AN EXPLORATION OF MEANING IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
-REDESIGNING TSIM SHA TSUI EAST WATERFRONT
IN HONG KONG

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

Through an exercise to redesign Tsim Sha Tsui East waterfront in Hong Kong, this thesis explores different approaches to achieve meaning through design. A site survey and analysis is first carried out to address functional, social and potentially aesthetic issues on site and to identify objectives for the proposed design. A conceptual framework of the different approaches is then established primarily through comparison and review of five relevant articles in Landscape Journal on the subject of meanings in landscape design. The articles include Marc Treib’s “Must Landscape Mean? Approaches to Significance in Recent Landscape Architecture”, Robert B. Riley’s “From Sacred Grove to Disney World: The Search for Garden Meaning”, Laurie Olin’s “Form, Meaning, and Expression in Landscape Architecture”, Jane Gillette’s “Can Gardens Mean?” and Susan Herrington’s “Gardens Can Mean”. The categories of approaches include: 1. Natural form/ Processes; 2. Genius of place/ History; 3. Zeigeist/ Reference to art; 4. Vernacular/ Material; 5. Experiential/ Perception; 6. Narrative and 7. Didactic. The second, the fifth and the sixth approaches are applied in the redesign to address issues identified in the stage of site survey and analysis. The resulting design is evaluated according to criteria drawn from the articles, including such concepts as accessibility of the meaning, pleasure and integration with existing context and execution. It is the author’s aspiration that what results from such a process is a meaningful design that goes beyond a functional and economically viable solution: one that possesses aesthetic significance.
To Humanity
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this project saw a significant phase of my personal growth, both intellectual and spiritual. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to a number of people: my committee Chair Laura Lawson, for instilling a socialist perspective in my design thinking, and without whom this project could not have been realised; Carol Emmerling-DiNovo, for her valuable advice and thoughtful revisions on this project; Terry Harkness, for his previous inputs and for always pushing the envelop of my self-knowledge through agreeing, questioning and disagreeing; Christiane Martens, for the wonderful conservation that offered me perspectives of an artist; Robert Riley, for his illuminating remarks while I was in a state of self-doubt; Sasaki Associates Inc. Watertown office, for their diversity initiatives and for revealing to me a holistic view of the human souls; Michael in Boston, for his insights on life; Nancy Sanders, Gladys Martinez and K.K. Chung, for affording me this precious opportunity to see the world; My friends, my relatives and my brothers, for your love all these years I spent abroad; and most importantly, my parents, for your trust, and your respect for the paths I have chosen. Thank you all!
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CHAPTER 1

Objectives

The primary objective of this project is to redesign the Tsim Sha Tsui East waterfront in Hong Kong through exploration of different approaches by which meanings can be achieved in landscape design. Based on a conceptual framework developed through a literature review, as well as site analysis and observation, a design is proposed to achieve meanings apart from addressing the programmatic agenda for the site. The proposed design integrates the waterfront promenade with other open spaces in the area. Through the introduction of water features, color screens and kinetic art powered by wind, it transforms the mundane experience of walking to or from the waterfront to one that engages the users’ perceptions and evokes feelings of wonder. It also alludes to the reclaimed site’s history.
CHAPTER 2

Problem Statement

Tsim Sha Tsui is the major tourist and cultural center in Hong Kong, with a concentration of hotels, offices, shopping venues, museums and tourist attractions. Tsim Sha Tsui East (TSTE) is an area created by land reclamation- a process of creating new land where there was once water. In a densely populated city where land is painfully scarce, the Tsim Sha Tsui East contains some of the most well-known open spaces in the city, including the Hong Kong Centenary Garden and the Tsim Sha Tsui East waterfront promenade. These venues are easily accessible by public transportation, commonly featured in the mass media, and used by people from all walks of life. Needless to say, they house some of the most precious personal and collective memories in the city.

Figure 2.1 Aerial photo of Tsim Sha Tsui East (Image from Google Earth)

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1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_reclamation
The existing design of Tsim Sha Tsui East waterfront promenade is far from satisfactory. It is disconnected from the Centenary Garden by a highway, and its design is monotonous, lack of greenery and climatic shelter, and poorly-maintained. It fails to function properly and to reflect its significance in the city. On the other hand, it presents an opportunity for a redesign. Given its prominent location and its symbolic significance in terms of collective memories, a mediocre design that purely addresses functional and economical considerations will not suffice. Instead, it has the potential to become a meaningful place in the city.

The practice of garden-making and landscape architecture has been in existence for a long time and has always been a significant invention of human beings. While a landscape project undeniably has functional requirements to be fulfilled, such as providing places to sit or shelter from the sun and the rain, a design that simply addresses those functional requirements leaves much to be desired. The search for meanings seem to be inherent and ceaseless in human nature, and in the light of this, sources such as history, culture and the persona are often referred to by artists and

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2 This refers to the time when this study was proposed in 2004.
designers to inject meanings in landscape design. Devices such as metaphor, symbolism, narrative and humor are employed in the attempt to achieve significance in landscape design. A number of designers and artists such as Isamu Noguchi, Peter Walker and Martha Schwartz are well-known for their distinct approaches to achieve meaning in landscape architecture. Since approaches vary widely from designer to designer and from project to project, a conceptual framework of these approaches will be helpful in inspiring designers on ways to instill meanings in landscape design, as well as in helping the audience interpret these meanings.

To establish such a conceptual framework of a meaningful in landscape architecture, several relevant pieces of literature will be reviewed and a list of approaches to meanings will be developed. Some of these approaches will be applied to the site of Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront to generate a meaningful design that goes beyond functional and economical considerations.
CHAPTER 3

Methods

This thesis consists of four stages and employs methods including literature review, precedent studies, on-site observation, site analysis, and a hypothetic redesign project. The purpose and operation of each of the four stages are outlined as follows:

Stage One: Site Survey and Analysis

This stage consists of a survey of existing site conditions and a series of site analyses and on-site observations to define social, functional, and potentially aesthetic objectives for the redesign. Program for the redesign will also be proposed.

Stage Two: Conceptual Framework on Meaning

The second stage will aim to establish a conceptual framework of the different approaches by which meanings can be achieved in landscape architecture. It involves relevant literature review as well as precedent studies. As far as literature review is concerned, five relevant articles on the subject of meanings in landscape architecture are compared and summarized. The five articles are listed as follows:

1. Treib, Marc. 1995. “Must Landscape Mean?: Approaches to Significance in Recent Landscape Architecture” In Landscape Journal 14(2): 47-61
These five articles are selected for a number of reasons. First, they were all written specifically on the subject of meaning in landscape architecture and Treib’s article is of particular significance in this regard. Second, they were published in different periods of time from the moderate past (1988 in Olin’s article) to the very recent past (2007 in Herrington’s article). Third, they involve authors of various backgrounds including landscape designers/practitioners, educators and critic. Gillette was formally educated in English Literature. Last, they cross-reference each other. For example, Treib’s article is cited in Gillette’s article, whereas Herrington’s article is a direct response to Gillette’s article.

By comparing and reviewing the above five articles, a list of approaches through which meanings are achieved in landscape design will be developed. Under each of the approaches, a few projects will be discussed to illustrate how the specific approach is adopted. In addition to that, the potential and limitations of the approach will be discussed in some cases.

This stage will conclude with a synopsis of the issues revealed in the process, in order to develop some more personal understanding on the practice of injecting and interpreting meanings in landscape architecture. A list of objectives specific to meanings will be established as well as criteria for evaluating how well these objectives are achieved in the design.
**Stage Three: Design**

This stage will involve applying some of the approaches to achieve meanings in landscape design in Stage Two back to the site in Tsim Sha Tsui East waterfront in the form of a hypothetic redesign. The design objectives developed in the site study will be addressed. Criteria to evaluate the success of the implemented approaches will be set up according to the conceptual framework. Through application of the approaches, an understanding as well as appreciation of the conceptual framework established in Stage Two will be demonstrated.

**Stage Four: Self-Evaluation of Design**

The last stage will be self-evaluation of the proposed design by the criteria set up before.
CHAPTER 4  
Site Survey and Analysis  

This section provides information about the site as well as a series of analyses and on-site observations to define the social, functional, and potentially aesthetic objectives for its redesign. The following information about the site are covered:  

1. Context including landuse, landmarks and tourist attractions, major roads, pedestrian circulation patterns and open spaces in the context;  
2. The site’s history and its formation by land reclamation;  
3. Major architectural characters including the buildings, pedestrian’s bridges and water features;  
4. Conditions of the TSTE waterfront promenade including its size, typography, tidal levels and materials;  
5. On-site observations of activities.  

Based on the above information, design objectives and a program are proposed at the end of this chapter.  

Context  

Tsim Sha Tsui is located in the southern part of the Kowloon peninsula. It is the major tourist and cultural center in Hong Kong, with a concentration of hotels, offices, shopping venues, museums and tourist attractions.
Major landmarks and tourist attractions in Tsim Sha Tsui include:

1. The Kowloon Park
2. The Mosque  
3. The Clock Tower  
4. Hong Kong Cultural Center  
5. Hong Kong Space Museum  
6. Hong Kong Museum of Art  
7. Avenue of Stars  
8. Hong Kong Science Museum  
9. Hong Kong Centenary Garden  
10. The Coliseum

Pictures of the above tourist attractions are shown below:

Figure 4.3 Kowloon Park  
http://www.flickr.com/photos/51405727@N00/2237265432 (Dec 2009)  
Figure 4.4 The Mosque  

Figure 4.5 Clock Tower  
http://www.flickr.com/photos/hanneorla/175774902 (Dec 2009)  
Figure 4.6 Hong Kong Cultural Center  
http://www.pbase.com/cmkwan/image/73565210 (Dec 2009)
Figure 4.7 Hong Kong Space Museum

Figure 4.8 Hong Kong Museum of Art
http://top-of-the-web.com/hongkongtravelworld/photos/Hong%20Kong%20Museum%20of%20Art2.jpg (Dec 2009)

Figure 4.9 Avenue of Stars
http://www.cobracero.com/images/014_kowloon_stars.jpg (Dec 2009)

Figure 4.10 Hong Kong Science Museum

Figure 4.11 Hong Kong Centenary Garden

Figure 4.12 The Coliseum
The major roads in the Tsim Sha Tsui area include: Salisbury Road that runs along the waterfront; Nathan Road, the busiest north-south road in Kowloon; Canton Road; Chatham Road South and Mody Road.

**Tsim Sha Tsui East and Land Reclamation**

Figure 4.14 Reclaimed land around the harbor since 1976 shown in red (Image from Lands Department, 1996)
Figure 4.15 Tsim Sha Tsui East area
Tsim Sha Tsui East (TSTE) refers to the area east of Chatham Road South created by land reclamation in the 1970’s. Land reclamation is a process of creating new land where there was once water. The practice of land reclamation in Hong Kong has been in existence since 1840’s owing to the lack of flatland for construction and an ever-increasing population.

Pedestrian circulation to TSTE waterfront

There are three major pedestrian circulation patterns to the TSTE waterfront:

1. The first circulation pattern is along the waterfront, from the Hong Kong Cultural Center and Spac Museum through the Avenue of Stars towards the elevated link to the Hung Hom Public Transport Interchange. This circulation

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3 http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/尖沙咀東
4 http://hk-place.webconflux.com
starts and ends with major transportation nodes: the Star Ferry, bus terminus and subway station on the west and the Transport Interchange (for trains and buses) on the east. It receives users from both sides of the harbor and other areas in Hong Kong, hence generating the most circulation through the site amongst the three major pedestrian circulation patterns.

2. The second circulation pattern runs from the Science Museum through the Centenary Garden to the Promenade. This path is broken up by two major roads: Mody Road and Salisbury Road and requires use of pedestrian bridges. The offices, retail stores and restaurants in this area receive much use, though not all users go to the waterfront.

3. The third circulation pattern runs from Chatham Road South and Tsim Sha Tsui East Subway Station to the Promenade. This is a major bus route with a subway station on one end.

Architecture in TSTE

The old international airport is located in proximity of Tsim Sha Tsui East. Buildings’ heights in the area were restricted and range from ten to sixteen stories high. Consequently, buildings in the area tend to be highly orthogonal with maximum footprints to increase the floor areas. Most of the buildings were constructed in the early 1980s under the old planning regulations and, unlike the more recent buildings in Hong Kong, they are not interconnected by elevated walkways. This gives rise to conflict between pedestrian circulation and vehicular circulation. As a result, a series of pedestrian bridges were built to mitigate the problem.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
Pedestrian bridges in TSTE

Figure 4.20 Pedestrian bridges in the context
Pedestrian bridges are common features in the area to resolve the conflict between vehicular and pedestrian circulation. Two pedestrian bridges across Salisbury Road connect the site to the Hong Kong Centenary Garden and other parts of Tsim Sha Tsui East. A widened bridge/ viewing platform extends from the Tsim Sha Tsui East Terminal across Salisbury Road to the promenade. An elevated pedestrian link connects to the Hom Hung Public Transport Interchange in the east.

Mody Lane is the only through road that intersects with Salisbury Road and runs perpendicular to the waterfront. It provides an important visual connection with the waterfront that should be preserved.
Open Spaces in TSTE

There are several major open spaces in Tsim Sha Tsui East:

1. Open spaces scattered along Chatham Road South
2. The Hong Kong Centenary Garden
   It consists of a large fountain raised on steps, a mini stage for outdoor performance, and a groove of trees planted in grid pattern.
3. A public square between Mody Road and Salisbury Road
   Bordered by planters, the public square measures 180 feet by 160 feet and consists of a large pond with water-jets and an outdoor sculpture. It is fronted by a minibus station and isolated from the Centenary road and the waterfront and receives little use throughout the day.
4. Tsim Sha Tsui East waterfront promenade (see description below)
Figures 4.34-4.36 Hong Kong Centenary Garden
(Images by author)

Figures 4.37, 4.38 Public square between Mody Road and Salisbury Road
(Images by author)

Figure 4.39 Existing view of Tsim Sha Tsui East waterfront promenade
(Image by author)
There are a variety of water features in the TSTE area:

1. An elongated pool in the open spaces on Chatham Road South
2. A sizeable rounded fountain in the Centenary Garden
3. A shallow pond in the public square between Mody Road and Salisbury Road
4. An existing memorial fountain on the waterfront promenade

While all the above water features are prominent in the TSTE area, they are too varied and separate to play a role in integrating the area.
The Tsim Sha Shui East promenade is located on the eastern stretch of the Tsim Sha Tsui, adjacent to Salisbury Road. The promenade part measures approximately 1440 feet long and 42 to 80 feet wide, and joins the Avenue of Stars on the western. The promenade is lined with a seawall and has a waterbus jetty at its eastern end.

**Topography**

The majority of Tsim Sha Tsui East area was created by land reclamation. The waterfront promenade is primarily at elevation 13 -14 feet (4.3 meters) above the Charted Datum with minimal slope. Tidal levels fluctuate between 0 and 8.6 feet (2.6 meters) above the Charted Datum. Tide height in the following figure is shown in meters above the Chart Datum, which is 0.146 meter below the Hong Kong Principal Datum. The promenade is located about 15-10 feet from the fluctuating tide levels.

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9 Hong Kong Observatory, Predicted Tides at Quarry Bay in 2008
These factors will be considered when proposing any jetties or structures to bring people down to the water.

![Predicted Tides at Quarry Bay in May 2008 provided by the Observatory](image)

**Material**

The promenade is paved with concrete with exposed aggregate. There are a series of concrete planters with trees in poor condition. The area is bordered by triangular concrete barriers with stainless steel railings. Along the edge of the promenade are tubular steel structures for loading and unloading goods. These are rarely used. A memorial fountain with a stone wall and water jets is located on the eastern end of the site.
Activities

Based on a number of site visits, the promenade receives a fair amount of use by residents and tourists, especially in the evening. People stroll and jog on the promenade on a daily basis. In the evening, it is a popular spot for couples and fishermen. At Christmas, it is a popular venue for viewing the decorative lighting on the facades of office buildings. At Chinese New Year, the promenade is packed with people viewing fireworks at the harbor and laser shows projected from highrises on the other side of the harbor.
On-site Observations

1. The buildings in the area are of the international style. They are uniformly orthogonal and boxy in shape. They constitute an air of mediocrity, unlike the distinctive character displayed in the architecture on the other side of the harbor.

2. Pedestrian bridges end at the waterfront in an abrupt manner. There is not an elegant transition from the bridge level down to the promenade. The bridges are functional in appearance and are not integrated with the waterfront.

3. There is a tendency for pedestrians to linger at the waterfront ends of the pedestrian bridges and to use them as harbor overlook.

4. With the exception of urban fishermen, most users pass the site without stopping. The promenade fails to encourage contemplation or any social interactions.

5. Overall the site appears to be under-planted, lack climatic shelter and is aesthetically bland. There is little visual interest on the promenade.
Program objectives

Based on the site analysis and on-site observations, the following design objectives are defined:

1. To better integrate the Centenary Garden with the waterfront and to provide an elegant transition, both visually and experientially, from the Garden to the waterfront.

2. To soften the rigidity of the surrounding architecture with greenery and to counteract the bleakness with a design that promotes wonder, imagination and playfulness.

3. To provide an overlook area for the city-dwellers and tourists to observe the waterfront and the harbor, a precious open space in the city.

4. To encourage users to linger. The promenade then serves as a place to stay rather than a corridor to walk through.
5. To bring users physically closer to the sea by means such as jetties, decks or steps.

Program

Based on the above information, the program for the redesign is defined in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Adequately accommodate in existing Design</th>
<th>Applicable in redesign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuity and integration from the Centenary Garden to the waterfront</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water features to integrate the whole experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area for overlooking the harbor</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elegant transition from the pedestrian bridge level down to the promenade</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual buffer from the highway</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View from Mody Lane to the waterfront</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climatic shelter from sun and possibly rain</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strolling/ walking/ lingering</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jogging</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting and resting</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban fishing (by docks.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting down closer to the sea (by steps or ramps)</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space for waiting for buses</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space for gathering</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees and greenery</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiosk for coffee, snacks, tourist information</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorative lighting</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing fountain to be (partially) preserved</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art/ sculptural objects</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Program for Redesign

Meaning-oriented objectives

Objectives specific to meanings will be developed at the end of the following chapter on conceptual framework of meanings.
CHAPTER 5

Conceptual Framework of Meanings

Five articles were selected and compared in order to form the conceptual framework of meanings in landscape architecture. They include Marc Treib’s “Must Landscape Mean? Approaches to Significance in Recent Landscape Architecture”, Robert B. Riley’s “From Sacred Grove to Disney World: The Search for Garden Meaning and Laurie Olin’s “Form, Meaning, and Expression in Landscape Architecture”, Jane Gillette’s “Can Gardens Mean?” and Susan’s Herrington’s “Gardens Can Mean?” All of them contribute to perspectives on meanings in landscape architecture. The key points of each article are listed as follows:

1. “Must Landscape Mean? Approaches to Significance in Recent Landscape Architecture”
   - In Treib’s definition, meanings comprise ethics, values, history, affect, singly or as a group (Treib 1995, 48)
   - Treib classifies approaches to meanings into five categories: Neoarchaic, the Genius of the Place, the Zeigeist, the Vernacular Landscape and the Didactic. (Treib 1995, 49)
   - Treib believes that meanings are not a designer’s construct. They are earned rather than granted. They result mostly from collective association by the receivers and accrued over time (Treib 1995, 58, 60).
   - Treib writes that symbolic system demands education and comprehension of both the medium and the message (Treib 1995, 55).
   - Treib points out that pleasure is more predictable than meanings, which are ever-changing (Treib 1994, 60). He advocates that pleasure, frequently neglected in academic writing, is helpful in linking individual experience with broader cultural grounding (Treib 1995, 48, 59).

2. “From Sacred Grove to Disney World: The Search for Garden Meaning”
• In Riley’s definition, a garden is an attempt to establish meanings by giving form to nature (Riley 1988, 136).

• Riley believes that gardens as a locus of meanings are not probable in North America because of a lack of shared symbolism in a highly diverse and pluralistic society. Symbols are more likely to be individual than communal in North America (Riley 1988, 142).

• Riley writes that garden meanings shared with other art forms, especially contemporary art, are too arcane and inaccessible to the general public (Riley 1988, 143).

• Riley points out that a garden is about fantasy. This includes both fantasy realized and fantasy provoked, and is interactive and open-ended in nature (Riley 1988, 145).

• Riley writes that garden meanings require connoisseurship. Critics, patrons, designers and garden participants all contribute to the accretion of meanings and rewards understanding with joys at many levels: from sensory to cerebral, from literal to abstract (Riley 1988, 145).

3. “Form, Meaning, and Expression in Landscape Architecture”

• Olin believes that landscapes, though not verbal constructions, can express certain things and ideas. He writes that landscapes possess two kinds of meanings: “natural” meanings and “synthetic meanings”. Both have been created by society. (Olin 1988, 158-159)

• Olin points out that archetypal settings contributed to the repertoire of forms and meanings for subsequent synthetic, designed landscapes (Olin 1988, 159).

• Olin points out that some of the new approaches to meanings include use of new materials, imageries, new compositional techniques and reference to art (Olin 1988, 151).

• Olin affirms the significance of metaphor in landscape design, but also points out that metaphor depends on the education and experience of audience and is unstable and changing (Olin 1988, 165).
• Olin stresses the importance of abstracting natural processes over literal imitation of nature (Olin 1988, 166).

4. “Can Gardens Mean?”
   • Gillette believes that gardens are incapable of expressing complex ideas (p.85) and the pleasure we derive from gardens depends on this mindless quality of the pleasure (Gillette 2005, 86).
   • Gillette believes that the concerns for gardens to express meanings are partly due to the rising role of critics in the postmodern era (Gillette 2005, 87) and the current taste in narratives (Gillette 2005, 91). This results in a shift in production of meanings from the designer to the audience (Gillette 2005, 91).
   • Gillette believes that meanings in gardens are generated by the human habit to associate and to tell stories (Gillette 2005, 91).
   • Gillette points out the materiality of landscapes and the problems of representations account for the difficulty to express complicated ideas in physical landscapes (Gillette 2005, 91).

5. “Gardens Can Mean”
   • Herrington maintains that gardens can mean.
   • Herrington believes that pleasure and meanings are not mutually exclusive properties (Herrington 2007, 305).
   • Herrington writes that earthworks, minimalism and public art have played a significant role in shaping how gardens can mean in the postmodern eras (Herrington 2007, 306).
   • Herrington points out that narrative is an effective strategy for gardens to accrue meaning through their context in ways that functional considerations do not (Herrington 2007, 306).
   • Herrington believes that the presence and placement of garden elements can communicate meanings (Herrington 2007, 310).
• Herrington proposes an expanded definition of meanings to include multiple interpretations by readers, movements, sensations and emotions. (Herrington 2007, 314-315).

Based on the readings, categories of meanings are developed and discussed below. Some categories are accompanied by discussion of relevant projects to illustrate how the approach is used as well as its potential and limitations. The projects are either from the above-mentioned articles or from other sources. It will be evident from the following discussion that it is not uncommon for one project to adopt more than one single approach or to derive meanings from more than one source, and the classification should be taken as relative rather than absolute. The categories of meanings together with the projects discussed are shown in the following table.
1. Natural Forms/ Processes

a) Abstraction of natural form and processes

One of the most common ways to approach landscape design is to refer to nature for inspiration. Some have approached it more as a mimic of natural forms, while others like Lawrence Halprin chose to abstract natural processes. Though many designers like Halprin, Bye, Haag and Kiley reject the possibility that one can imitate nature (Olin 1988, 167), it is possible to achieve meanings in landscape design by abstracting natural forms and processes. Laurie Olin believed this approach to be a much more effective way of injecting meanings into landscape design than referring to other sources such as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Approach</th>
<th>Project / Designer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction of natural forms</td>
<td>Ira Keller Fountain/ Lawrence Halprin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological processes</td>
<td>Fair Park Lagoon/ Patricia Johanson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Categories of Meanings and projects
contemporary works of art (Olin 1988, 152). Lawrence Halprin’s Ira Keller Fountain in Portland exemplified this approach.

In his essay “Nature into Landscape into Art,” Halprin declares he returns to nature’s primitive processes to make landscape into an art that addresses the emotional need of human beings. He is interested in the role of nature’s processes, referred to as ecology of form, in giving rise to form and composition (Halprin 1995, 246). To Halprin, the form and composition resulted from natural processes look perfect and inevitable, and should be used as a source of our aesthetic language (Halprin 1995, 247). He stresses the results of the processes of nature instead of imitating the outward nature (Halprin 1995, 247). He also emphasizes the importance for designers to consider the
choreographed movement through space in order to evoke similar feelings in 
experiencing nature (Halprin 1995, 247).

b) Ecological Processes

A number of landscape designers and artists, such as Richard Haag, George 
Hargreaves, and Patricia Johanson, have shown interest in incorporating ecological 
concerns into landscape design to tackle problems of environmental pollution, 
exploitation of natural resources and loss of habitats. According her self-titled article in 
‘Sculpting with the Environment: A Natural Dialogue,’ Patricia Johanson uses drawings 
to explore ideas of integrating art forms with the ecosystems (Johnason 1995, 151). In 
her Fair Park Lagoon in Dallas, Texas, Johanson introduces native plants and animals 
into the lagoon to balance the food chain, reduce turbidity and shoreline erosion and to 
provide nesting sites for the wildlife (Johnason 1995, 151).

2. Genius of the Place/ History

a) Genius of the Place

The genius of the place, or genius loci, can be consulted to achieve meanings in 
landscapes by revealing the particularities of the place (Treib 1995, 50). In writing about 
this, Treib raises a couple of issues. First, the context of the place, especially in an urban 
area, can be so disturbed that it is no longer possible to recognize the design as a
reference to the past conditions (Treib 1995, 50). Second, information on vegetation, hydrology, soil conditions etc. cannot suggest a significant form for the design (Treib 1995, 50). Similarly, Olin notes in his article that “Form comes from forms first” and a designer must familiarize himself with a repertoire of forms before he can manipulate them (Olin 1988, 155).

The Windcombs in Spain by artist Eduardo Chillida, together with a plaza designed in collaboration with architect Pena Ganchegui, is an example of this category of meanings. Chillida paid homage to his hometown San Sebastian in this project. Windcombs are composed of three pliers-like steel structures anchored to rocks. They are so oriented as to relate to the forces of land, sea and air in the context. One comb is set into the cliff with its axis parallel to the ground. The second comb is fastened on a rock in the water and points toward the land. The third comb is further out in the sea and points to the sky. A terraced plaza with granite pavement was built for viewing the sculpture, performance and contemplation. Seven waterholes are drilled into the terrace to accommodate the power of the subterranean sea (Jaurlaritza 1985, 1-15).

![Figure 5.6 Windcombs](http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2016/2112712756_6af6f8a834.jpg) (Dec 2009)
![Figure 5.7 Terraced Plaza near Windcombs](http://maccias.files.wordpress.com/2007/06/windcombs.jpg) (Oct 2009)
![Figure 5.8 Waterholes on plaza](http://photo.net/photodb/photo?photo_id=2228231&size=lg) (Oct 2009)

**b) History**

The Sawyer Point Park in Cincinnati, Ohio, designed by Andrew Leicester as part of the city’s bicentennial observances, is an example of historical meaning.
Leicester studied the city’s history, topography, and its political, commercial and cultural past in a notebook, in which he developed images to be featured in the gateway (Beardsley 1988, 144). What resulted is a 750-foot-long earthen mound running parallel to the river. On top of the mound is a 450-foot watercourse mapping configuration of the Mississippi River. At the location of Cincinnati on the map, the mound was cut by brick walls in the shape of a canal lock to celebrate the fact that the spot was the terminus of a canal that ran from Toledo to the Ohio River (Beardsley 1988, 145). Four towers were erected with winged pigs standing on riverboat smokestacks on the top of each tower, signifying Cincinnati’s role as a pork butcher to the world, hence the nickname Porkopolis (Beardsley 1988, 145). A sixty-five-foot-tall flood column was also erected, with a stick on it that marks the river levels in the major floods of the past century (Beardsley 1988, 145). In this design Leicester made reference to the City’s history and expressed it with a sense of humor.

Figure 5.9 Flying Pigs

3. **Art & Design Theory/ Zeigeist**

Since landscape design is a form of art, some refer to art and design theory for meanings and validation in their landscape design. When the works specifically involve contemporary art theory, they are then similar to what Marc Treib refers to as the Zeitgeist (“the spirit of the times”) since they rely on contemporary culture (Treib 1995,
52), of which art is one aspect. Such an approach has opened up new possibilities in both the formal vocabularies and the intellectual content of landscape design.

According to Treib’s “Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture”, an example of the influence of art on landscape design is the sinuous and amoebic motif of Surrealist painters Jean Arp and Joan Miro that influenced some modernist landscape design (Treib 1994, 50-51). One example is the gardens by Burle Marx, who approached landscape design as painting with plants. More recently, compositional strategies related to Cubism such as collage, dislocation, displacement and distortion, have been explored by different designers. Olin affirms this approach as it allows designers to challenge conventions and open up new possibilities (Olin 1988, 167). On the other hand, Riley believes that contemporary art is arcane and its synthesis with garden art can potentially be indecipherable to the public. The Harlequin Plaza in Denver, Colorado, belongs to this category of approach.

Prior to its redesign by EDAW, the Harlequin Plaza was designed by George Hargreaves and built in 1982 on a parking garage between two office buildings with reflective surfaces. Hargreaves chose a hard-landscape approach on the grounds that “anything soft or warm or textured would be swallowed by the surroundings” (Thomson 1999, 96). Inspired by the diamond pattern in Picasso’s “Harlequin”
paintings, he proposed to cover the plaza with black-and-white terrazzo tiles in a skewed pattern that promoted a distorted perspective to the viewers. A pair of walls painted in bright red bisected the plaza, while their sloping profile gave viewers a false perspective of looking down. A rill -a traditional water feature- flowed in the sandwiched space between the two red walls. The owner also added seven bronze Harlequin sculptures by Harry Marinsky. The vent structures for the garage were tilted to complement the distorted perspectives of the whole plaza (Thomson 1999, 96).

In her article titled “Metamorphosis”, architecture critic Barbara Goldstein sees in Harlequin Plaza influence from other art sources including the Surrealist paintings by Giorgio de Chirico and Salvador Dali (Thomson 1999, 96). The reference to Picasso’s paintings, together with the Plaza’s sense of alienation, solitude, and bizarre quality in common with some Surrealist paintings, render the Halequin Plaza a typical example for this category.

While borrowing from art can be an intriguing idea, there are disadvantages in such an approach. Laurie Olin points out design that derives its significance from its relevance to art tends to suffer weakened vigor because of its indirect relationship to nature (Olin 1988, 152). Robert Riley writes that contemporary art can be arcane (Riley 1988, 152) and indecipherable to the less art-informed public. Despite these criticisms, it
would be difficult to dismiss the influence that earthworks, minimalism and public art have in “shaping how gardens can mean” in the postmodern age as pointed out by Herrington (Herrington 2007, 306).

4. Vernacular/ Material

While landscape design has long been associated with traditional materials such as plants, stones and timber, some designers are experimenting with other materials such as plastic, concrete and industrial materials in an attempt to achieve significance in design. Works of designers who refer to the vernacular for sources of materials and forms are referred to as Vernacular Landscape by Treib (Treib 1995, 52). Despite the roles of some contemporary designers such as Martha Schwartz and Ken Smith in expanding the palette of materials in landscape by using unconventional or everyday materials, the validity of this approach has been controversial.

According to Treib, the vernacular materials lose their essence and can no longer be considered vernacular when taken out of their usual context (Treib 1995, 52). He uses Martha Schwartz’s Rio Shopping Centre, which features a large number of ornamental frogs painted in gold, to illustrate this point. In contrast, Jane Gillette suggests that the all-inclusive association encouraged by Schwartz’ frogs make them “pleasurable” but
“not well-suited to conveying meaning” (Gillette 2005, 92). All in all, if we embrace multiple interpretations as part of meaningfulness, and if we consider how mundane objects can acquire new meanings outside their conventional context, exemplified in Dadaism and in works by Duchamp, the approach of employing commonplace objects or unconventional materials in landscape design should be considered a valid one with its own potential.

5. Experiential / Perception

Some landscape architects and artists such as James Turrell and Robert Irwin focus on human perceptions in their works. In the 1960s, there was a shift of attention in the art field from the object perceived to the activity of perception itself (Treib 1994, 267). A new type of installation evolved, in which “the objects and markings within the space” were considered to be an artwork. Robert Irwin is a representative artist from that era.

In 1979 Irwin was commissioned to redesign the Public Safety Building Plaza in Seattle. In his “Being and Circumstance: Notes toward a Conditional Art”, Irwin writes that the plaza was surrounded by blank and banal architecture and received very limited use (Irwin 1985, 67). He believed the plaza needed to be lightened and
improved with greening. He also envisioned a strong graphical read-down from the surrounding office buildings and increased visibility from the street level. After finding out that the plaza, on the roof of a garage, could only allow loading at the points of the columns below it (Beardsley 1998, 70), Irwin proposed to build planters with four-sided seating directly above nine columns in the garage (Beardsley 1998, 70). In each planter there is a red-violet leafed, flowering plum tree. Plastic-coated blue fencings, sixteen feet in height, are erected to separate each planter, resulting in fenced spaces. On the periphery of the plaza are low planters with groundcover. Light interacts with the semi-transparency of fences and the trees, casting different patterns of light and shadows. As one moves from one space to another, layers of blue screening interplay with the red-violet leaves of the trees, affording a “gentle interaction” with the users as Irwin put it (Beardsley 1998, 70).

While Irwin envisioned the space to “become a nice place to sit, rest and brown bag” (Beardsley 1998, 70), the actual degree of delight from sitting or resting in the space is questionable. As change is a major consideration in Irwin’s works, the power of Nine Spaces, Nine Trees actually lies in its dynamic nature and the ever-changing views that engage the viewer’s perceptions as he moves inside the spaces. When seated within the space, however, the fences cause unpleasant feelings of imprisonment (Harriet 1992, 210). Perhaps as suggested by Harriet Senie in her “Contemporary Public Sculpture: Tradition, Transformations, and Controversy”, Nine Spaces Nine Trees serves more as a “metaphor for urban isolation” (Harriet 1992, 210) than a welcoming place for users. The project was taken down with demolition of its adjacent building in 2001 and restored on the campus of the University of Washington.
In additional to the theme of perception, other examples of human experience include fear, wonder and fantasy. Riley covers these aspects in his article by writing that gardens can serve as a means to not only concretize fantasies but also evoke them (Riley 1988, 145). This essential aspect of gardens has been ignored and he quoted Bernard Lassus as an example to bring fantasy back to the garden (Riley 1988, 144). Similarly, Herrington affirms the role feelings and emotions play in contributing to meanings in gardens and in some cases they are central to a garden’s meanings (Herrington 2007, 315).

6. Narrative

a) Neoarchaic

The approach of borrowing directly from neolithic sources, or indirectly from artworks that made reference to Neolithic sources, is termed neoarchaic in Treib’s article. Both Olin and Treib see it as (partially) a reaction to the urbanization of America (Olin 1998, 159; Treib 1995, 49). Treib questions the assumption that these forms or configurations will mean something to us just because they meant something in the past (Treib 1995, 49). Olin points out that the meanings assigned to many archetypal settings
differ from what was originally intended (Olin 1998, 159). One example of this approach is the Stone Field created by the artist Carl Andre in Hartford, Connecticut. Eight rows of boulders with the same composition of rocks from the Hartford area were chosen and arranged in a triangular pattern, from one large boulder in the first row to eight smaller boulders in the eighth row. They are reminiscent of the tombstones in the Hartford’s Ancient Burying Ground in the adjacency.

![Figure 5.21 Stone Field](http://www.stichting-mai.de/hwg/amb/aai/ill/andrston.htm (Oct 2005)](http://www.stichting-mai.de/hwg/amb/aai/ill/andrston.htm (Oct 2005)

**b) Symbolism**

In search of meanings in landscape design, a significant number of designers turn to the use of symbols. Symbols are believed to be archetypal tools that speak to the humans’ minds metaphysically.

One typical landscape project in this category is the California Scenario designed by Noguchi between 1980 and 1982. The project is located in a courtyard surrounded by two reflective glass towers and the white-painted walls of an adjacent parking garage (Asensio 2001, 212). Noguchi created a narrative of the topographical diversities in the state of California including its deserts, rivers, forests and farmlands (Asensio 2001, 212).

The whole site is divided into areas named Energy Fountain, Water Source, Water Use, Desert Land and Forest Walk (Asensio 2001, 148). Energy Fountain is a stainless-steel cylinder set in a granite cone; the Water Source is a triangular sandstone fountain where water flows out from its apex into a meandering watercourse which ends underneath the granite pyramid Water Use; the Desert Land is a low circular gravel mound planted with cactus and other desert species whereas Forest Walk is a U-shaped path through a rectangular hillside planted with redwoods and wild flowers and grasses in a tribute to California landscapes (Torres 2000, 217).

In addition, Noguchi installed a stone sculpture named the Spirit of the Lima Bean in the space. Composed of stones that appear to be locked together, the sculpture serves as homage to the major product (beans) of the family business of Henry Segerstrom, the commissioner. As Noguchi put it, California Scenario was a “dramatic landscape, one that is purely imaginary” (Torres 2000, 212). By designing and placing these sculptural elements in the courtyard, Noguchi also shaped the space around the sculptural objects, giving a strong spiritual aura to the place. It is timeless piece of design with an unusual richness of symbols that are open to the viewer’s own interpretation.
The power of symbols may be weakened in a pluralist world. As Riley points out, “we live in a diverse, pluralist culture, in which widely agreed-upon meaning and powerful symbols are the exception” (Riley 1988, 145). Riley also adds that landscape design based on personal symbolism can be problematic if the meaning is only shared by few (Riley 1988, 144). On the other hand, Herrington considered the issue of instability of meaning and pointed out the shift from a “singular truth-meaning determined by the author to an emphasis on the multifaceted readings of language” in the postmodern era (Herrington 2007, 313). Taking this viewpoint into account, a landscape design that employs symbols can still be meaningful even if the users do not interpret it the way the designer intended.

c) Metaphor

Metaphor is a type of rhetoric device. The roles of rhetoric and metaphor in landscape are discussed in Olin’s article “Form, Meaning, and Expression in Landscape Architecture”. According to Olin, little has been written about rhetoric devices in landscape architecture (Olin 1988, 165), and the fact that the referent may be made of the same substance as the referee (both are natural materials) in landscape design complicates the matter (Olin 1988, 165). In Treib’s article, “metaphor” is defined as
describing or presenting one thing in terms of another thing which does not literally equate to the thing being described (Olin 1988, 165). On the other hand, Susan Herrington argues that neglecting the problem of representations, the shape and arrangement of garden elements alone are capable of conveying meanings (Herrington 2007, 309).

Figures 5.26, 5.27 Nursery for Peace
Source: Amidon, Jane. Radical Landscapes: Reinventing Outdoor Space. p.123

One of the projects that exhibit use of metaphor is Dani Karavan’s Nursery for Peace. The work speaks at different levels: on the personal level, Karavan was inspired by the impromptu tree nursery his landscape designer father created in the atrium of his childhood home (Amidon 2001, 109); On the regional level, it echoes the nursery traditions of the region, where heeled-in trees and plant materials are produced and sold in nearby greenhouses (Amidon 2001, 109); On the global level, it serves as “a call to peace among fractious parties and unsettled nations” (Amidon 2001, 109), as the different species of plants share resources on the same site. As seen in this example, some meanings can be more personal than communal as mentioned in Riley’s article (Riley 1988, 145).

d) Humor

Riley writes about the commonly ignored view of garden as fantasy concretized and that “Architecture is serious business in this view, but the garden is where we can
build our whimsy” (Riley 1988, 144). Humor and irony are used in some projects to convey meanings. Perhaps they are a characteristic of landscape designs by Martha Schwartz, who shows an affinity with Pop Art. Her landscape projects frequently feature unconventional use of materials such as colored pebbles and plastic flowers coupled with a sense of humor that often defies political correctness. Her Bagel Gardens in the Boston area consisted of eight dozen weatherproof bagels arranged in rigid geometric order as in French Garden, with a Japanese Maple on the periphery. It was meant to be a criticism of the “petit-bourgeois” ideal of a front garden (Weilacher 1996, 214).

Figure 5.28 Bagel Garden

7. Didactic

A didactic Landscape is a landscape that teaches. The term is defined in Treib’s article as landscape that tells or instructs the viewers about the natural workings and history of the place (Treib 1995, 53). Treib regards this category as the most appealing one, and suggests that designers consult the Genius of Place and make it explicit (Treib 1995, 53) in a Didactic Landscape. However, Treib notes that the success of such an approach relies on the skill and care taken, and on what it offers the visitor (Treib 1995,
Douglas Hollis’ A Sound Garden in Seattle, WA is used as an example in Treib’s article.

A Sound Garden consisted of twelve vertical aluminum pipes erected on top on a hill, each with a tuned organ pipe and a wind vane. As the winds blow, the vanes turn, giving a visual signal of wind direction (Treib 1995, 53). Also, the organ pipes produce a variety of sounds that change with the velocity of winds (Beardsley 1998, 116).

A Sound Garden falls into this category of Didactic Landscape as it attempts to address wind, a key element specific to the site. Its success relies on the way it intensifies the visitors’ experience by stimulating their visual and audio senses, at the same time rendering wind, an otherwise very subtle element on site, more perceivable. Hollis also demonstrates care in her execution of ideas by designing the towers to be formally elegant but not visually dominant over the site, and by incorporating benches amongst the towers.

While A Sound Garden is an example of teaching about the natural working of a place, the Emma Stebbin’s Angel at Bethesda Terrace in Central Park, designed by Federick Law Olmsted, is used as an example by Olin to illustrate how representational devices and naming can instruct users on the intended meanings of the landscape (Olin
The name alludes to a biblical story about a basin with healing water, hence carrying the message of cleansing, healing and recovery intended for the park. Olin points out that this tradition of notation and use of representational or symbolic narrative has become obsolete.

![Emma Stebbin's Angel at Bethesda Terrace in Central Park](http://www.ronsaari.com/stockImages/nyc/CentralParkBethesdaTerraceAndBoathouseInFall.jpg (Nov 2009))

**Synopsis**

A few key points can be summarized from this discussion of the articles on meanings in landscape architecture. Meanings are unstable and they accrue with time. Meanings are relative rather than absolute, and the role of the audience is not any less important than that of the designer in the interpretation of meanings. Perhaps these perspectives bear more significance than ever before in this information age when things are rapidly changing. Meanings in landscapes are also multilayered, dependent on how a design speaks to us through the senses as well as through our intellect. A successful design is usually able to engage one’s senses through its forms, materials and colors and the audience does not have to be well-informed of the intellectual content in order to appreciate it. Where narratives do not travel far enough, the elements of pleasure, wonder and fantasies leap right in.
From projects such as the Harlequin Plaza, it can be seen that landscape designs that are less user-friendly are vulnerable to criticism from the utilitarian perspective despite their aesthetic significance. On the other hand, designers may have to understand that aesthetic and functional concerns in landscape do not have to be mutually exclusive. A design can be aesthetically pleasing and at the same time functionally sound.

Some projects are criticized on the grounds that their meanings are too obscure to the general public. Nevertheless, it is questionable that limited accessibility of meanings to the general public is adequate for dismissing the meaningfulness of a design. Interestingly, in her discussion about public art, Lucy Lippard writes, “The best public artist aims for the “highest common denominator” and “the general public’s intelligence is often underestimated” (Lippard 1997, 272).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional understanding of meanings</th>
<th>Proposed understanding of meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Unstable, ever-changing; accrue with time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute</td>
<td>Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular and definite</td>
<td>Layered; speaking at different levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize on designer’s intention for authenticity</td>
<td>Open to multiple interpretation by audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only complicated messages are considered to carry meanings</td>
<td>Narrative is embraced as well as pleasure; speaking to the intellect as well as the senses; feelings and emotions considered part of meaningfulness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Comparative understanding of meanings

The above table summarizes the issues regarding the understanding of meanings in landscape design. There are no easy answers as to how valid each perspective is. Perhaps what is less debatable is that we should cultivate a more tolerant, if not appreciative, attitude towards open-endedness in design, and a more liberal mindset to
allow for pluralistic views in society. Only through such a shift in attitudes can we fully exploit the potential of landscape architecture to enhance our physical, intellectual, social and spiritual life.

**Meaning-oriented Objectives**

Based on this conceptual framework of meanings and the site inventory and analysis in the previous chapter, the following objectives corresponding to some of the approaches are developed to achieve meanings in the proposed design:

**Experiential/ Perception**

To transform the mundane experience of walking from the Centenary Garden to the waterfront into an integrated one that engages visitors’ senses, challenges their perceptions of the surroundings, and promotes pleasure and wonder. In this case, design elements such as lavender-colored screens, water features and kinetic art are introduced.

**Genius of Place/ History and Narrative**

To introduce design elements that are suggestive of the site’s conditions and history. In this case, the site was under water prior to its creation by land reclamation.

To introduce design elements that teaches visitors the working of a natural element on the site. In this case wind is chosen since it is a prevalent element on a waterfront site.

**Criteria for evaluation of proposed design**

To evaluate a design in terms of its social and functional objectives is not difficult; to evaluate a design in terms of its meaningfulness may be difficult. In the light
of this, the following criteria are established based on the articles to help with the assessment of the meaning-oriented objectives described above.

**Experiential/ Perception**

- Is the experience dynamic and engaging to the viewers? Does it evokes wonder or other feelings? Does it bring about pleasure (or pain, or neither, if intended)?
- In achieving the experience, is the program for the space supported, or is it compromised or conflicted?

**Genius of Place/ History**

- Is the design well-anchored with the existing context?
- Is the reference to the past decipherable to the general public? Does the designed form convey the idea?
- Does the meaning accrue over time?

**Narrative**

- Is the message a civic and socially acceptable one? If not, what is the intention behind it?
- Is the intended meaning accessible to the general public?
- Does it allow for multiple interpretations?
CHAPTER 6

Design

Process

The following diagrams illustrate in a step-by-step manner how the layers of design elements emerged.

Figure 6.1 Existing Pedestrian bridges
Movement is a key element in the City. This includes movement of pedestrian and movement of traffic. Footbridges are prevalent in the context to resolve conflict between the two types of movement. They are a characteristic of how the City is organized, and should be embraced and expressed honestly. There is also potential to transform the utilitarian role of pedestrian bridges. In addition, the Centenary Garden needs to be better integrated with the waterfront.

Figure 6.2 Raised plaza and complex of footbridges (existing bridges in color)
A raised plaza is proposed to make the walking experience from the Centenary Garden to the waterfront a more enjoyable one. A complex of intersecting footbridges lead from the raised plaza to the promenade level, offering users a variety of routes to take. Angled on plan, these bridges offer users changing and engaging vistas as they negotiate the level difference.
The following series of diagrams show some possible options of paths.

Figures 6.3-6.5 Options of paths through proposed footbridges

Figure 6.6 Kinetic art
A series of kinetic art powered by wind is proposed on the raised plaza to show users the working of wind, a key natural element in the context. The movable colors plates on top draw viewers’ attention to the sky with a formal property consistent with the water features. They are repeated to set up a rhythm as viewers progress along the raised plaza.
Figure 6.7 Color screens
A series of screens in lavender color are incorporated onto the railings of the bridges. The users’ senses are engaged by the overlapping shades of colors, the dance of light and shadow cast upon the screens by trees, and silhouette of moving people as they make their way on the crooked bridges. The users’ perceptions of natural elements such as light, trees, sky and the sea, so readily overlooked in the hustling city, are enhanced. These color screens are also strategically placed on the raised plaza.

Figure 6.8 “Color windows”
On the raised plaza there are well-like features for users to view traffic underneath. Painted with bright red, yellow and blue colors on the inside, they offer welcoming glimpses of colors from above and underneath the raised plaza alike.

Figure 6.9 Water feature with slabs
The existing fountain on the western side of the promenade will be partially preserved with the stone wall removed. It inspires on a series of water features with the same square geometry placed alongside each other. They are proposed shallow pools of water. Overlapped with shifted slabs of the same geometry on top, these appear to be holes on the ground. Their ambiguity and playfulness provokes thoughts on the practice of land reclamation. This combination of water and slabs provides delightful spots for passers-by and joggers to sit and to contemplate on the narrative.
Figure 6.10 Pools
The motif of square water pools is repeated on the promenade underneath the bridges. Set in a scattered fashion, these “tiles of water” evoke poetic thoughts on the previous state of the site before it was created by land reclamation.

Figure 6.11 Terrace
A terraced platform brings users closer to the water, and provides a convenient spot for urban fishing.

Final Design
Plans, sections, perspectives and other graphic presentation of the final design are shown as follows.
Figure 6.12 Site Plan
Figure 6.14 Enlargement Plan 1
Figure 6.15 Enlargement Plan 2
Figure 6.16 Enlargement Plan 3
Figure 6.17 Typical Section Across Raised Plaza

Figure 6.18 Section Enlargement
Figure 6.19 Typical Sectional Perspective across Waterfront Promenade

Figure 6.20 View of raised plaza with artificial mounds, kinetic art and “color windows”
Figure 6.21 View of raised plaza from road level

Figure 6.22 View of proposed footbridges with color screens (color); existing footbridges (grayscale)
Figure 6.23 View of footbridges and square water pools

Figure 6.24 View of square water pools with slabs near bus stop (color); existing fountain (grayscale)
Figure 6.25 View of promenade from viewing platform

Figure 6.26 Aerial view of promenade
Figure 6.27 View of promenade

Figure 6.28 Footbridges provide shady spots to sit
Figure 6.29 Overlapping shades of lavender and dance of shadow cast upon the screens by trees

Figure 6.30 Mini-bridges project to the sea and provide ideal spots for urban fishing (color); existing fishing activities on site (grayscale)
Figure 6.31 Overlooking the promenade at threshold of proposed raised plaza; a public sculpture faces Mody Lane

Figure 6.32 Nighttime view of promenade
Figure 6.33 Square water features on podium and promenade glow in the evening
CHAPTER 7
Self-evaluation of Design

The final design is evaluated according to the criteria developed earlier:

Experiential/ Perception

1. Is the experience dynamic and engaging to the viewers? Does it evokes wonder or other feelings? Does it bring about pleasure (or pain, or neither, if intended)?

The experience of moving through the color screens and the bridges is dynamic and engaging to the viewers as the views change continuously with viewers’ movements. These changes result from the angles and slope of the bridges, the effect of overlapping shades of colors from the screens themselves, and the constant shift in direction and intensity of daylight. These subtle changes evoke a sense of wonder and a contemplative mood in the viewers. It is intended to bring about pleasure in a bustling city.

2. In achieving the experience, is the program for the space supported, or is it compromised or conflicted?

The design supports the program such as integrating the Centenary Garden with the waterfront, channeling pedestrians from the raised plaza level to the waterfront promenade and providing opportunities to overlook the harbor.

Genius of Place/ History

3. Is the design well-anchored with the existing context?

The design makes reference to the site’s past and expresses reclamation in a series of water features. Water features are a common way of anchoring a design
in a waterfront context. The kinetic art addresses wind as a key natural element in the context.

4. **Is the reference to the past decipherable to the general public? Does the designed form convey the idea?**

The designed forms - square pools, some of which are coupled with square lids - are simple enough to convey the design idea directly through formal properties. The practice of land reclamation in the is quite well-known amongst the local residents (and tourists) and makes this interpretation even easier.

5. **Does the meaning accrue over time?**

Since this design is hypothetical in nature, the accrual of meaning over time cannot be speculated nor evaluated at this point. It will depend on factors such as the way the design is actually used, events at site, and the way the design is promoted and reviewed. Given its prominent location and frequent use, possibilities for meanings to accrue are many.

**Narrative**

The design is suggestive of the site’s physical conditions before reclamation.

6. **Is the message a civic and socially acceptable one? If not, what is the intention behind it?**

Though the ongoing land reclamation in the City has raised environmental concerns, the message in this narrative is apolitical in nature and delivered by mostly minimalist forms. The design is intended to evoke wonder about the ambiguity between the natural and the constructed, and is free from any embedded political agenda.

7. **Is the intended meanings accessible to the general public?**
Since the narrative is derived from the site’s location and history, the answer to question 4 is applicable here.

8. *Does it allow for multiple interpretations?*

The angled walkways, coupled with trees and water features, are reminiscent of what one can find in a Chinese scholar’s garden as both of them lack a fixed and dominant perspective. Spaces conceals and unfolds as the viewer moves along.
CHAPTER 8
Conclusion

If meaning does not have to be too big a question for the course of life, this exploration of meaning in landscape architecture has certainly presented itself as a challenge for a masters thesis. The dilemma resulting from the emphasis on the intellect in academia and the poetic nature of the topic and design process has made it a challenge. The process was more lengthy and winding than intended, and some of the previously brainstormed thesis topics such as dualism in Barragan’s works, dimension of time in landscape, and public art and installation seem to whisper gently in the outcome.

I have come so far in this exploration to conclude that meanings in landscapes are unstable and they accrue with time; meanings are relative rather than absolute, and the audience plays a significant role in the interpretation of meanings; and meanings are multilayered, speaking to us through our senses as well as our intellect. The role of cultural background in the reading of meaning still holds its validity to me who grew up in a less pluralistic environment than the United States. In a myriad of existent and emerging design forms, the conceptual framework established in this study will continue to give me some structure to build my understanding of meaning in landscape design around.

The ending of this project coalesced with the ending of my journey to the United States. As I found myself drafting this epilogue and searching for the meaning of this journey in a destination far away from Urbana-Champaign, there came the questions: Has it been a given? Has it been chance? Has it been my own design? To what extent?
Bibliography


