



Landscape History and Theory: from Subject Matter to Analytic Tool

JAN KENNETH BIRKSTED

... to the Alps, into wilderness, or out on the infinite ocean.

August Schmarsow

Jan Kenneth Birksted
is Visiting Fellow at the
Centre for Research in the Arts,
Social Sciences and Humanities at
Cambridge University, and teaches at
the Bartlett School of Architecture
University College London
22 Gordon Street
London WC1H 0QB
Email: j.birksted@ucl.ac.uk

THIS ESSAY EXPLORES how landscape history can engage methodologically with the adjacent disciplines of art history and visual/cultural studies. Central to the methodological problem is the mapping of the beholder – spatially, temporally and phenomenologically. In this mapping process, landscape history is transformed from subject matter to analytical tool. As a result, landscape history no longer simply imports and applies ideas from other disciplines but develops its own methodologies to engage and influence them. Landscape history, like art history, thereby takes on a creative cultural presence. Through that process, landscape architecture and garden design regain the cultural power now carried by the arts and museum studies, and has an effect on the innovative capabilities of contemporary landscape design.

LANDSCAPE HISTORY – in comparison to the influential and dynamic disciplines of art history and visual/cultural studies – is not a significant player in mainstream academic research and university curriculum development. Nor does landscape history and theory, as discipline, command the widespread and popular cultural influence and authority that art history does. This situation was analysed in the *Journal of Garden History*:

KEY WORDS

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Focalisation
Narrative

Garden history, unlike the history of painting, sculpture, and architecture, has no conceptual foundations. It lacks the elements of scholarly and critical consensus: a conventional set of interpretive methods, agreed-upon leading terms, ‘ruling metaphors,’ and descriptive protocols. Painting, for example, has a recurring set of critical problems, including fictive space, the picture plane, the position and nature of the beholder, and notions of realism and representation. In art history, even the most abstract theoretical accounts of painting dwell on these same topics. The more specialised organs of art history, such as iconology, semiology, formal analysis, and psychoanalytical criticism, all return to these issues as if to a kind of home (Elkins, 1993, p 189).

It is correct that, in the ‘new’ art history and in visual/cultural studies, theoretical and methodological developments have taken place in a range of areas – related, for example, to gender, post-colonialism, reception theory and performative approaches¹ – to the extent that, in the 1980s, it was written:

... the discipline of art history, having for so long lagged behind, having been among the humanities perhaps the slowest to develop and the last to hear of changes as these took place among even its closest neighbors, is now unmistakably beginning to alter. One

REFLECTION





index of change is the number of new journals that in the past ten years, and strikingly in the past five, have appeared . . . (Bryson, 1988, p xiii).

If landscape and garden history and theory had avoided these debates, their marginalisation would be easy to understand, as would their lack of potential to constitute a living, influential and dynamic field with intellectual, social and cultural power. They would, if they had not addressed these issues, fail to measure up to that inherent feature they share with art history and theory, which consists of the fact that the ‘central characteristic of the often ambiguous term “landscape” is that it is first a schema, a representation, a way of seeing the external world . . .’ (Corner, 2002, p 144). It is precisely on this insight – the representational character of landscape and garden design – that a contemporary practitioner, Sébastien Marot, bases his work, because:

Landscape architects in France today are beginning to develop increasingly discriminating modes of interpreting and constructing sites and local situations . . . To properly reclaim and improve sites, the first and, perhaps, only thing we need to learn is how to look at them from a different point of view (Marot, 1999, pp 44–57).

Similarly, the history and theory of landscape and gardens has also addressed these issues. Its marginalisation cannot, therefore, be understood in terms of its avoidance of these issues. In an extended and systematic review of developments in landscape history, accompanied by an extensive bibliography, Diane Harris details the innovative, multiple and diverse approaches, theories and methods that have transformed, and are transforming, landscape history. In discussing landscape and garden history and theory, one therefore cannot set out to oppose a theoretically driven art history to a non-theoretical landscape history. One could appropriate Bryson’s statement and adapt it to landscape history to say that ‘landscape history, having for so long lagged behind, has now unmistakably altered’. So why is landscape history and theory not as culturally significant and powerful as art history and visual/cultural studies?

In order to understand this, an examination of Harris’s analysis would be useful. In her review article, Harris describes:

. . . the broad range of theoretical developments that include semiotic and linguistic theories that stress the contextualisation of texts; feminist and postcolonial theories that focus on recovering the voices of the oppressed and others on the margins of society; postcolonialism which works to unmask the pretended neutrality of physical space; relativism and its emphasis on the acknowledgment of situated knowledge; and a range of reinterpreted Marxist theories (Harris, 1999, p 434).

Harris sums up this diversity and multiplicity with the word ‘postmodernisation’, which provides the title of her essay.² In the light of this, it would seem that James Elkins’s opposition to an art history *with* ‘a conventional set of interpretative methods, agreed-upon leading terms, “ruling metaphors” and descriptive protocols’, and a landscape history *without* the ‘elements of scholarly and critical consensus’ (1993, p 189) is an inaccurate oversimplification. However, this is precisely where a fundamental difference becomes visible.





Harris describes developments in landscape and garden history and theory in terms that are very different from those attributed to art history by Elkins. She notes that:

Despite the fact that postmodern landscape histories – particularly those focused on the garden – have only recently begun to appear in greater numbers, there are notable precedents for interdisciplinary and contextualised studies. Again, geographers led the way (Harris, 1999, pp 434–435).

The difference that emerges – in addition to the subsidiary fact of their recent appearance – is precisely the *interdisciplinary* character of developments in landscape and garden history and theory. In opposition to Elkins's description, which attributes a centripetal quality to the development of art history, since they 'all return to these issues as if to a kind of home' (1993, p 189), Harris attributes a centrifugal quality to landscape and garden history and theory, since:

...landscape analysis has started to appear with increasing frequency in the works of scholars who define themselves as art, architectural, and environmental historians, or as literary critics, anthropologists, archaeologists and scholars of material culture (Harris, 1999, p 434).

The history and theory of landscape and gardens, in other words, appear as subject matter within other disciplines.³ It is this basic condition of landscape and garden history and theory that this essay addresses. It also argues that (in inverse proportion to its spreading to other disciplines) this is a generative source of its weakness within mainstream academic research and university curriculum development, and its lack of widespread, popular cultural influence and authority – unlike art history.

This essay contends that the interdisciplinary osmosis of methods from adjacent disciplines into landscape history – as well as the reverse multidisciplinary diffusion of landscape as subject matter outwards to adjacent disciplines – paradoxically leaves landscape history as a collection of discrete and unrelated methodological and theoretical components, sociological, anthropological and geographical (cultural or physical), without its own 'kind of home' (Elkins, 1993, p 189). Could landscape and garden history and theory even be said to be victims of encroaching disciplines?

These adjacent disciplines have their own particular methodological approaches, theoretical positions and explanatory rationales, which tend not to take into account the specifics of landscape – its diverse materialities, complex visualities, composite dimensionalities and even its significant 'dreamy quality' (Elkins, 1993, p 189). James Corner notes how '[i]f asked to draw the landscape, each party would no doubt produce a wholesome variety of graphic models and representations, reflecting their own peculiar mode of (re)cognition' (Corner, 2002, p 144). Sometimes, landscape and garden history and theory seem subject to that doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self which Freud describes as characteristic of the uncanny.





This might open this essay to the criticism of being against interdisciplinarity – hence, the need to state that this essay is not enamoured of (what Aby Warburg called) the ‘border police’s’ reassuring simplicities.⁴ In opposition to a wholesale importation of external concepts, this essay proposes the use of systematic comparisons with interdisciplinary concepts – embedded within their own theoretical systems to highlight their separateness – as heuristic models to develop domain-specific approaches. In this respect, interdisciplinarity’s value consists of the development of domain-specific methodologies relating to landscape-oriented, ‘critical problems, including fictive space, the picture plane, the position and nature of the beholder, and notions of realism and representation’ (Elkins, 1993, p 189). The point, as Gilles Deleuze has so trenchantly spelled out, is not simply to *recognise* but to *encounter* in a process involving:

... those unpredictable encounters with things that force one to think... The conditions of a true critique and of true creativity are the same: the destruction of an image of thinking presupposing its own conditions... (Deleuze, 1968, p 182).

Therefore, this essay does *not* propose developing or adding another approach or theory – quite the contrary. Just as art history has ‘a recurring set of critical problems . . . [and] all [its different subdivisions] return to these issues as if to a kind of home’ (Elkins, 1993, p 189), this essay explores the possibility of a ‘scholarly and critical consensus: a conventional set of interpretive methods, agreed-upon leading terms, “ruling metaphors”, and descriptive protocols . . . a recurring set of critical problems’ (Elkins, 1993, p 189), which are *domain-specific* to landscape and garden history and theory.

It will be seen that this involves mapping the spatial and temporal location of the (extra)visual and mobile beholder in the three dimensions of landscape and gardens, phenomenologically positioning the beholder within these dimensions and landscape and gardens’ inherent narrative conditions. These need theorising on the basis of systematic empirical observation and description, methodologically informed analysis, and theoretically informed syntheses. The challenge is to develop for landscape history and theory what Stephen Bann has described for art: a ‘unitary explanation of the . . . tradition of representation’ (Bann, 1989, p 246). To achieve such a true critique, landscape and garden history and theory must map the processes of form and representation specific to its subject matter: landscape and garden design.

DOMAIN-SPECIFIC LANDSCAPE AND GARDEN HISTORY

When Norman Bryson described developments in the ‘new’ art history, he noted that:

What must surely be given up is the unadventurous assumption that strict archival methods, together with a strategy for reconverting paintings into documents, are all we need to deal with visual representation. That is impoverishment, and a recipe for stagnation. (Bryson, 1988, p xxxix).





The risk is converting landscape and gardens into documents without dealing with their particularity and specificity as representations – which are not purely visual nor simply two-dimensional and static. There is a danger of formalism, which, focusing entirely on *what* is signified, forgets to consider *how* landscape and gardens signify.⁵ A useful model might be Freud’s notion of ‘dream-work’, which highlights not merely the dream’s contents to be analysed, but also the methodological problem of *how* dreams operate, and thus also the methodological problem of how to develop an appropriate system of observation, analysis and synthesis. There is a risk of overlooking the process of landscape figurability. The term ‘figurability’ refers to the processes of form and of representation; what James Corner describes as ‘a schema, a representation, a way of seeing the external world’ (Corner, 2002, p 144). Thus, the challenge that falls to landscape and garden history and theory is to devise ways of dealing with observation and analysis of domain-specific form and representation when considering the (extra)visual and mobile beholder in landscape and gardens’ three-dimensional space and time.

Two aspects are involved: perspective and focalisation. ‘Perspective’ is the point of view of characters in a story.⁶ This term describes how events in a narrative:

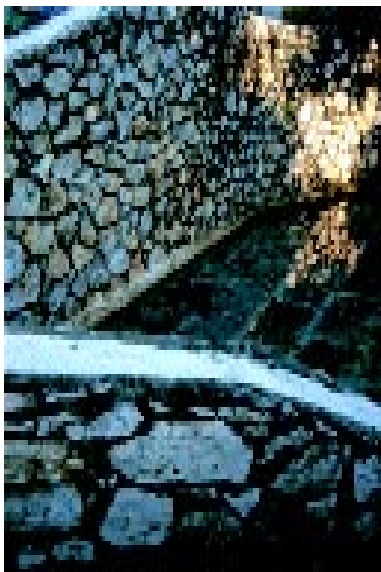
... are always presented from within a certain ‘vision’. A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle, whether ‘real’ historical facts are concerned or fictitious events [which are] strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body... (Bal, 1985, p 100).

At the same time, this story is itself narrated by an agent (or author or designer) who, in turn, has a personal point of view (*Figure 1*).

The term ‘focalisation’ refers precisely to the narrator’s point of view and angle, in accordance with which characters are presented. The narrator is the focaliser.⁷ Thus, the terms ‘perspective’ and ‘focalisation’ – though they may seem at first cumbersome – ‘make an explicit distinction between, on one hand, the vision through which the elements are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalising that vision’ (Bal, 1985, pp 100–101).

These concepts also apply to the visual arts and three-dimensional design. The painter focalises a position, or central figure, which presents a perspective on the other figures in the painting. Mieke Bal (1985) makes a further distinction between internal and external focalisation: sometimes, the focaliser espouses the perspective of one of the narrative’s characters. This is ‘internal focalisation’, whereby the narrator identifies with, and stands in the shoes of, a character in the plot. At other times, the narrator, as an ‘anonymous agent’ (1985, p 105), stands back from the characters to present an outside perspective, or ‘external focalisation’. To these distinctions, Bal adds perceptible and non-perceptible objects, which include interior monologues, dreams and thoughts. Focalisation ‘has a strongly manipulative effect’ (1985, p 110). By focalising non-perceptible objects, information can be shared with the reader while excluding other characters in the plot. The fluctuating criss-crossings, overlappings, exclusions and inclusions between these centres entangle the reader in the web of actions, events and

Figure 1: The narrative of the Labyrinth, which sets the visual perspectives (sight-lines, labyrinthine spatial structures, etc.) of visitors to the Maeght Foundation. Photograph: the author.





characters, hence the narrative dynamic. However, do such general and theoretical considerations relate to landscape and gardens, and to landscape and garden history and theory? (Figure 2)

The first aspect involved in the narrative dynamic is locating and mapping the mobile beholder within the space and time of landscape in visual and phenomenological terms, that is, the beholder's perspective. These phenomenological perspectives, specific to landscape and to gardens, need to be observed, described and analysed. Secondly, landscape architects and garden designers determine the position of the beholder in specific ways: they focalise the beholder's perspectives. Thus, there is also the need to map the ways in which landscape and garden designers place the beholder to perceive their landscape and gardens.

THE (EXTRA)VISUAL

It is important not to assume a general and abstract concept of experience in considering notions of landscape experience. The challenge is 'to find appropriate language to deal with images' (Alpers, 1983, p xx), which in this case are three-dimensional and (extra)visual. One methodological issue involves visual analysis through movement, to 'try to conceive of form instead in dynamic terms, as matter in process, in the sense of the original, pre-Socratic word for form: *rhuthmos*, rhythm' (Bryson, 1983, p 131).⁸

Still, non-visual forms of experience are equally important. If tactility is important to landscape-related visibility, *how* does it signify? That is, *can* the system tactility/visibility - to temporarily eliminate other variables - operate together as a cognitive system in order to signify?⁹ This requires observation, description and analysis of how the experience of landscape sets its own (semantic) landscape-related imprint on its (syntactic) elements. Again, Freud's comparable model of the 'dream-work' analyses how dreams - with their specific system of visibility, sense perception, memory, narrativity and desire - signify. The primary question is not only *what* they mean, but *how* they mean. That is, which syntactic components do dreams use and how do dreams assemble them semantically? The experience of landscape and gardens indicates that, within the semantic parameters of a domain-specific history and theory, the syntactic elements are quite different. These, as is the case for the comparative model of literature, 'constitute an empirically very diverse range of practices, which need to be inductively clarified, case by case and often type by type' (Genette, 1987, p 17). Hence the importance of empirical case studies.

But it is precisely at this point that landscape and garden history and theory have, at times, found themselves in a self-inflicted, double-bind situation, leading to arguments about the role of theory in landscape history.¹⁰ This is due to confusing form with formalism. 'Formalism' is an evaluative term, whereas 'form' refers to a set of methodological procedures of analysis.¹¹ It is important to be clear about the power of analysing form. William H. Adams (1991), for example, in a discussion of Roberto Burle Marx, wrote that:



Figure 2: The focalisation of labyrinthine perspectives and spaces from the rooftop panorama, through which participants and visitors are made aware of the overall narrative structure. Photograph: the author.





The metaphors of ‘vocabulary’ and ‘language’ have long provided critics with a convenient way to reduce all cultural productions, including gardens, to an intellectual ‘text’ that can be easily read. But a caveat is called for. The visual experience of paintings, films, gardens, and architecture is easily read. Yet this convention can be highly limiting and misleading... this moralistic obsession with text concentrates on the unseen and the abstract at the expense of the ‘eye-intense’¹² image itself. In the artist’s visual exploitation of nature’s incessant botanical themes, the analogies of text and language break down before the rush of the purely visual energy released (Adams, 1991, p 25).

It is quite true – and this is the issue this essay addresses – that landscape and gardens *are* often ‘translated into a reading at the expense of the “eye-intense”’ (Adams, 1991).¹³ However, demonising language, text and metaphor is a dead-end move. Self-contradictorily, Adams’s quotation of the ‘eye-intense’ refers back to Emily Dickinson, whose poetry is precisely such a ‘rush of energy released’. There has thus been a tendency for landscape and garden historians to box themselves into a corner, since they desire domain-specific figurability but write-off potentially generative comparisons. They condemn these comparisons as ‘formal’, forgetting that sound, touch, smell and movement necessarily have their own distinct formal and representational processes and qualities, as well as that other essential feature: mobility.

MOBILITY AND VISION

Unlike the relationship between beholder and painted two-dimensional landscape image – which, complex as it is in its operations and modalities, involves two fundamental relations: a visual relation¹⁴ and a single position for the beholder¹⁵ – mobile viewing conditions operate in landscape and gardens. For landscape and garden history and theory, the challenge is therefore to define the beholder’s changeable location and variable perceptual structures.

The situation is complicated by the fact that, in the past, landscape and garden history and theory have traced certain art historical notions, for example, adopting the theory of the Picturesque as static pictures. Yve-Alain Bois (1984, pp 32–62) points out the inherent paradoxes in both the theory and the practice of the Picturesque. On the one hand, the Picturesque considers landscape as a series of framed images comparable to paintings, that is, static visual compositions viewed from specified vantage points and therefore requiring appropriate visual design methods. On the other hand, the Picturesque considers landscape ‘in deambulatory space and peripatetic vision’ (Bois, 1984, p 34), that is, as a mobile and bodily experience. It thus requires appropriately complex, extra-visual considerations, which presuppose ‘a fundamental break with pictorialism’ (Bois, 1984, p 36), more related to the notion of parallax than to perspective.

This short essay cannot attempt to theorise the experience of vision/movement in terms of any one model. It simply aims to establish that vision/movement and sight/sound operate as dual units of experience, each one as a phenomenological nexus, implying an expanded notion of visual culture.¹⁶ This is important since





description already contains the seeds of theory. A number of possible comparative models have been explored, such as the cinematic model, and types of mobility such as walking or driving.¹⁷ It is difficult to know what to call these dual forms of experience – which are not strictly and purely visual – since our culture, including its academic literature, prioritises vision and the notion of a *visual* culture over and above other forms of cognition.¹⁸ The methodological challenge for landscape and garden history and theory is therefore to draft new concepts of (extra)visual culture.¹⁹

This in turn prompts a re-evaluation of those historical theories that have established our parameters, such as the primacy of space over time in August Schmarsow's 1893 essay, 'The Essence of Architectural Creation'.²⁰

SPATIAL TEMPORALITY

It has been argued that our contemporary culture has a 'tendency to condense time relations – an essential ingredient for personal and social meaning – into space relations' (Gross, 1981–82, p 59). The most prominent exposition of this view is Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space*. He argues that:

This manifest expulsion of time is arguably one of the hallmarks of modernity... Time may have been promoted to the level of ontology by the philosophers, but it has been murdered by society (Lefebvre, 1991, p 69).

This position must be immediately questioned in relation to landscape and gardens, when one observes their material qualities. For example, Gilles Deleuze describes how:

... [w]ater is the prime element which allows us to highlight motion in a moving environment, as well as the very mobility of movement itself: hence water's visual and audible importance in conveying rhythm (Deleuze, 1983, pp 112–113).

Based on such material qualities, Deleuze developed two concepts, the optical sign and the acoustic sign, which refer to how the optical and acoustic experience of flowing water provides an 'opening directly unto temporality' (1983, p 293). From such empirical observations, the importance of temporality in landscape forces one to reconsider the centrality of space as the predominant dimension, and highlights the complex interactions between space and time – for which this essay proposes the notion of spatial temporality.²¹

At this point, because of the somewhat abstract level of discussion – which paradoxically insists on being domain-specific – it is necessary to give a specific example of a landscape garden designed around, and part of, an art museum (Figure 3). The Maeght Foundation in Saint-Paul de Vence was designed between 1958 and 1964 by architect José Luis Sert and landscape architect Henri Fish, in active cooperation with a number of artists, amongst whom were Miró, Braque and Giacometti. At various points, this essay will refer to this case study in order to support, sustain and embody its theoretical and abstract points.

Figure 3: A moving water sculpture at the Maeght Foundation that also produces gushing water sounds and clanking metal sounds. Photograph: the author

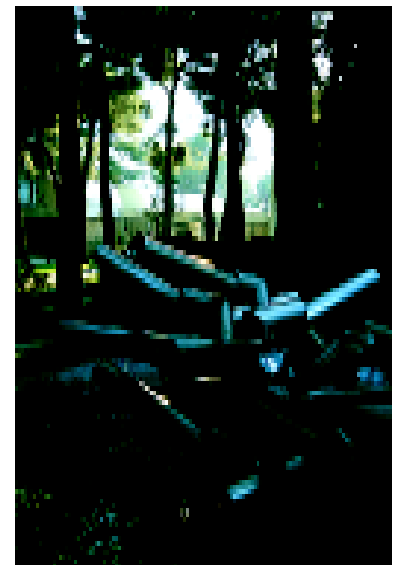
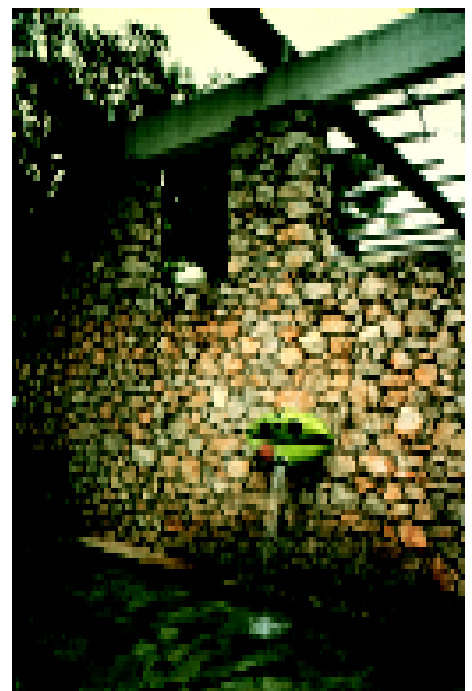




Figure 4 (left): General view of the Maeght Foundation in its landscape setting.
Photograph: the author.

Figure 5 (right): The central spine of water pools and fountains and spouts at the Maeght Foundation. Photograph: the author.



At the Maeght Foundation, sights and sounds emanate from a central spine of water pools and fountains and spouts, which are reminiscent of Deleuze's notions of optical and acoustic signs (Figure 4). The sounds, which follow the flow of water down and along the central spine of pools and fountains, highlight the rhythm and pace of walking.²² The slow pace, the constant sound of water, as well as the inherent cultural significance of water used in this Mediterranean context, constructs a sense of permanence. Simultaneously, the shifting, evanescent reflections in the pools, fountains and spouts create a sense of transience. A duality between the permanent and the ephemeral emanates from the contrast between the continuous sound of running water and the ever-changing visuality of the reflections (Figure 5).

Returning to the theoretical argument of this essay, Paul Ricoeur describes a similar duality in literature between the experiential time of reading – '*le temps du raconter*' – and of the narrated story – '*le temps raconté*' (1984, p 150). Their relationship is a structure in itself, 'constituted by the very play between the time of reading and the times of the stories told' (Ricoeur, 1984, p 150). Indeed, narrative constitutes a component of the experience of landscape and gardens. Since landscape combines both narrative and perceptual experience – and therefore, two forms of (extra)visual culture in a complex interaction – the challenge for landscape and garden history and theory is to combine domain-specific 'attention to the surface of the world . . . [with] the representation of narrative action' (Alpers, 1983, p xxi). Narratives in turn raise the (already briefly touched upon) distinction between focalisation and perspective, that is, the differences between the beholders' perspectives and their focalised representation.





PERSPECTIVE AND FOCALISATION

Landscape and gardens – an experientially different narrative culture – question how narrative and image/text relationships are visually embedded in landscape. They question the very nature of what constitutes narrativity in landscape and gardens, as well as related issues such as the notion of ‘memory’, since landscape is historically linked to notions of memory and of narrative.²³

To describe this relationship, concepts of ‘landscape narratives’ and ‘spatial narratives’²⁴ have been developed. The notion of landscape narrative, however, needs to question the wider notion of ‘visual culture’. This does indeed require ‘an expanded notion of text, of the role of readers in producing meaning’ (Potteiger and Purinton, 2002, p 136) but in a more unpredictably complex way.²⁵ It is not, however, that landscapes carry different kinds of stories; two-dimensional paintings also transmit immensely complex narratives. Landscape’s stories operate in different ways since landscape is a different form of visual culture, in which the narrative/vision nexus is different. Since the *how* varies, the problem is how to observe, analyse and interpret this different form of visual culture. The term ‘narrative vision’, cutting across the distinction between textual and visual, implies a specific narrative experience; perhaps what the Japanese call *oku* (Berque, 1986; Maki, 1979) and others have called ‘depth’. In order to empirically explore, clarify and develop conceptual, experiential and historical methodologies related to landscape as narrative, an inductive and deductive process is involved.

Narrative in landscape and garden history and theory must thus consider the different and particular forms and representations of a more visual, ‘eye-intense’ culture (Adams, 1991, p 25), with different nexuses of image/text, space/narrative, vision/touch and perception/movement. No assumptions can be made, ‘[n]o integrative perspective holds sway here: the narrative is studded with different “centers of attention”, “focalisers”, or “sources of vision”’ (Kemp, 1992, p 69). This means a renewed and subject-specific observation of landscapes in accordance with ‘the relations between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented’ (Bal, 1985, p 100). In this process, landscape studies outlines a domain-specific area of observation and analysis between beholder and landscape. From such phenomenological considerations stems the use of the term ‘focalisation’, defined by Pierre Larrivé as ‘a relationship of reference... established between a focalised and a focalising term, from which result a range of alternative possible implications for the source’ (2001, p 64).

Some specific examples illustrate the intricate interactions between narrative’s perspective and focalisation. As a first example of such complex relationships between narrator and beholder, Michael Fried has developed the concept of ‘absorption’ to describe how some paintings treat ‘the beholder as if he were not there’ (Fried, 1980, p 5) in opposition to its antithesis, ‘theatricality’. Some examples of this are paintings depicting figures absorbed in some activity. The figures seem oblivious to the fact that they are watched, firstly by the painter and, subsequently, by the viewer (*Figure 6*). In landscape paintings, however, these



Figure 6: A figure at the Maeght Foundation observing the distant landscape and Mediterranean horizon, who is seen from behind by visitors, who observe the figure observing the landscape. Photograph: the author.





notions of absorption and theatricality are not directly applicable since landscapes – unlike human figures – do not *look* but simply *are* (except if, for example, sculptures or windows are included). Caspar David Friedrich's painting *The Monk* (1809) illustrates a variation on landscape's specific and complex relationship with the beholder. When we view a painting of a figure who is in turn beholding a landscape, both elements of absorption and theatricality are involved: the monk is absorbed in his contemplation, and, gazing away from us, sets up a paradoxical relationship of theatrical absorption. Fried (1980) describes nature's absorption in the act of representing itself. The presence of this diminutive human actor points to the landscape scenery, whose sheer scale is theatrical. At the same time, the relationship between landscape and beholder is one of contemplative estrangement, placing us in a self-reflective relationship to the represented landscape. Fried describes several examples in which nature is represented as 'omnipresent' (1980, p 282), focusing on the 'aloneness of his figures relative to the beholder' (1980, p 7) and where the figures 'have been depicted largely from the rear, which further emphasises their ostensible obliviousness to our presence' (1980, p 31). Landscape – because of inherent and specific features such as scale – constructs paradoxical relationships to the beholder.

Further complex domain-specific beholder/landscape relationships are generated by the very notion of nature – the status of landscape as 'natural' – in which figure/ground distinctions become fluid.²⁶ For example, the way the Maeght Foundation's spine of pools, fountains and waterspouts reflect the surroundings in their mirror-like surfaces constitutes a spatial field that is simultaneously illusory and real (*Figure 7*). Reality is mirrored as representation, and representation is presented in a real space of water.²⁷

Figure 7: Reflective spaces in the pools at the Maeght Foundation. Photograph: the author.



Maurice Merleau-Ponty has attempted to articulate the paradoxical relationship whereby landscape suppresses and transforms traditional distinctions between figure/ground and presentation/representation, describing how: 'Nature is an enigmatic object, an object not entirely in front of us. Nature constitutes our ground, not what is in front of us, but what holds us' (1994, p 20). Landscape's perceived position as 'nature' constitutes a threshold area that blurs distinctions and allows transformations between representation and presentation. Immanuel Kant declares that the biological component of landscape is so crucial that landscape design cannot qualify as art since, 'it [takes] its forms from nature at least at the very outset: the trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers from forest and field' (Kant, 1987, para. 323).²⁸

Thus, through the association, landscape makes representation appear natural: landscape 'naturalises' spatial representations.²⁹ Consequently nature, and landscape as the embodiment of nature, often plays the role of the 'real'. Hubert Damisch, in his analysis of the development of perspective, calls this 'what cannot be painted: fire, light rays, storms, lightning' (1972, p 180), in contrast to cultural elements and built forms, which can be represented through culturally evolved perspective drawings (*Figure 8*).





Figure 8 (top left): Material landscape and garden qualities at the Maeght Foundation. Photograph: the author.



Figure 9 (bottom left): Changing visual relationships at William Kent's Theatre at Rousham. Photograph: the author.



Figure 10 (right): Reversing sizes and scales at Derek Jarman's garden at Dungeness, Kent. Photograph: the author.

Alternatively, such complex three-dimensional figure/ground situations can involve contradictory and conflicting tensions generated by the juxtaposition of multiple perceptual relationships between beholder and landscape. Such is the case at Kent's Theatre at Rousham (Figure 9) where the beholder switches between playing the role of actor and audience (Moggridge, 1986). This can also be seen in Cézanne's studio at Les Lauves where a distant macroscopic panorama, framed by two rectangular windows, is crammed up against a microscopic frontal view of vegetation through a conservatory window (Birksted, 1999a), and also in Derek Jarman's garden at Dungeness (Figure 10), where sizes and scales reverse and metamorphose (Birksted, 2000b). Once again, landscape and garden history and theory need to study multiple and complex landscape/beholder relations through empirical documentation and analysis, since they 'constitute an empirically very diverse range of practices, which need to be inductively clarified, case by case and often type by type' (Genette, 1987, p 17).

Another type of figure/ground relationship is that in which the landscape operates as a presentational device. For example, Le Corbusier uses landscape as *repoussoir*, a framing device,³⁰ which positions us within the landscape (Figure 11). The *repoussoir* landscape, by co-opting us into its space, focuses and directs our concentration.³¹ In this process, the landscape effects a spectatorial transformation from pictorial representation to direct site presentation, from picture to apparent reality or truth, blurring the distinction between representation and site by framing the subject matter and positioning the beholder. Landscape - establishing the fiction that the beholder is not standing *before* but *in* the landscape - engineers a paradoxical relationship between landscape and beholder, affecting precisely what

Figure 11: Landscape as framing device at Le Corbusier's Cabanon, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Photograph: the author.





Elkins described as ‘fictive space, the picture plane, the position and nature of the beholder, and notions of realism and representation’ (Elkins, 1993, p 189).

This again raises the essay’s central theme: the importance of evolving observational and analytic models that are domain-specific to landscape. The main problem is methodological. In order to fully observe and describe the (extra)visual complexities of landscape, appropriate models are needed to examine them in the first place, and then appropriate methodologies are needed to analyse them.

A further example, raising difficult methodological problems for landscape and garden history and theory, arises when the landscape studied is resistant to analysis of meaning, as in the case of (apparently shapeless and undesigned) wilderness (Figure 12). What is important here is precisely the apparently formless wilderness, which further adds to its natural appearance. Its strategic value lies in its resistance to any obvious meaning. It is a naturalising *repoussoir* device. Besides the *repoussoir* role, which makes landscape seem external to the image, thus attributing a sense of visionary presence to the central architectural image, Le Corbusier also resorts to the enigmatic iconography of formless wilderness. This makes critical inquiry difficult, creating a ‘trap for the gaze’ (Lacan, 1977, p 89). Another exemplary Modernist, Cézanne, similarly makes use of nature’s resistance to meaning. In all of these landscapes, formlessness introduces a narrative content with associated spatial, temporal and cultural meanings, at the same time as it disguises this narrative content, transforming it from representation to presentation.

The Maeght Foundation’s architect, Sert, and landscape architect, Fish, also deliberately worked with notions of wilderness and natural-looking landscape. Sert wrote that ‘the [Maeght Foundation’s] grounds beyond the courtyards and terraces must stay as found, that is, without landscaping them’ (Sert, undated b). Fish described the importance of retaining ‘a Provencal and a primitive quality’. The use of wilderness is an important aspect of twentieth-century landscape and garden history and theory, as the very notion of wilderness plays a strategic and formative role in Modernism: avoiding traditional narratives.³² This, however, is not only inherent to the history of modern developments in landscape representation. It is evident in the work of Albrecht Altdorfer, who developed landscape painting as a subject-matter through his richly detailed and tactile paintings of forest trees; as a subject matter landscape avoided political and religious issues implicit in narrative figure paintings (Wood, 1993).

To summarise the argument so far, two features are of importance. The first consists of the phenomenological aspects of the ‘eye-intense’ and (extra)visual experience of landscape and gardens, which must form the basis of a domain-specific history and theory of landscape and gardens. The second feature relates to the complex structure of narratives in landscape and gardens. These involve, on one hand, the perspectives of beholders within landscape and gardens, and, on the other hand, the focalisation of these beholder perspectives, that is, the ways beholder perspectives are organised, structured and presented to us by designers.





DOMAIN-SPECIFIC IMPLICATIONS

In the examples above, we have seen major features to be developed in order to achieve a landscape and garden history and theory that is domain-specific. These lead us towards the answer to the problem posed at the outset of this essay: why is landscape and garden history and theory not a significant player in mainstream academic research and university curriculum development? How could landscape and garden history and theory, as disciplines, develop and command the widespread and popular cultural influence, authority and respect that art history does?

This essay will now investigate the consequences and implications that would derive from such a domain-specific landscape and garden history and theory, listed under five key points.

Firstly, a new relationship to art history and visual/cultural studies would be created. A domain-specific landscape and garden history and theory would revitalise the dialogue with art history and visual studies. It would feed back into neighbouring disciplines, transforming and revitalising them, discovering new forms of (extra)visual culture so that it can no longer be claimed that visual perspectives alone provide a 'model for thinking'.³³ This would critically question the present dominant focus on vision. It would also have an impact on art history, generating rethinking of vision/movement (and its sub-category gaze/glance) and sight/sound nexuses, which would have to be explored using relevant models and case-studies. New empirical landscape and garden case studies would revisit traditional notions of perspective, a-perspective, anti-perspective, anamorphosis, scenography and so on, also putting in question basic notions of geometry and form, as noted by Elizabeth K. Meyer (1994). Thus, spatial temporality would be in the foreground of landscape and garden history and theory. The complex interaction between space and time would play a pivotal role in these theoretical advances, by challenging underlying assumptions of traditional phenomenological theory, such as the opposition between place and space and between object and process.³⁴ *Vis-à-vis* other traditions – including art and architectural history – landscape and garden history and theory would play the role of that 'moment of danger at which the past flashes up'. Walter Benjamin describes this as the means to 'articulate the past historically . . . to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger . . . [affecting] both the content of the tradition and its receivers' (1999, p 247).

Secondly, landscape and garden history and theory would synthesise the many existing landscape and garden histories and theories scattered across disciplines. These relevant studies, dispersed among many fields and disciplines, need to be brought together.³⁵ In this process, it would be seen that many such studies exist already, but are disconnected from each other because they are spread across various disciplines such as social anthropology, art history, cultural studies, visual studies, landscape studies, design history (including film and photography studies), cultural geography, gender studies and architectural history – a range of disciplines and topics far wider, in fact, than described by Harris (1999, p 434). The challenge

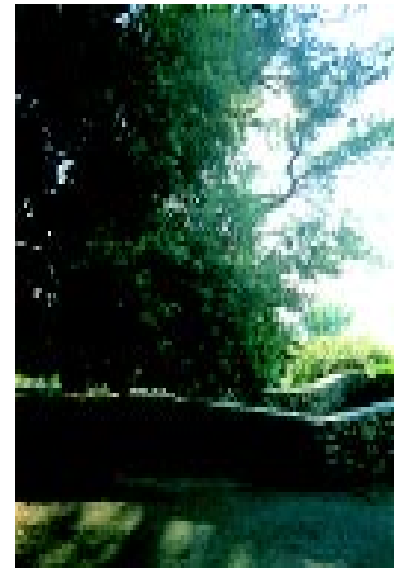


Figure 12: Wilderness at the Maeght Foundation. Photograph: the author.





is to gather together the existing literature into one body to build up 'a kind of home' (Elkins, 1993, p 189), a centre to landscape history with 'scholarly and critical consensus: a conventional set of interpretive methods, agreed-upon leading terms, "ruling metaphors", and descriptive protocols . . . a recurring set of critical problems' (Elkins, 1993, p 189). With these, landscape history becomes a centripetal field with its own methodology. It provides domain-specific tools of observation and analysis, and critically addresses neighbouring disciplines (which sometimes deal with more purely and uniquely two-dimensional fields) from its own position – not simply absorbing methodologies from other fields and exporting its subject matter to them.

Here, several classic studies come to be seen as foundational, such as Vincent Scully's (1962) seminal re-interpretation of the Greek temple, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*. Scully recognised that the analysis of individual Greek temples must look at the significance of their relationship to their landscapes 'which were essential components in the meaning of the site as a whole' (Scully, 1962, p 5). Greek viewers were positioned to view temples against specific landscape forms.

Thirdly, landscape and garden history and theory would have a profound impact on culture and society. New case studies and empirical observations would challenge dualities such as place/space, space/time and object/process, by developing a methodology attuned to change, process and mobility. In doing so, landscape studies would reorient visual studies and historiography towards movement, change and process. Such a landscape and garden history and theory foregrounds the interactive process between humans, landscape and nature. It no longer simply exports and disperses landscape as subject matter to different disciplines, methodologies and theories attuned to recognising their own specific observations but, on the contrary, would 'oblige a fundamental rethinking' (Deleuze, 1968, p 182). It is perhaps such a situation that Michel Foucault suggested when he wrote:

As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, humanity is a recent invention. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment only sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble as the ground of classical thought did at the end of the eighteenth century, then one could certainly wager that humanity would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea (Foucault, 1970, p 387).

In this respect, not only would landscape and garden history and theory affect its practice, but they would also contribute to the reconfiguration of the past and the recovery of lost historical landscape and garden histories and traditions, which were often conceptualised as alternatives to other disciplines. A classic example within Western history is the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphilus*, based on a view of landscape – enmeshed in notions of gender, sexuality, dreams, desires and the unconscious – which was very different to the Classical architectural tradition





aimed at resolution, harmony and stasis (Tzonis and Lefaivre, 1986). Recovered landscape and garden history and theory would highlight a different set of typologies, such as the labyrinth.³⁶ For example, a sequence of clearly demarcated spaces was used as a mnemonic technique in the ancient rhetorical tradition of the arts of memory. Different memories were associated with various imaginary spaces, and movement through these spaces assisted recapitulation of the various memories in a narrative sequence. The imagined sequence of different spaces allowed both the recording and the recalling of narrative events.³⁷ The Maeght Foundation's narrative organisation involves such a labyrinthine space, built on a different typological model. Thus, form and representation in landscape and garden history and theory involve different spatial and typological notions with their own histories and their own interpretative and analytic approaches.

Fourthly, this renewed domain-specific landscape and garden history and theory would have profound effects on contemporary design practice. A view of our environment as a mobile and complex process would have fundamental implications for our place within it,³⁸ and hence for the very concept of human subject. Landscape and garden history and theory – highlighting how '[n]ature is an enigmatic object . . . not what is in front of us, but what holds us' (Merleau-Ponty, 1994, p 20) – would contribute to a view of the human subject as part of the landscape. No longer as self-centred Cartesian subject, nor decentred deconstructed subject, but instead confronted by '[s]omething that obliges a fundamental rethinking. This something is the object of a fundamental encounter, not of mere recognition' (Deleuze, 1968, p 182).

Fifthly, by recovering lost traditions, landscape and garden history and theory would contribute to changes in the writing of history, that is, of historiography. They would contribute to a 'metahistory', that is, the 'deep structure of the historical imagination' (White, 1973, p ix) by developing the temporal dimension. An existing example is that of the French Annales School, 'with its emphasis on the *longue durée*' (Harris, 1999–2000, p 435). In fact, the *longue durée* stemmed from the notion of landscape. Fernand Braudel wrote that the life of the Mediterranean 'is linked to the land . . . its history can no more be separated from that of the lands surrounding it than the clay can be separated from the hands of the potter who shapes it' (1972, p 17). For Braudel, the landscape stands simultaneously for geographical space and an inherent idea of historical agency.³⁹ He suggests a model that investigates combined spatiality and temporality as empirical subject matter. A history and theory of landscape involving spatial temporality generates a different historiography in so far as it prioritises the temporal dimension as cultural phenomenon.

FROM SUBJECT MATTER TO ANALYTIC TOOL

As seen in the above consequences and implications, a domain-specific landscape history and theory would operate not merely as subject matter but also as a methodological and theoretical tool of analysis. They would thus rise to the





challenge of dealing with fundamental issues of 'fictive space, the picture plane, the position and nature of the beholder, and notions of realism and representation' (Elkins, 1993, p 189), in order to deal specifically with these paradoxes: that the fictive spaces of landscape and gardens are real (Marin, 1973); that the spaces of landscape and gardens are also temporal; that the pictures involved in landscape and gardens are not two-dimensional; that there is no single position of the beholder (Bolla, 1995; Careri, 2001); no single visual dimension; and not one type of beholder (Conan, 1999).

And, if objections are raised against using landscape and gardens as methodological and theoretical procedures, let it be noted that such a procedure follows the landscape-specific dictum that 'land with no ground-use is potentially free to be used in landscape design, thus turning its inherent difficulties to advantage' (Fairbrother, 1970, p 32). There is an opportunity to establish a domain-specific landscape and garden history and theory, and to recover this dormant field as an analytic discipline in order to provide new investigative tools for expanding and enriching other fields. This would, in return, engage landscape history in creative and oppositional dialogue with allied and different histories. In so far as landscapes 'both reflect and engender ways of thinking about ourselves and of being in the world' (Harris, 1999, p 440), their history and theory, as the history and theory of a 'significant other', could once again engage in a dialogue with the concepts and methods of contemporary art history and visual studies and with contemporary design practice, shaping them with reflective repercussions. In this respect, landscape history and theory would also interact with the practice of landscape architecture and garden design, but critically, not subserviently.

In reconfiguring landscape and garden history and theory as 'significant other' in mainstream academic research and curriculum, and a dynamic field with intellectual power within our contemporary culture (as in the eighteenth century), the history and theory of landscape and gardens must develop its own 'kind of home' (Elkins, 1993, p 189). This 'kind of home' would involve the fundamental notions of 'deambulatory space and peripatetic vision' (Bois, 1984, pp 32-62; 44), of (extra)visual experience and of the 'eye-intense'. This difficult process reminds us of the *Holzwege* (Heidegger, 1986), those paths that meander deep into the forest, leading unsuspecting travellers apparently nowhere. However, seen from the perspective of woodcutters who make and use them, these paths lead to the heart of the forest, allowing new wood to be brought out.





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NOTES

- 1 For some basic readers that explicate these issues, see Mirzoeff (1998), Nelson and Shiff (1992) and Preziosi (1998). It is important to remember that this history of theoretical and methodological developments in art history reaches far back into previous centuries.
- 2 A brief and contrasting review is Birksted (2000a).
- 3 These issues have also been discussed in Grandison (1999).
- 4 As Aby Warburg famously described such professional demarcations (Iversen, *Retrieving Warburg's Tradition*, 1993; Didi-Huberman, 2002; Michaud, 1998; Gombrich, 1986).
- 5 I leave open the issue of the difference between landscapes and gardens. See Marc Rakatansky (1992, pp 201–221; 203). In this respect, it could perhaps be argued, as Michael Crozier does, that '[gardens] are not dissimilar to architectural spaces' (1999, p 628).
- 6 Other terms used are 'vision' and 'aspect'. See Genette (1980).
- 7 Other terms used are 'mood' and 'register'. See Genette (1980).
- 8 Others have attempted this. See Adams (1991). Michel de Certeau has distinguished between 'carte' and 'parcours' and described the 'rhetoric of walking' (1990, p 149). Jean-François Augoyard has attempted an analysis of urban walking (1979). Louis Marin speaks of 'the art of distinguishing the sentence construction of space' (1992, p 34). One does not, however, want to fall into the traps of classification nor of taxonomy. For another analysis of walking and vision, see Yve-Alain Bois (1984).
- 9 The importance of tactility is discussed in several books such as Holl, Pallasmaa and Pérez-Gómez (1994) and must include Alois Riegl's classic distinction between 'haptic' and 'optic' (Iversen, 1993). See also Georges Braque's notions of 'visual space' and 'manual space' (Golding, Bowness and Monod-Fontaine, 1977).
- 10 Stanislaus Fung (1999) has described the avatars of such anti-theoretical positions.
- 11 The methodological analysis of form can of course be formalistic, such as Immanuel Kant's analysis of the art of landscape architecture, which he evaluates as not an art because of its non-formal material qualities.
- 12 Adams references this expression to Paglia (1990).
- 13 Reading itself is eye-intense. See Derrida's accounts of reading's backwards-and-forwards visual movement, and the range of visual procedures' relationship to the silently spoken word.
- 14 However, a subordinate visually tactile – 'haptic' – element may be involved, for example in





- paintings by Braque. It is thus problematic to categorically distinguish between different media.
- 15 Though, again, exceptions clearly exist, for example Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, where the beholder would first move up a staircase from the bottom right of the painting and then view it frontally. This is of course the classic example analysed by Lacan (1973).
 - 16 An attempt at doing so is John Dixon Hunt's (1995) description of Kent's Theatre at Rousham. See also Cereghini (1991). Another is Peter de Bolla's (1995) description of Battersea Park. See also Bowring (2000) and de Vega, Intons-Peterson, Johnson-Laird, Denis and Marschark (1996).
 - 17 Bernard Tschumi has used the cinematic model at the Parc de la Villette, José Luis Sert used the pedestrian model at the Maeght Foundation and Bernard Lassus has used the model of automobile movement in his works along French autoroutes.
 - 18 This is currently changing. See Fried, Menzel's *Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth Century Berlin* (2002).
 - 19 Edquist and Bird (1994) and Matless (1998) have proposed the notion of a 'culture of landscape' but there still is no domain-specific body of methodological literature on in situ landscape form and representation as a 'kind of home'.
 - 20 This problem of dimensions so saturates historiography, and seems so ineradicably linked to the pre-eminence of architectural space as an autonomous or semi-autonomous dimension, that it has been described as 'obsessive' (Teyssot, 1981, p 28). It is interesting to note how George Abraham postulated a conflict between time and space on psychological grounds: a sense of space as ideal fusion implies the negation of time. Conversely, the sense of ideal spatial fusion is destroyed by awareness of temporality (Abraham, 1976, pp 461-471).
 - 21 For a discussion of the relations of time to identity, see the work of Piera Aulagnier discussed by Mijolla-Mellor (2002). For a review of psychological research, see Rohde and Kendle (1994).
 - 22 Walking was a significant art-related activity for Giacometti's last project, *Paris sans fin*, a record of walks through Paris. Miró spent long periods wandering around Palma cathedral and the streets of Palma, saying that his walks were his works of art.
 - 23 See Nora (1989). See also the narrative landscape of Aldus Manutius's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) in Lefaivre (1997, p 8).
 - 24 'Narratives intersect with sites, accumulate as layers of history, organise sequences and inhere in the very materials and processes of the landscape. In various ways, stories "take place". The term "landscape narrative" designates the interplay and mutual relationship between story and place' (Potteiger and Purinton, 2002, p 136). See also Rakatansky (1992).
 - 25 Direct, intentional, one-to-meanings and symbols can be interpreted in multiple and unpredictable ways. See Iser (1978).
 - 26 Another aspect of this figure/ground fluidity specific to meanings projected unto landscape is that of the 'material'/'spiritual' (see Bradley, 1999).
 - 27 These spaces were of prime importance to Sert who wrote that '[t]his sequence of reflecting pools . . . repeats the sculptural and architectural motifs and creates depth by piercing the surfaces of the terraces' (Sert, undated b).
 - 28 For a further discussion of these issues, see Miller (1993) and Miller in Birksted (2000). See also the work of Arnold Berleant (1993).
 - 29 Roland Barthes's description of this process of naturalisation is classic: 'In a first (exclusively linguistic) system, causality would be, literally, natural: fruit and vegetable prices fall because they are in season. In the second (mythical) system, causality is artificial, false; but it creeps, so to speak, through the back door of Nature' (1972, p 13).





- 30 For an account of Le Corbusier's insightful and strategic use of imagery, see Beatriz Colomina (1994).
- 31 Many other examples exist. Anne Bermingham (1986) shows how Constable uses the landscape of Willy Lott's cottage to focus the beholder away from a view of industrial England. Romy Golan (1995) shows how artists in France during the wars used landscape for specific political views.
- 32 For a review of this literature and a more in-depth discussion of this complex problematic, see Birksted (1999a, p 1-11). Richard Shiff has analysed Cézanne's use of the subject of wilderness in his efforts to 'suppress any hint of representation' (1984, p 223).
- 33 See Merleau-Ponty (1994) and Alois Riegl [1858-1905] who opposed 'haptic' and 'optic' modes of perception (Podro, 1982).
- 34 Behind the phenomenological assumption of place as immobility, lies a deeper assumption of the dichotomy of object and subject.
- 35 See, for example, five studies chosen relatively at random from the fields of cultural studies, art history, social anthropology, landscape studies, architectural studies, cultural geography and film studies: Taylor (1994); Mitchell (1994b); Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995); and Berque (1986). Bringing together the existing, and exponentially growing, literature on landscape and garden history within the critical and visual studies field would provide a real example of a contemporary multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary field of study, linking together different methodologies and departments.
- 36 See Michel Conan (1992, pp 119-150), Carruthers (1990) and also Yates (1966).
- 37 In the classical theory of rhetoric, memory is specifically related to place since 'the classical memory technique is a way of reconstructing temporal orders by mapping them onto spatial configurations, most notably architectural structures, with various loci and topoi or memory places inhabited by striking images and sometimes even words; it is also a way of mapping an oral performance, an oration from memory, onto a visual structure' (Mitchell, 1994b, p 192).
- 38 An interesting economic analysis that considers this is Dasgupta (2001).
- 39 Mirka Beneš indeed notes that '[f]requently landscape was a protagonist of their [Annales] narratives' (1999, p 65). In other words, a natural sympathy with landscape was so much part of the Annales School that it provided not so much a model as a mould, which necessarily brought out common dimensions of landscape and history. In this process, history and landscape and the Mediterranean and the *longue durée* - all four imbricated in each other - become the main historical agents. These relations need clarifying.

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