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Publication date
2023

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Scales of Change

Citation (APA)
de Wit, S. I. (2023). The power of composition. In T. Bevk, & M. Golobič (Eds.), *Scales of Change* (pp. 155-161). University of Ljubliana. https://conference.eclas.org/eclas-conference-2022-scales-of-change/

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Scales of Change

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Proceedings editors dr. Tadej Bevk, prof. dr. Mojca Golobič
Graphic design Manca Krošelj
Published by University of Ljubljana, Biotechnical Faculty, Jamnikarjeva 101, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Conference proceedings are available at
conference.eclas.org

Electronic version
Ljubljana, 2023

Kataložni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili v Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani
COBISS.SI-ID 161324803
ISBN 978-961-6379-81-6 (PDF)

The power of composition

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Abstract
Designed form is not about creating a good appearance. Nor is it restricted to the small scale. The small scale, however, can be used as a valuable playground and laboratory for large scale landscape designs. Three case studies are compared in which similar compositional principles are used at different scales and complexities: the technical, agricultural, pedagogic social reform landscape of the Gartenreich Dessau-Wörlitz (Duke Leopold III of Anhalt-Dessau, 1760-1830), the theatrical urban design for London connecting the government centre with the landscape panorama (John Nash, 1810-1826) and the residential urban landscape of Borneo-Sporenburg in Amsterdam (West8, 1993-2000). In each we can recognize the formal principles of the picturesque garden. Not the style, image, or shape, but the formal (visual-spatial) principles: landscape fragments that are connected by a route as a scenographic succession of composed scenes or tableaux, using the existing topography as a base. Such timeless compositional principles, as the relation between form and space as the initiator and carrier of structure, are versatile enough to accommodate and generate varying uses and processes. These examples illustrate a landscape architectural position that is in its essence not about problem solving but about creating form as condition for different uses, intended and unintended, expected, and unexpected, for human and non-human practices and experiences.

Keywords
Landscape architecture, compositional design principles, scale

Introduction
In the fuzzy transition between design and planning, scale is often used as the key distinguishing factor. And whereas planning answers the questions "what, where and how much" in its attempt to optimally allocate uses to territories, design answers the questions "how" in its attempt to give form to land uses. I would argue, however, the value of design is not to give form to land use, but rather to create conditions for land use. Designed form is not about creating a good appearance, an optional add-on; not the dress, but the skeleton, so to say. In the landscape architectural transformation of landscape form the place forms the prerequisite, the inspiration even, for the programme. Through asking "how", we might condition the answers to "what, where and how much". Nor is design restricted to the small scale. The small scale of the garden or park is relevant as a laboratory for landscape design

of multiple scales and complexities, where the relationship between form and how it might condition, evoke, invite different defined and undefined land uses, can be studied, and experimented with.

Therefore, in order to stimulate invention, experimentation and landscape experience, the curriculum of the Landscape Architecture Master in Delft track starts with the garden**.** From material, horticultural and technological inventions to compositional tools to expressions of societal fears and anxieties, the inventiveness of gardens has always been unlimited. "The garden is the place where the great inventions of our time are made." (Lassus, 1996) How can spatial-experiential compositional principles, such as those that were invented in garden design, be of value for different design contexts and the environmental and societal challenges that contemporary planners and designers are facing?

Methods

To allow a discussion of design beyond its appearance, style, or aesthetics, I will compare three spatial designs, dating from the 18th, 19th, and 20th century. Each have different scales and different functions and uses, but comparable compositional principles. The first is the technical, agricultural, pedagogic social reform landscape of the Gartenreich Dessau-Wörlitz (Prince Leopold III of Anhalt-Dessau, 1760-1830), followed by the theatrical urban design for London connecting the government centre with the landscape panorama (John Nash, 1810-1826) and finally the residential urban landscape of Borneo-Sporenburg in Amsterdam (West8, 1993-2000).

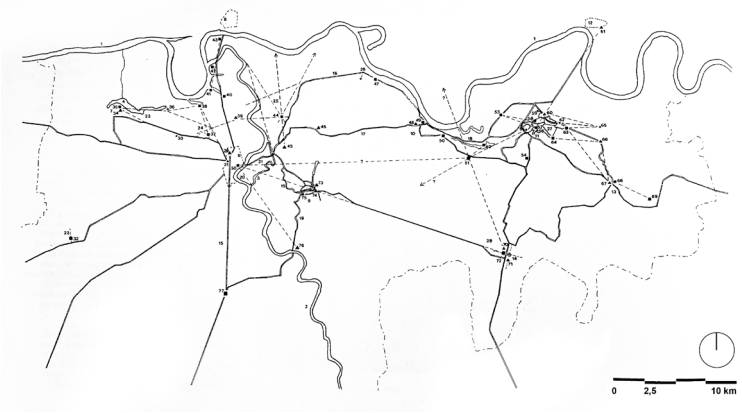

Figure 1

The architectural landscape of the Gartenreich Anhalt-Dessau (drawing: Petroushka Thumann, 1995)

Results

Gartenreich Dessau-Wörlitz

In 1758 Leopold III Friedrich Franz von Anhalt-Dessau followed his father as monarch of the principality of Anhalt-Dessau. Pursuing an economical, scientific, cultural, technical, and social prospering for him and for his subjects, the reforms that he made were revolutionary: education and reform programmes for all children, reclamation of the Elbe river landscape, agricultural reforms, all held together by an architectural landscape of gardens, avenues, and view lines. With the river Elbe as the natural spine of the *Gartenreich*, the design of Prince Friedrich Franz connected all components to this natural framework and to each other. Transforming the basic form of the natural river landscape by architectural means created the framework for reforming the agricultural and the urban physical structure and as a result its use and economic, cultural, and social structure. The landscape design consisted of several layers: the *Auenlandschaft* [flood plains] was made accessible for agriculture, the villages were brought into a landscape architectural framework, a network of *Gartenlandstrassen* [avenues]

was constructed, parks were built, and all of these were connected by a composition of view lines marked by buildings (Figure 1). (Reh, 1995)

The paved *Gartenlandstrassen* connected the royal court in Dessau and the garden residences of the several members of the royal family, with every five kilometres an inn or tavern. The straight parts were focused on monumental buildings or the spires of redesigned neo-gothic churches in the villages. Next to the avenues were walkways for pedestrians, where they were protected from the dust produced by the carriages. Trees were planted to provide shadow and, at regular distances, seats with panoramas to the surrounding landscape. Sightlines connected the existing residencies to the tower of the palace in Dessau. Views are limited by the visual reach of the human eye, but by connecting points and lines and adding new ones, a visual network was created that covered the full 400 square kilometres of the kingdom: a kingdom as a garden. The spatial design, that embraced and interconnected cities, villages and countryside transformed the landscape into the technical, agricultural, pedagogic social reform landscape of the Gartenreich Dessau-Wörlitz.

The Wörlitzer park was the residency of Prinz Friedrich Franz himself, but also from the beginning a public park, and in that sense very avant-garde, intended as an example and inspiration for the visitor, to become a more educated and better person. The garden is a hybrid ensemble of garden components and agricultural fields, connected by sightlines and buildings, with the river and its dike as a structuring element (Figure 2).

Figure 2
The Vulkan in the Wörlitzer Park, one of the follies visually connecting garden and agricultural landscape

The river dike was built already during the reign of Friedrich Franz's father Leopold. Walking paths were laid out on top of the dike, and along the river dike towers-*Wachhauser*-were built as set pieces. They functioned as lookouts for dike guarding, resting places for traveling and as ornament, and, because Franz was very pragmatic, if another function was needed, they were used for that. Such as Wachhaus Limesturm: an eclectic building that looks like a vernacular farmhouse on top of a classical temple, expressing its different meanings and uses. It was a storehouse, part of a historical narrative, reflection on local architecture, reflection on the shape of the dike, and a beacon marking the course of the dike and because of that the shape of the river (Figure 3).

Thus, the formal principles of garden design were deconstructed and brought in a new relationship, scaled up to a full country, without losing their compositional power. The composition-as a translation of

the natural river landscape-was leading, evoking and new cultural and agricultural uses and relations.

Grand Design

This translation of garden design principles to the scale of a full country may be quite unique, but we see a similar translation in, for example, the Grand Design for Regent Street and Regent Park by John Nash in London, a century later (between 1810-1826). From the 17th century onward London had been developing fast and erratic. Expansion was in the hands of landowners and developers. The fast urbanisation destroyed the connection between the government centre in Westminster and the surrounding landscape, traditionally the basis for the aristocracy, and the random new housing projects disrupted the continuity of the originally agricultural road pattern. A new approach to the composition of the urban structure was needed to create space for the development of public urban life. Nash's plan tackled these issues, providing a new housing area for the aristocracy with a view to the rural landscape, designed as an urban landscape garden with a continuous, ceremonial routing, connecting the government centre with the park, with Mayfair and the landscape panorama. (Steenbergen and Reh, 2011)

Designed in stages, starting with Regent's Park, followed by redesigning New Street (which is now Regent Street), then Buckingham Palace and the surrounding ceremonial government buildings and finally reorganising the area around St. Paul's Cathedral, allowed Nash to develop the idea of a complete scenography between the River Thames and Primrose Hill, in a continuous relationship between city and countryside (Figure 4). This scenography that allowed the urbanite to walk from the centre at the river Thames uphill out of town towards an arcadian landscape in the

Figure 3
Wachhaus Limesturm

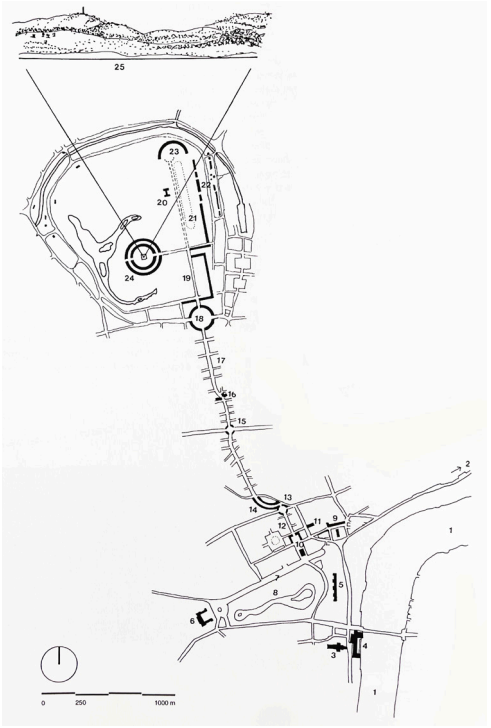

Figure 4
Scenography of the Grand Design in London, that positions the government centre in its landscape context, connecting the river Thames to Primrose Hill (drawing: Ellen Bestebreurtje, 1995)

hills, gave the illusion of spatial continuity. From the endpoint at Primrose Hill, one could look back to the city in the Thames valley. Nash did not use trees to frame the space, but used the buildings as his material, architecturally elaborating the street walls, using theatrical set pieces to articulate bayonet-like, staggered transitions, and creating frames, view lines and focal points (Figure 5). In this sequence Regent's Park was designed as the central connecting element, in what Nash called the 'Theatrical Panorama.' He surrounded the park with terraces and villas with an open view to the park and at the same time creating the visual horizon when seen from the park, both stage and décor. The park was conceived as the landscape framework for an urban residential programme, uniting the qualities of city and landscape.

The recovery of the visual contact with the surrounding landscape and the theatrical staging of public space was based on the concept of the landscape garden. Despite all the architectonic simplifications, wear and tear and increased traffic, Regent Street and Regent's Park still are among the most important public spaces of metropolitan London. The design enhanced the visual contrast between city and countryside but at the same time erased the programmatic opposition, creating the urban space as landscape-urban continuum. The design tools of the landscape garden were used to give space for a new and better functioning of the urban programme, embracing all urban functions in one gesture.

Borneo-Sporenburg

A more contemporary example shows a similar sensitivity for landscape architectural design means to create the conditions for urban use. The residential urban landscape of Borneo-Sporenburg in Amsterdam (West8, 1993-2000) is a former harbour area developed into a residential area with the density of the inner city (100 dwellings per hectare). To achieve this urban concentration, but in a suburban programme, West 8 introduced a fresh typology: a sea of low-rise buildings, given rhythm by a variation of blocks and open spaces. This rhythm recurs on a larger scale in the tapestry of land and water characterizing the whole area. The sea of low-rise buildings is interrupted by three immense, sculptural blocks that seemed to have landed as 'meteorites', functioning as focal points in the urban scenography, determining sightlines over and between the sea of houses (Figure 6 and 7).

Figure 5
The famous bend in Regent Street, using the architectural elaboration of the street walls as landscape architectural design tool (photo: Wouter Reh)

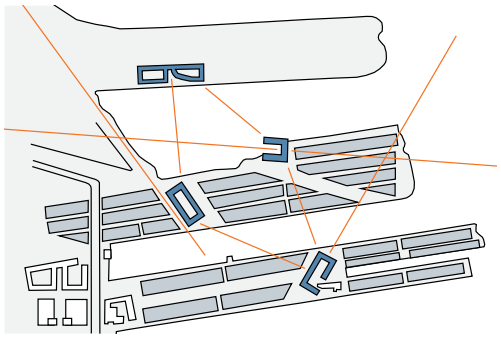

Figure 6
Sculptural blocks define visual connections through and over a sea of houses, connecting to each other and to the surrounding urban landscape (drawing Anastasiia Ignatova, Lene Westeng, Pietro Grignani, edited by author)

Like in Nash's Grand Design, the buildings are used as the material to create the landscape architectural form of the urban space, defining a contrast between narrow streets and the large open spaces of the water landscape, and using theatrical set pieces to articulate long sightlines. The sculptural building blocks are focal points from afar, creating visual connections. Their internal spaces act as connecting links between inside and outside, making the internal, residential space part of the urban landscape. This is the case for example in the courtyard of the Whale, one of the meteorites (ArchitektenCie, 2001). By elevating two sides of the building, the inner area transforms the traditionally private domain into an almost public city garden (Figure 8). The garden is not to be entered; therefore, the design is based on the view from the street and the view from above. The latter has resulted in a strong graphic two-dimensional pattern. A transparent fence filters the view from the street. Through the fence a space is seen with an open centre, flanked by two rows of columnar objects, like two galleries flanking the courtyard. Thus, the landscape architectural design principles that define the urban landscape, also inform the design on the smallest scale of the garden.

Figure 7
The Whale as one of the 'meteorites' in the sea of houses (photo ArchitektenCie)

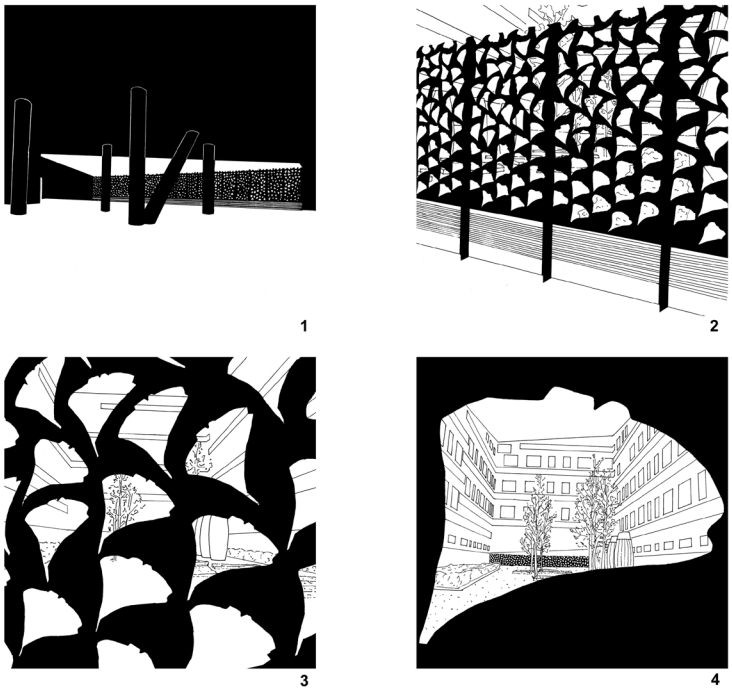

Figure 8
The internal garden becomes part of the urban scenography (drawing Lisanne Braak)

Discussion

In each of these examples we can recognize the formal principles of the picturesque garden. "Invented" in the late 18th century, the composition of the picturesque garden was based on the principle of the circuit walk, staged as a sequence of pictorial scenes: landscape fragments are connected by a route as a scenographic succession of composed scenes or tableaux. The construction of these garden scenes was inspired by the landscape paintings that the landlords brought back from their Grand Tour through Europe. Underlying these paintings was a perspective construction that placed the components of the scene in a monumental architectural context. In the gardens, the route was the carrier of the composition, linking the various scenes together, allowing the

viewer to participate in the "performance". Conceived to accommodate a garden programme, this compositional principle, a relation between form and space as the initiator and carrier of structure, turned out to be versatile enough to accommodate and generate varying uses and processes, and could be transformed to function at the scale of a residential neighbourhood, a city, a country even.

These examples are no exceptions. A similar sequence of designs could be discussed that are based on the design principles of for example the formal garden, such as Georges-Eugène Haussmann's 19th-century renovation of Paris. Clearly the lessons learned within the safe playing ground of the garden were taken well into account when the need arose to control the grim reality of traffic, hygienic problems and violent civic uprisings, following the advice of Abbé Laugier, who wrote in 1775: 'Let the design of our parks serve as the plan for our towns.'

Conclusion

Landscape form is the organisation of perceivable qualities of our living environment: the shape, dimensions and proportions of space, the plasticity of surfaces and volumes, colours, textures, light, and structural relationships. However, as these examples illustrate, this does not mean that it is restricted to the small scale of experiencing the environment through the near senses (touch, scent, sound, balance, etc.). The same principles of organizing perceivable qualities are relevant at the large scale of vision and movement that can be measured by the time it takes to move through a landscape. Parallelly, specific design principles are not tied to a specific land use, but can be extracted, decomposed and translated to sites with a different scale, use and complexity, not giving shape to predefined land uses, but using the existing topography as a catalyst for new land uses. While in the case of planning the site is looked at in light of the programme, and may even develop from it, we see the opposite happen in landscape design: here it is rather the programme which is envisioned through the site and may even be inspired or engendered by it. These examples illustrate a landscape architectural position that is in its essence not about problem solving but about creating form as condition for different uses, practices and experiences, intended and unintended, expected and unexpected.

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