

Industrial Poetry.

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Abstract.

One of the great opportunities that increased access to technologies and information has brought, is interdisciplinary practice between the fine arts and industrial design. As a student, these two pathways had at first appeared separate, and requiring different skills and temperament to study and practice. But on further enquiry into the subject of Landscape Architecture, which is considered an industrial design discipline, I discovered a past and present rich with unbounded trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary practitioners, where fine art methodologies have helped find identity and belonging in landscape, and have been used to influence and inform design.

I have based my Masters of Landscape Architecture project on how fine art practice could contribute to Landscape Architectural site analysis, and through this project demonstrate possibilities in interdisciplinary practice. The relationships between fine art practice and the articulation of “*sense of place*” has always been evident in map making, and it is in this cross-over that I hope to find a usefulness to Landscape architecture within my work. In this paper I describe my methods and findings from this project so far.

Methodology.

One of my first observations of making the transition from fine art practitioner to Landscape Architecture student was that I would have to understand normative site analysis practice, and place my work in context with it. What I had to do was establish at what level my site analysis artwork was to operate within the managing and developing of public open space, and what aspect of site analysis if any is not currently being utilised.

I started by selecting a site that I had known as a child, Centennial Park on Auckland’s North Shore. There are projects such as the Common Ground movement in the UK, and the Bright Sparks funding scheme also from the UK that explore the relationship of artist and industrial environmental design. The former is engaged in preserving local distinctiveness and empowerment in the face of insensitive development. This is done through advocacy and the publication of guidelines and strategies that are designed to promote sense of place. One of the methods employed is to use local artists to conduct mappings of their towns and villages,

thus giving a counter view to the authorities town planning data collection that is oftendone without the benefit of intimate local knowledge and experience, as(Wood, 2006,p.8) observes; *“Beyond their formal continuities, maps and paintings are both communicative, that is constructs intended to affect behaviour”*.

This process enables artists and crafts people to talk to Town Planning and Landscape Architectural practice through a complimentary creative process, this has been a distinguishing methodology for the Common Ground projects, for the reason (Kanarinka, 2006, p. 24) suggests; *“It is possible to think of a map not as a representation of reality but as a tool to produce reality.”*

The Bright Sparks funding scheme offers a different approach, it explores public space potential through creatively led research that is achieved through partnerships between artists and public realm professionals. This scheme was set up by Haring Woods Associates, and Landscape+Arts Network as (Woods, 2009, p. 26) describes; *“The scheme champions the role of the artist in the development of the public realm, and the their intuitive response to spaces, places people and wildlife.”*

These two differing ways of achieving similar goals offered me two methodologies from which to use as a model, I had to try the Common Ground approach first as no such scheme as Bright Sparks was available to me, unless I created one myself, not easy.

After my second workshop, when I had presented exploration through producing artwork based on locations within my site, it became clear that only through the use of my own fine art methodology could I produce work that could offer Landscape Architecture something that was not already available through existing practiced site analysis techniques, or too heavily coded. The aspect of site analysis I identified through research that is currently under explored was narrative, and as (Potteiger, 1998, p. ix) observes; *“...narrative offers ways of knowing and shaping landscapes not typically acknowledged in conventional documentation, mapping, surveys, or even the formal concerns of design.”* What was also evident from my second workshop was that the artist should not abandon the poetic in order to come closer to the scientific, it is the dreaming and the poetic qualities of the artwork that the scientific data collection requires. The necessity for the partnership arrangement in the success of the Bright Sparks Program was evident to me now, and I decided that I needed to find a partnership that could work in a similar way, and the model of the Bright Sparks Program was what was needed to for me as an artist to have currency in Landscape Architectural site analysis.

Having identified an unusual planting of Pohutukawa trees in the park, I completed three artworks of this landscape feature. From these artworks I discovered that the site contained

significant historical importance, and this importance even though known by some local residents was not known to the North Shore City Council, under whose authority the park resides. From this artwork I discovered the following story of the sites construction;

In 1939 the local residents under the umbrella of the Campbell's Bay Beautification Society undertook to contribute to the national celebrations of the 1940 Centenary. They planned to do this in the form of a grand avenue in a similar style as Twin Oak Drive in Cornwall Park but they decided to use Pohutukawa.

The avenue was bulldozed to approximately 20 meters wide and 480 meters long, from one road-end of "Takapuna Reserve" (Beach Rd.) to another(Rae Rd.). For the Centenary the park was re-named "Centennial Park" and the grand avenue planting was started.

But in September 1939 the war had arrived, and the decision was made in 1940 when citizens were being mobilized to go overseas to fight to continue the plantings began in 1939, but each man leaving from the district would now have a tree planted for them in the avenue with their name written on a small plaque that was placed under their tree. And from that time on this avenue was known by locals either as "*Centennial Avenue*", "*Memorial Avenue*" or "*the soldiers trees*".

This impressive landscape feature had now become a hybrid memorial, one designed to celebrate the inception of nationhood signed at Waitangi in 1840, and to celebrate the courage of the men who had volunteered to fight for that nation. The hopeful possibility of partnership and nationhood that the cartoon from the Herald of 1940 endeavoured to create had been captured in this double row planting of Pohutukawa.

But by the beginning of the 1960's the origins of the memorial had been lost to all but a handful of locals who had an interest in the park's history or witnessed the original construction.

The artwork made from researching images from various time frames from the life of the avenue of trees, and the findings of the site made through this process was presented to the council. The result from this presentation was that the Council changed the draft management plan of the park to recognise the avenue of trees known alternately as Memorial Avenue or Avenue of Remembrance to locals, as a listed historical site. In recognition of this work, the Council agreed to a partnership arrangement with me in the form of 120 hours of expert advice from the specialist council staff, as I required it. I now had something resembling the Bright Sparks model to work with.

As (Giro, 1999, p. 95) states; *"The central question today is whether we are capable of returning to a site-induced vision."* and the key word for me in that quote is *"site-induced"*, and that is where my work could be of value, to explore the *genius loci* and to work complimentary to the council planners, managers and landscape architect. And in order to help me to identify what method I could use for a categorising of the elements within a landscape I turned to (Relph, 1976, p.5) *"identity of place is comprised of three interrelated components, each irreducible to the other – physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meaning or symbols."* A decision was made to use this proposition to structure my enquiry. The city council's sole landscape architect is responsible for all design development within the city parks, and her role is almost completely management of contracted landscape professionals. Budgetary constraints limited the depth of site analysis work undertaken by council and the contracted architects and designers. The council structures for funding are such that the arts and open public space are managed separately, coming together occasionally for a sculpture, a bridge or placed landscape features that are commissioned for a negotiated space. The use of fine art practice to research and articulate a *sense of place* for a public open space, by anyone other than a landscape architect is not currently considered by the council, and as the contracted architects are under budgetary pressure for design solutions this is not required of them beyond the rendering of site lines and vistas, even though many have been trained in fine art practices, but what is required for true understanding of *place* is what Colin McCahon is quoted as saying in (Park, 2006, p. 57) *"...his landscapes weren't landscapes"*. And Park puts this quote into context for us; *"But an interpreting a place through symbol and imagination, they heighten our own perceptions in ways that are rarely permitted by ordinary process of seeing."*

(Giro, 1999, p. 95) comments again on the need for a deeper connection to *place* in site analysis; *"How far from reality can the landscape design tools that we work with be? The gradual withdrawal from landscape as a place to landscape as a piece of paper or a computer screen must be questioned."*

The council officers suggested an application for funding from the Community Board Fund to put together a comprehensive historical site analysis of the avenue, a successful application would enable through the funding, for a Bright Sparks model to be used in New Zealand.

One of the outcomes of my second workshop was the realization that an extended description of the artworks is un-necessary and perhaps counter productive, and that the poetry of the site contained within the work should speak for its self, and the true value in the works are the personal interpretations of the site made possible, and that answering questions about the work is a better way to utilize the artworks. So I set out to construct the artworks as devices or

machines that could be used to provoke dialogue and thought and to extract the stories of the landscape.

If the artwork can take on mechanical characteristics without losing its spiritual and perceptive creative origins, it might enable the art-machine to become a more effective instrument within the discipline of Landscape Architectural site analysis, one that could become complementary to scientific data collection.

In the absence of an expert partnership, I needed to find an example of where perception and the use of imagination to unlock aesthetics could have made a difference to an industrial landscape development. And I have here an example of where the collaborative work of artist and industry in conducting site analysis might have assisted in preventing an Environment Court case.

This Environment Court decision went in favour of the Respondent, the NSCC, who opposed the coastal development plans of the Appellant.

In the case of Bayswater Marina Holdings v. North Shore City Council, Environment Judge J.A. Smith (Smith, 2009, p. 29) when delivering the decision began by saying; *“At the heart of the difference of opinion on natural character was the perceived naturalness of the reclamation.”* This issue was at the heart of the dispute, and it is my contention that an artist could have been in a position to express variations of “naturalness” in this case, and could have provided the valuable site analysis dealing with this problem of perception.

The Judge (Smith, 2009, p. 30-31) also commented; *“How we assess and address landscape issues depends on how landscape is defined.”* And more pointedly on this subject went on to say; *“Neither is it simply a total of bio-physical elements, patterns and processes occurring over time, even though these are regarded as formative factors.”*

Is it this kind of case that possibly can answer the question of why fine art practice should be used to assist in solving industrial landscape design problems?

I believe what this Environment Court document represents, is an acknowledgement that the qualities of a landscape, are not able to be defined simply by a scientific collection of data, or by a photographically representational rendering of a site. Possibly what is asked for is a site analysis that is able to express values and perceptions through an exploration of a site's meaning, and to assist in defining the cultural basis to the definition of landscape.

My conclusion so far is that the positioning and relevance of using fine art practice in conducting site analysis for Landscape Architecture relies on the structure put in place for

analysis and development, macro or micro, a district, neighbourhood or a specific site of importance. The artwork, even though intended only for site analysis requires a standard of presentation that enables it to have authority, and should also be available in a format that enables it to be distributed to all interested parties in a clear and accessible manner. One way of making fine art practice more useful to industrial applications like Landscape Architecture would be to ensure a wide variety of rendering media and methods of composition were used when producing artwork, and multiple pieces of artwork for a site are produced, this would maximise the machine-like qualities that artwork can bring to analytical discourse, and bring a less pre-determinate site analysis to the design process.

As (Joliet, 2001, p. 40) states; “*Landscape incontestably involves aesthetics; we could even go so far as to say, aesthetic motivation, as regards the land.*” I believe it is in this aesthetic motivation that the place for fine art in Landscape Architectural site analysis resides. Fine art’s capacity for aesthetic discovery becomes a vital tool for ensuring the best interests of the environment and society in the early stages of town planning and open space development. But I also believe that currently the Bright Sparks model for funding and artist/public space professional partnerships is the optimum methodology for an artist practitioner like myself, to maximise the interdisciplinary process and to contribute useful knowledge through site analysis. I also propose that a working partnership between open space design management and fine artists in exploring “*sense of place*”, is vital to preserve identity and uniqueness in communities.

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