experience of such an image is possible, but would require a *belief* in the unity of things (that unity which Deconstruction denies), even if we only momentarily suspend our secular assumptions. It is the condition for symbolism, for we are required to see the symbol *as* a symbol, and not merely as a projection of our subjective thoughts *onto* it. It begs us to not merely perceive analogies between things as trivialities, but to believe that there is truly some unity between the rose and my lover, between dark woods and danger, between a tree and knowledge, between a fountain and life, between a garden and heaven. The re-imagining of the analogous universe is necessary, for like 'window' much of the world has become prosaic, or in landscape architecture, kitsch statues of nymphs.

When entering these shadow spaces of modernity, *the numinous will not be found*, for it is always one step ahead of us. At best, the walled garden can remind us that we long for Paradise by rendering our desire for it unfulfilled. This in itself is poetic, for when we enter the garden gate and our experience becomes merely phenomenological, strangely we long for a place beyond the walls; strangely we experience *Sehnsucht*.⁶⁵

Conclusion: liquid now

I have mostly argued within a phantom future. Yet, the (especially informal) urban landscape of South Africa *already* does resemble, in some ways, the liquid landscape: it is a vast horizontal landscape with few 'semantic reserves' that offer escape; infrastructure dominates the visual field; form and space are not superimposed but emerge where there is potential; change is constant; the landscape is often productive and plots of agriculture line stream edges; livestock still roam some streets; the natures are not everywhere distinctly separate, each from the other, nor from the city; the informal urban landscape of South Africa is *emergent* and *undifferentiated*. In many ways it is far removed from the ideals of landscape urbanism. Yet, when considering the spatial experience, dramatic transitions are *now* a necessity for finding the poetry in our liquid landscape.

Epilogue

Crossing the threshold of another door, Jan entered an outdoor room. In the corner sat an old man on a bench. Whistling to himself softly, he was unperturbed by the young man's arrival. His grey head was turned away from the garden and he gazed intensely through the Window of the Sea. 'What are you looking at?' asked Jan. 'I see ships and a country behind the sea,' said the old man, 'and I hope one day to travel there.'⁶⁶

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notes

Notes

1. Translated from the Afrikaans by the author from his 'Die Jongman en die See' in Schalk W. Le Roux and Roger C. Fisher (eds), *Festschrift ter ere van O. J. O. Ferreira* (Gordonsbaai: Adamastor, 2010), pp. 189–192.
2. I am following John Dixon Hunt's well-known classification of the three natures that is a synthesis of Cicero's description of a 'second nature', the implied 'first nature' and Jacopo Bonfadio and other's sixteenth-century writers' use of 'third nature'. See *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 1–4; and his *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), chapter 3.
3. This image is based on the description in the *Roman de la Rose* of the allegorical images of vices portrayed on the outside of the walls of the enclosed garden that Amant encounters. An earlier ennoblement of the enclosed garden as a place in which sin is purged, can be found in the ninth-century text by Honorius Augustodunensis, *Gemma anima* (book I, chapter 149): a cloister garden is described as a place 'in which the just are segregated from sinners'. The translation and a discussion of the text can be found in Paul Meyvaert, 'The Medieval Monastic Garden' in Elisabeth B. MacDougall (ed.), *Medieval Gardens* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), pp. 23–53.
4. This generalisation is a continuation of Jacob Burkhardt's contested reading in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* of Petrarch's letter (written in 1350) describing his alleged ascent of Mt Ventoux, as a testimony to the poet's appreciation of first nature for the sake of it. Beyond naming features such as the clouds below or the Alps in the distance, the text is bereft of lofty or detailed descriptions of the mountain or the view beyond. Perhaps it is opportunistic to deduce a completely changed attitude to landscape from such scant evidence. However, like Burkhardt, Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto argues that Petrarch 'lacks the rhetoric that would give shape to his new sensitivity towards the beauty of the landscape, and all he can do is to remain silent'. See 'Writing the Garden in the Age of Humanism: Petrarch and Boccaccio', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly*, 23/3, 2003, p. 233.
5. John B. Jackson, 'The Past and Future Park' in Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams (eds), *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p. 132.

6. Galen Cranz, 'Four Models of Municipal Park Design in the USA', in Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams (eds), *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p. 119.
7. For a discussion of the manifesto, see Dorothée Imbert, 'The AIAJM: A Manifesto for Landscape Modernity', *Landscape Journal*, 26/2–07, 2007, pp. 219–235.
8. Dorothée Imbert, 'The AIAJM', pp. 230–232.
9. Dorothée Imbert, 'The AIAJM', p. 230.
10. Although the enclosed garden did not generally feature as a typology for the public designed landscapes of the twentieth century, it did endure in the private realm of the suburban garden of which the modernist compositions of Thomas Church, James Rose and Garrett Eckbo for Californian gardens were exemplar and influential. These gardens were often characterised by enclosing vertical planes that define outdoor rooms as illustrated in Eckbo's illustrations 'Outdoor-indoors?' and 'Indoor-outdoors?' in his *The Art of Home Landscaping* (New York: F. W. Dodge Company, 1956), p. 12.
11. See Susan Herrington's critique of some of Ian McHarg's scientificisms in 'The Nature of Ian McHarg's Science', *Landscape Journal*, 29/1, 2010, pp. 1–20.
12. Philip Pregill and Nancy Volkman, *Landscapes in History: Design and Planning in the Eastern and Western Traditions* (New York: John Wiley, 1999), p. 670.
13. See James Corner, 'Landscape Urbanism in the Field: The Knowledge Corridor, San Juan, Puerto Rico', *Topos*, 71/2, 2010, p. 26.
14. Richard Weller, 'An Art of Instrumentality' in Charles Waldheim (ed.), *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), pp. 72–73.
15. James Corner, 'Eidetic Operations and New Landscapes', in James Corner (ed.), *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), p. 158.
16. Charles Waldheim, 'On Landscape, Ecology and Other Modifiers to Urbanism', *Topos*, 71/2, 2010, p. 24.
17. Richard Weller, 'An Art of Instrumentality', pp. 71–83. The italics are mine.
18. James Corner, 'Landscape Urbanism in the Field', p. 26.
19. I borrow the term from the title of Aaron Betsky's book *Landscrapers: Building with the Land* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), in which he uses the word to describe buildings with 'earthbound form[s]', p. 18.
20. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

21. See Anne W. Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (London: Yale University Press, 1998).
22. See Jane Gillette, 'Can Gardens Mean?', *Landscape Journal*, 24/1–05, 2005, pp. 85–97.
23. I have argued for the complimentary role of verbal language in Johan N. Prinsloo, 'I'm Not There: On the *ex situ* Experience of Landscape Architecture in Texts', *South African Journal of Art History*, 24/1, 2009, pp. 157–169; and Johan N. Prinsloo, 'De-Picturing the Landscape: Notes on the Value of Text for the Conception and Experience of Landscape', in Hennie Stoffberg, Clinton Hindes and Liana Müller (eds), *South African Landscape Architecture: A Reader* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2012), pp. 27–40.
24. Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 48.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 46.
28. Quote in Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 67, from Shelley's essay *A Defence of Poetry* published in 1840.
29. For a succinct etymology of the word 'window', see the entry in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=window>.
30. For a succinct etymology of the word 'paradise', see the entry in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=paradise>.
31. For a list of Indo-European root words and their offspring, see <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/indoeurop.html#IR017200>.
32. Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 171.
33. For the full poem, see *The Collected Poems of Howard Nemerov* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 473.
34. Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, pp. 173–176.
35. Arthur Machen, *The Hill of Dreams* (La Vergne, TN: Bibliobazaar, 2006), p. 75.
36. Michel Conan, 'Fragments of a Poetic of Gardens', *Landscape Journal*, 25/1–06, 2006, p. 13.
37. Graham Young, 'Community Factors in the Planning and Design of Parks in South Africa: Thokoza Park, Soweto and Three Parks in Atteridgeville, Tshwane', in Hennie Stoffberg, Clinton Hindes and Liana Müller (eds), *South African Landscape Architecture: A Reader* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2012), pp. 69.

38. Susan Herrington, 'Gardens Can Mean', in Marc Treib (ed.), *Meaning in Landscape Architecture and Gardens: Four Essays, Four Commentaries* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), p. 202.
39. Jane Gillette, 'Can Gardens Mean?', pp. 85–97.
40. The name for the botanical gardens in Maputo, Mozambique. It was designed in 1885 by a British garden designer, Thomas Honney.
41. For a more detailed description of the project, see Johan N. Prinsloo, 'Anti-Contextual Design: Walled Gardens for Power Plants', in Hennie Stoffberg, Clinton Hindes and Liana Müller (eds), *South African Landscape Architecture: A Reader* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2012), pp. 245–248.
42. Steven Krog, 'Whither the Garden?' in Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams (eds), *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p. 103. Admittedly, Krog wrote the essay more than twenty years ago, yet the enclosed garden remains an elusive typology in the contemporary public landscape.
43. Rob Aben and Saskia De Wit, *The Enclosed Garden* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999), p. 145. Saskia De Wit is currently continuing her research on enclosed gardens and has, subsequent to the publication of *The Enclosed Garden*, found more examples of contemporary urban enclosed gardens which, in a way, shows that the typology is not quite as absent from modernist practice as the quote suggests.
44. Quoted in Kate Baker, *Captured Landscape: The Paradox of the Enclosed Garden* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), p. 187.
45. For Marc Treib's critique of the sensory experience of Parc de la Villette, see 'Must Landscapes Mean? Approaches to Significance in Recent Landscape Architecture', in Marc Treib (ed.), *Meaning in Landscape Architecture and Gardens* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), p. 96.
46. Rob Aben and Saskia De Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p. 154.
47. Ibid.
48. Kate Baker, *Captured Landscape*, p. 135.
49. This passage is quoted in Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), pp. 125–126.
50. A phrase popularised by Max Weber in his *The Sociology of Religion* (1971).
51. Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), p. 142.
52. Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, p. 40.

53. Johan N. Prinsloo, 'I'm Not There' and 'De-Picturing the Landscape'.
54. Stephanie Ross, *What Gardens Mean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 224.
55. Ibid.
56. Danie Goosen, *Die Nihilisme: Notas oor Ons Tyd* (Johannesburg: Uitgewery Praag, 2007), p. 228.
57. David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 378.
58. Ibid.
59. Jane Gillette, 'Can Gardens Mean?', p. 88.
60. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 4.
61. Douglas Hedley, 'Coleridge's Intellectual Intuition, the Vision of God, and the Walled Garden of "Kubla Khan"', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59/1, 1998, p. 116.
62. Douglas Hedley, 'Coleridge's Intellectual Intuition', p. 134.
63. Robert J. Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 120–121.
64. Douglas Hedley, 'Coleridge's Intellectual Intuition', p. 122.
65. Johan N. Prinsloo, 'I'm Not There', p. 166.
66. Translated from the Afrikaans by the author from his 'Die Jongman en die See' in Schalk W. Le Roux and Roger C. Fisher (eds), *Festschrift ter ere van O. J. O. Ferreira* (Gordonsbaai: Adamastor, 2010), pp. 189–192.