

The everyday collective laboratory.

Paul Woodruffe.

UNITEC New Zealand.

Introduction.

How can Fine Art practice coupled with Graphic Design documentation methodology be of use to Landscape Architectural site analysis? Where currently does a need for new methods of producing site analysis lay?

The answer to these questions can possibly be found in how Tangata Whenua, communities and interest groups are engaged in the assessment of a landscape.

This process of assessment and engagement is based on the following attributes according to the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architecture – Education Foundation draft document of March 2010.

They are Biophysical elements, patterns and processes, Sensory qualities, Spiritual, cultural and social associative activities and meanings.

It is in the last two, the spiritual, cultural and social where the most difficulties can lie, as the interpretation and representation of these can be highly personalized or come from one cultural perspective at the expense of another.

This paper explores and tests the use of Fine Art Practice and Graphic Design methodology through two case studies, both on Auckland's North Shore, and both involving issues of culture, ownership and social activity, with spirituality being addressed in a less direct way.

The first case study tests the methodology through community and interest group forums involving primarily guardianship and social activity within a heritage site. The second study explores culture, social activity and ownership in respect to boundaries, this study is yet to be tested through public forum but produces discoveries that could prove useful in making connections between site analysis methodology and design methodology.

This paper presents a case for cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary practice in Landscape Architectural site analysis, regarding community consultation in landscape attributes, character, classification and amenity.

From specialization to collaboration.

A shared experience usually carries more potential than a solitary one, and this is especially so when the experience is to be translated into planning or design. To illustrate this point two projects were undertaken on the North Shore of Auckland City, the first is Centennial Park in Campbell's Bay and deals with local history, the second at Kennedy Park also on the North Shore, explores boundary. In both cases it was move away from specialization as artist, historian, cartographer, photographer or landscape architect, it was the result of shared experience, collaboration, and as Gibson observes; "Information about the self accompanies information about the environment, and the two are inseparable." (Gibson, 1979, p126).

The Landscape Architectural site analysis that is conducted by the North Shore City Council on public open space is currently undertaken largely by their sole charge Landscape Architect or by contracted professionals placed under tight financial constraints. Assessment of heritage sites within council owned public space is undertaken by the Historic Places Trust by commission, the resulting report can only be released on permission from the commissioning party. Local interest groups that exist such as the *Centennial Park Bush Society* rely on volunteer members to assess the conditions of the public park they have interest in.

This compartmentalization of site analysis into various individual specialist professionals on the one hand, and local amateurs on the other, has resulted in disagreement and legal challenges that have revolved around sensory qualities, with conflicting cultural and social associative meanings being attributed to biophysical elements. These disagreements have arisen as a result of a lack of shared experience, and as Clifford remarks; "So much surveying, measuring, fact gathering, analysis and policy-making leaves out the very things which make a place significant to the people who know it well." (Clifford, 1996 p4).

Collecting the everyday.

To address this disconnection between local distinctiveness and the city authorities a methodology was developed that incorporated paintings and drawings of the site, historic photography from archival and personal collections, GIS mapping, and written stories gathered from local people and the local newspaper. The work was to be produced after multiple site visits with local residents and Council Parks Officers, and in the second case also a collaboration with an academic and landscape designer.

To conduct site analysis in a truly collaborative multi-disciplinary way requires a great deal of time, and has in this model been conducted as a series of creative arts academic research publications until a suitable industry model can be designed, but the use of the fine arts together with exhibition and publication design can have benefits as Leavy observes; "The turn toward artistic forms of representation brings social research to broader audiences, mitigating some of the educational and social biases that have traditionally dictated the beneficiaries of academic scholarship." (Leavy, 2009, p55). So the challenge is two fold, to undertake collaborative inter-disciplinary site analysis that questions its motives, and to use a methodology that effectively allows for this knowledge to be easily accessible and understood by the general public.

Precedents for this exist, such as in the "Parish maps" of the "Common Ground" movement from the UK, here artistic representation, story telling and map making are effectively used as tools in the fight for the acknowledgement of local uniqueness. And the "Bright Sparks" program also from the UK, is a funding scheme for arts and design led research and development projects that explore the physical and social aspects of public open space in both urban and rural contexts.

In order to enable the gathering of images and text to be presented to local interest groups and local political organizations effectively, the printed format of a landscape A3 document and supporting pdf slide show was created, the slide show for public meetings and the document for individuals and groups to discuss at length, with the idea of this document drawing out further information on the site from the recipients that could in turn be used to create an updated version, until all avenues of enquiry had been explored and a definitive version produced. as Schama contends "Before it can ever be the repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock." (Schama, 1995, p6.).

Two cases for a different approach to site analysis.

In an Environment Court case of Bayswater Marina Holdings v. North Shore City Council, Environment Court Judge J.A. Smith 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." (Smith, 2009, p. 29). The Judge 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." (Smith, 2009, p. 30-31). This issue of perception was at the heart of the dispute, and it is here that the case for a new site analysis methodology could lay, as clearly the existing model used was unable to express variations of associative "naturalness" in this case, and failed to provide the valuable site analysis data dealing with sensory qualities, spiritual, cultural and social associative activities and meanings.

In another case at Owairaka Park in Mt. Albert, a thriving community garden was moved and redeveloped by the Auckland City Council, much to the disappointment of the community who used it, Schuler observed; "Since the upgrade of Owairaka Park in 2008, the community garden was moved from the Owairaka Road side of the park to the Hendon Road end. The size of the garden and the quality of the soil have dwindled" (Schuler, 2010, p5). One of the comments made to the "Aucklander" reporter was from a Mr Chitale who commented in the March 4th 2010 edition; "You cannot kneel on concrete whilst doing gardening." Another comment reported in the same publication by a Mr 'Ilohahia expresses frustration at the result of the re-design; "In the first year, we had nine plots and 15 different groups of gardeners, but now Auckland City Council staff have run amok." This clearly shows that the site analysis methodology used by the city authorities in this case was unable to address issues of cultural and social associative activities in a satisfactory way, and these two cases suggest that new methods of site analysis could be developed to advocate for communities in cases of both development and design, and as stated in "Landscape Research volume 33"; "Active participation in landscape development is widely deemed to increase residents' acceptance of planning decisions, to build mutual trust, to strengthen people's awareness of their local landscape, and to encourage them to treat the landscape responsibly." (Hoppner, Frick, Buchecker, 2008 p3).

In 2003 the following keynote addresses by Dame Catherine Tizard, Dame Anne Salmond, Peter Addis and Dr Jock Phillips, group workshops were held to discuss the following four questions:

- What are the most important things we can do to promote the recognition, protection and interpretation of heritage landscapes in New Zealand?
- What are the creative ways in which this heritage landscape can convey the stories of our nation and its cultures?
- What actions should be taken now so that by 2010 this heritage landscape is appreciated and understood and provides benefits for the community?
- What partnerships can be formed to achieve such recognition, protection and interpretation of heritage landscapes? (Heritage Landscapes Report 2003).

With the project undertaken at Memorial Avenue some of these questions are addressed.

Memorial Avenue.

To test the methodology "the everyday collective", that utilizes fine art, photography, mapping and

graphic design to produce a site analysis document, the site Memorial Avenue was chosen. The test was used on this site as it contained unknown or unclear cultural and social qualities. Stakeholders, interest groups and the protocols for consultation with these groups were identified and timetabled. The following stages in methodology were explored;

1/ Mapping with GIS and Google Earth the site's physical structure, photographing and walking the site with local residents to establish sense of place.

2/ An initial series of drawings and paintings of physical attributes belonging the site.

This revealed that a structure was evident within the site that manifested itself primarily as a series of sensory experiences, these sensory attributes collectively determined character for the avenue, and were subsequently able to be classified by the artwork using image and symbol.

2/ Researching local narratives and historic photographic images of the site, through local and national archives.

The sourcing and collecting of these stories and images revealed the unique history of the site, and discovered a variety of similar but occasionally conflicting recollections of the sites past. This stage of data collection was crucial to the publications ability to be able to extract further narratives from the community and to give context to the subsequent paintings and drawings.

3/ A series of artworks that illustrated the findings of the heritage research.

This work was intended to bring some of the narrative threads together, primarily the twin origins of the site that was discovered through the previous research stage; the 1940 Centenary and the WW2 Memorial. Artworks were also made acknowledging local narratives that lay on the fringes of the site.

4/ A series of drawings that proposed design solutions for the restoration of the avenue as a memorial and public amenity.

This stage was decided on after consultation with the Arts Manager at the North Shore City Council. It was deemed necessary to provide a starting point in consultation on how the local authorities and interest groups saw the avenues landscape value. The rendering style was set as conceptual drawing and any reference to construction specifications was deliberately omitted.

5/ The collation of all information and images and the subsequent design of a document for publication.

Graphic Design software was employed to produce a document that clearly presented the written narratives and images in way that was designed to provide a resource for consultation, this was both an A3 and A4 colour printed spiral bound edition and a Pdf datashow file for public meetings.

The document "the everyday collective laboratory: Memorial Avenue" was presented to the "Centennial Park Bush Society" who are the primary local interest group who undertake volunteer work on the avenue. The members of this society contributed some more information on the avenue after viewing the document, and gave their approval to use the document to present to the Takapuna Community

Board a case for classifying Memorial Avenue a Heritage Site within the draft management plan currently being written.

On presentation to the community board, it was discovered that the council had no knowledge or record of Memorial Avenues' existence previous management plans had never undertaken a site analysis methodology that was capable of revealing the depth of landscape attributes that was required. The recommendation was made to classify Memorial Avenue a Heritage Site.

It is my contention that the reason previous and existing site analysis had not revealed this historic site is that the biophysical elements, patterns and processes are on the surface quite banal and unexceptional, and this influenced the focus of the assessment. The methodology "the everyday collective laboratory" was able to reveal the exceptional in the unexceptional, through the sharing of stories and images, 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."

Collaboration to find Characterization. In order to test the methodology in collaboration with another discipline, a colleague in the Department of Landscape Architecture was approached (Ian Henderson), and an site was selected close in proximity to Memorial Avenue but on the coast. It had similar attributes, in that it contained an extensive boundary with private properties, something that that the previous study had not researched, but also contained well documented heritage architecture and an historic Pa site. In this new project we were hoping to research and document local boundary types, revealing how the issues of private and public space had been addressed by the residents and authorities within the site.

Kennedy Park, Rahopara Pa, and the New Zealand Walkway.

The same "everyday collective laboratory" methodology was employed using GIS mapping, photography, site visits, paintings and drawings. But this time researchers from both the Design and Visual Arts and Landscape Architecture Departments contributed to the project within the Kennedy Park and Rahopara Pa site.

This collaboration resulted in a paper being written and presented at the Cumulus 2010 conference in Genk Belgium and published as a document in the same format as the Memorial Avenue project. This paper identified and classified four types of boundary that exist within the site, as well as revealing the differences that can occur between surveyed legal boundaries. In the process of writing this paper it was discovered that very little has been written on the psychology of the public/private boundary as it relates to Landscape Architecture, most texts lay within Sociology and the study of privacy. The generation of artworks exploring public/private boundary structures and possible classification go some way in starting a discourse around the psychology of public/private boundary in Landscape. These artworks explore the variety of elements that Allen explains; "...are loosely bounded aggregates characterized by porosity and local interconnectivity. The internal regulations of the parts are decisive; overall shape and extent are highly fluid." (Allen 1997). One of the boundaries explored by this methodology belongs to an historic residential building that has been the subject of an Historic Places Trust report commissioned by the owners Housing New Zealand. This report goes into depth regarding the architectural history of the building and it's past site context, but does not examine the garden structure, boundary, or the houses

relationship to the surrounding contemporary architecture and landscape, as the Council site analysis did not reveal Memorial Avenue within Centennial Park, the Historic Places Trust report on the house does not explain or reveal the sites differences or edge conditions that have contributed to the house being the sole survivor of an entire street of similar houses.

“...it is through the senses that architecture can have profound effect. As the human body moves, sees, smells, touches, hears and even tastes within a space it causes the architecture to come to life.

“(Lehman, 2010). It is in this case, on these boundaries within Kennedy Park that the architecture reaches out into the landscape, and effects our senses, but what of the psychological and cultural senses that relate to social conditioning in ownership, occupation and guardianship?

Environmental psychologist, Irwin Altman argues that privacy is a process whereby a person sometimes wants to be separated and at other times wants to be in contact with other people.(web; spacecollective.org/Environmentalalex/5905). It is in this area of landscape architectural design, that this site analysis methodology, that is able to explore and depict the multiples and variations that exist within boundaries is especially useful for.

Conclusion.

The model “the everyday collective laboratory” has not been explored to its full extent by involving a multiple of specialist practitioners such as cartographers, photographers, sociologists, writers and historians on one project. The template is possibly there for a model that is able to harness the multi-disciplinary research energy of a faculty or institution to produce landscape site analysis that answers these questions posed by Sue Clifford in ‘Parish Maps’; “What is important to you about this place, what does it mean to you? What makes it different from other places? What do you value here? What do we know, what do we want to know? How can we share our understandings? What could we change for the better?”In summing up she concludes; “Turning each other into experts in this way helps to liberate all kinds of quiet knowledge, as well as passion, about the place.” (Clifford 2008). Is it within its ability for an institution to undertake site analysis research that could be too difficult or costly for a community or organization to commission for advocacy? Can a faculty or department facilitate the move from specialization to collaboration to discover new knowledge that can be applied to community?

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