

SPACE IS NOT NOTHING: HERITAGE AESTHETICS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SPACE

Juliet Ramsay

ICOMOS ISC on Cultural Landscapes
Burra, Australia
julietdmramsay@hotmail.com

Feng Han

Department of Landscape Studies
College of Architecture and Urban Planning
Tongji University
Shanghai, P.R.China
franhanf@gmail.com

Abstract. The paper explores government encouraged industrial developments in the name of climate change mitigation and the impacts on the aesthetic and social values of rural cultural landscapes and rural lifestyles. The squandering of space and the disruption of spatial scale is also considered and discussed with regard to cultural landscapes. Examples of urban and rural landscapes are presented with an analysis of the effectiveness of heritage listings and the at times unjust and the arduous plight forced on rural communities by development impacts.

The paper questions and discusses:

- (a) the role of aesthetics in the outstanding universal, national and local value of cultural landscapes, the scope of aesthetic value and how it has been applied to identify cultural landscape values in different countries;
- (b) the attempts but apparent failure of the cultural heritage discipline to provide adequate measures to establish the strength of cultural capital in the competing demands on the resource of physical space; and
- (c) the big picture and constructive approaches to improve the status of rural cultural landscapes and assist rural communities continue their lifestyle.

Introduction

'Space' is a topic that has challenged physicists, philosophers, psychologists and designers for generations. For those involved in landscape design and reading cultural landscapes, space is an essential element, be it a part of the smallest garden or the largest designed landscape or the intimacy and expanses of countryside and nature.

Aristotle described space as the container of all objects while Isaac Newton proposed the notion of 'absolute space' – that space is an entity that frames and contains all material objects (Madanipour 1996, 5). Space is not simply defined, apart from being 'the region beyond earth's atmosphere' and 'between celestial bodies', it is also described as 'the unbounded three-dimensional expanse' and 'a period or interval of time', 'an area set aside for use', 'of mythical or experiential' and more. Space is distinct from mass which is almost always architectural structures.

Space can be unlimited, infinite, indefinite or clearly or subtly defined. Space is where we accumulate our intimate experience through time and where place is created through myths, legends and emotional attachment to land. Space also presents the visibility of the creation of space through which we appreciate the aesthetics of structures or landforms or sounds. All music and bird sounds have abstract spaces that articulate the melody or the meaning of the call. Space therefore gives us the dimension to read, understand and enjoy a place. Space and aesthetics are indivisible. Colors, size, lines, patterns ethereal and ephemeral moments in space give rise to our metaphysical imagination. Space can be physical, social and symbolic and along with aesthetics is a significant element of landscapes.

The Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas

(2005) initiated wider recognition of the importance of the spatial settings of World Heritage Places. Apart from the value of space as a setting there is the value of space a backdrop – the ability to recall the attached emotions and collective memories through history by experiencing and appreciating the silhouettes of hills rolling across a landscape, patterns of hills of different hues, the rugged form of mountain ranges and the skylines of cities.

Space has ability for multiple input and has collective values. Urban planners use the term 'open space' where the land and water is open to the sky. Such spaces may be designed aesthetic spaces for articulating a vista and some not, such as rural lands. In cities and towns there is recreation space where open space is used for sport and active recreation. There is also the 'loose space' described by Franck and Stevens (2007) as a space that may be used at one time or one day for a set purpose but is apart from controlled activities and controlled aesthetics having activities that may be impromptu or planned in advance. Loose space is likely to emerge in cities and it is loose spaces that give cities life and vitality. Rural spaces, the evolved landscapes are where culture and nature meet and have special stories of that interface, utilising nature. Those that have survived for hundreds of years not only express a sustainability, but also be an ideal life style praised and pursued especially in Chinese culture.

But is space adequately appreciated as an attribute of heritage ? For example the world has some famous vistas – designed spaces with a terminal features such as Washington Mall, Canberra's Land Axis Vista, the Baroque landscaped vista of the Palace of Versailles. Such spaces are not settings but are the heritage features themselves. Often a designed heritage space is defined by a boundary, vistas and terminal features may be well known but is the space itself clearly articulated as a heritage element? Water is often the setting space for great architecture, a vista space and a recreation space. When the water is the sea it adds a moody changing dimension to the space. When it is a lake it can create a tranquil centre to a city and a reflective setting for features. Water is recognised as a heritage value for many reasons – as the giver of life, as the home of gods, as the rich source of local myths, as environments for wildlife. But water is also a space in both natural and built environments and whatever environment it is in, it creates a contrast of surface texture, colour, reflections and attracts all manner of wildlife, birds and animals amongst which of course are humans. Space itself can be - not just a contributing attribute of a heritage place, but a heritage monument in its own right.

This paper uses examples of heritage places of West

Lake, Hangzhou and the spaces of Central Canberra to explain how space is articulated in designed landscapes, presented as a heritage value, and how it contributes to social sustainability. Changes and threats to spaces are also discussed.

Another critical issue is the exploitation of the space resources of rural landscapes that in turn affect traditional productive cultural rural landscapes. The exploitation of rural space is forfeiting the subtle qualities and intricacies of cultural landscape aesthetics as well as associational and sustainable values.

The final aspect of the paper considers challenges for the heritage discipline; the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of heritage listing in protecting cultural landscapes and their spatial qualities and the links of spatial values and cultural capital.

The articulation of space in designed landscapes

WEST LAKE, HANGZHOU

West Lake (Figure 1), the essence of the ancient city Hangzhou, inscribed in the World Heritage List in 2011. With a history of 2,100 years, it is known as “the Heaven on Earth” in China. It is a national cultural icon and a representative of living cultural landscape of true life underpinned by Chinese philosophy and aesthetics on the relationship between human beings and nature. West Lake is a miraculous space with multiple layers of meanings.

The evolving history of the West Lake from a natural seashore bay to a lagoon then to a symbolic landscape presents a unique spiritual and physical interaction



Figure 1 West Lake in Hangzhou

between Chinese society and the lake. Cultivated by the Chinese culture for more than one thousand years, the West Lake has become a classical designed master piece and a national cultural icon. It has achieved the most romantic and aesthetic objective of the Chinese: to create a worldly heaven for their life, for harmony, enjoyment, being with nature forever.

West Lake is a human-made landscape which has influential aesthetic achievement in Chinese landscape gardens. Hills embrace the lake on three sides; the city proper lies to the east. The West Lake appears natural with cultural construction harmoniously decorated around it. However, this intoxicating 'natural' landscape is not natural; rather, it is culturally constructed according to the Chinese philosophical and landscape aesthetic principles. Also, all landscape elements here have symbolic meanings.

West Lake was an open social space where emperors, scholars, citizens, officials, the successful, the failures and the religious, were gathering. It was a collective work by multiple social groups. It was this tolerance and openness of the West Lake that created unlimited values in poetry, novels, paintings, legends, operas, gardens and architecture that influenced the whole country. While local people were celebrating worldly weddings, the Buddhist temples were hidden in quiet rolling mountains. When tourists were enjoying the natural beauty, the failures came here to rest in the soft beauty to heal their wounded hearts.

The most important characteristic of the West Lake was that every school of thinking found its own space here and made it a place of its own while sharing the poetic beauty of the West Lake without escaping human life. It was such a mixed place that all people encountered each other but lived in a most harmonious way. It was a homeland and a paradise for everyone in the real world. Worldly social life and retreat in nature could be artistically and enjoyably interchanged when the City of Hangzhou had the West Lake. It always aimed to the eternal pursuit of the Chinese, to live with nature, physically and spiritually.

Today, West Lake is successfully evolving. In the ancient, it was a heaven that 'one dreamed for thousands of time' and where 'one should travel to and be getting old'. Today travelling to the West Lake in Hangzhou is still something that one must do in his life as a Chinese person. Collective memories have deepened this heritage lake.

Although West Lake area is very well protected, the portion of the protected area in the whole city is getting smaller while rapid expansion of the city and the new city spaces do not have organic relationship with the lake. The heritage lake lacks of space for continuing grow in the new city development. Heritage spatial context is under threat.

THE SPACE OF CENTRAL CANBERRA

Canberra, Australia's national capital is small city by global standards and young city. It is close to approaching its centenary with a population of 400,000. Central Canberra, famously manifests a city design by the American architect, landscape architect Walter Burley Griffin. Griffin brought to Australia a planning concept imbued with landscape principals from the much admired Frank Law Olmsted. The key components of the plan were the land and water axes that connect local mountains and hills with a central city lake while a triangular geometric pattern bisected by the axes sets the framework for the national capital and city's urban form.

Two major spatial features of Griffin's vision that Australians now take great pleasure in are the land axis vista and the lake. The vista is the captured axial view that engages the eye, sweeps down from Parliament House, fans out at the lake and then sweeps up at the grassed terraces to terminate in the now forested conical Mount Ainslie, and the return vista, from Mount Ainslie to Parliament House is equally impressive.

Lake Burley Griffin is the other critical spatial element created by damming a small river that in turn created a water system flowing through the centre of the city having three formal basins, a naturalistic lake and a nature reserve wetland. The lake waters embody the water axis that intersects with the land axis in the Central Basin. The water, spaces and horizontality were key elements as demonstrated in Marion Mahoney Griffin's renderings with the unbroken horizontal plane of the lake waters, retaining walls and vegetation in the lake edge space. The lake edge landscape spaces are the intentional interface between the city and the waters with the predominantly intact landscape perimeter promoting a flowing horizontal visual expression. The lake shore offers serial views and vistas loved by the community as documented in professional studies (S. Pippitone 2009, Godden McKay Logan 2009). The lake waters unify the city, give a calm, quiet, peaceful presence and provide reflective qualities while the parklands provide arrays of landscape diversity.

The grassed terraces, central on the land axis and central in the northern lakeshore parklands, were designed by Griffin to be for public recreation and to be recessed into the slope of the land so they will not disrupt the view. Although when implemented they were reduced in size they remain a critical open space landscape that holds compelling aesthetic importance for the vista expression and experience. The grassed terraces are 'loose space'.

The critical 'loose space' of the grassed terraces, is used by the community for recreation events, cultural

events and celebrations and is now under threat. Large bulky stone war memorials have been proposed that will impact the space, be eye stoppers in the vista and visually reduce the preeminence of the Australian War Memorial at the base of Mount Ainslie and appropriate community loose space. Initial heritage advice on the heritage impacts only considered the impacts on buildings. The importance of the space as an aesthetic visual medium was not articulated strongly in heritage listing nor in the conservation management plan and therefore the value of the space was disregarded.

The exploitation of rural landscape spaces

Rural landscapes may be experienced by a comparatively small percent of the population, but a rural ideal is often a strongly held passion even for those who never experience it. The role of pastoral and agricultural farms in our society is fundamentally economic but these lands are also the interface between the cities where most humans live and the wilderness where humans generally cannot live. Rural landscapes are places of primary industry but also sources mythology, folklore and ballads based on the rural ideal. Rural landscape space has been undergoing enormous change in recent decades.

The exploitation of rural land spaces is happening not just in China and Australia but everywhere. Key issues are urbanization, abandoned land, suburban expansion, glass housing of market gardens, industrial scale mono-crop farming, plantations, sourcing of wind power, minerals and natural gas. Alarmingly, prime rural land, the food baskets of world, are frequently close to cities and are being subsumed by urban expansion. Landscapes of market gardens where people could witness the growing of seasonal crops have become endless environments of glass houses

and plastic tents. Fields once small and delineated for a range of crops have become mega expanses of agribusiness mono-crops. Many old farms have lost the soft undulations of the natural landform by laser levelling for more productive management so that a human scale appreciation is lost in infinite extent and flatness.

China's rural landscape was a traditional aesthetic objective besides growing agricultural products, but today is especially under threat of rapid urbanization. With the largest population being urbanized, there are more than 13 million farmers who leave their land and move into cities every year. Beautiful rural landscape is disappearing rapidly and occupied by urban constructions. Also as a social space, the vitality of rural area is challenged. The sustainable food supply is another challenge.

Rambling forests that once had varieties of tree species, undergrowth species and wildlife have become single species plantations marching in menacing regularity across the landscape.

Lucky are the landscapes that have been inscribed for World Heritage. However, few of these as illustrated in the Table 1, are the world's food baskets while, many are wine and spirit producing landscapes such as the European vineyards and the Mexican Agave landscape. Wheat, the most widely used staple in the world does not appear to be represented in a wheat growing landscapes on the World Heritage List? Rice, the great Asian staple has to date only one set of rice fields inscribed – the Cordilleras of the Philippines, although others are under assessment. Rural landscapes listings that provide our food staples are scarce. World Heritage appreciates the issue and encourages heritage recognition of the continuing rural landscapes with traditional practices. Table 1 shows a comparison of the representation of types of cultural landscapes in the World Heritage List (World

TABLE 1 Cultural Landscape representation in the World Heritage List

Designed landscapes (note: that many of listed gardens have not been identified as cultural landscapes)	6
Relict landscapes : settlements and industrial	12
Relict landscapes : mining	4
Continuing landscapes : Pastoral	6
Continuing landscapes : Viticulture + Agave	10
Continuing landscapes : Agriculture, rice and small crop farming	3
Continuing landscapes : settlements with associated industries eg. fishing	3
Associative landscapes : including religious places and rock art	14

Heritage 2011). It illustrates the low number of food crop landscapes only three, compared with ten viticulture landscapes.

The sad reality of rural landscapes is that the family farm is almost lost into history. Even sadder is that these farms were to a large degree sustainable living systems that were predominantly self sufficient, managing with existing natural resources, and being healthy environments. Forms of agriculture that now prevail, excessively manipulate and exploit nature while introducing untold amounts of chemicals into the land to produce scientifically enhanced crops (Smiley, 1997:38-40). Visually they give us a monotonous looking engineered landscapes managed by machines with no nature moments in sight.

The aesthetics of our rural landscape space is also being despoiled by climate change. Wind turbines, now over 100m high, tower over fields and farms, and stand atop ridges. Where we once could enjoy an unbroken landmass we now see skylines fractured by poles. Necessary though they may be, wind turbines are appropriating the valued space of rural setting landscapes. Community actions against wind-farm installations are unfairly labelled as the 'nimby' (not in my backyard) without appreciating that communities who have lived in an for a life time or have moved to the area for a lifestyle and have heart-felt love of their landscape for a multitude of aesthetic emotional reasons. Not to mention a genuine loss of property value when turbines are installed close by.

Conserving and managing spaces: challenges for the heritage discipline

DESCRIBING SPACE AND ITS HERITAGE VALUE

Space has layered meanings and values. In order to understand the contribution of space as a heritage asset it is necessary to pay attention to sensory space and provide an analysis of a space in terms of what can be seen, what can be heard and what are the multiple meanings. An analysis of the experience of human senses in space is discussed in by Douglas Porteous in *Environmental Aesthetics: ideas, politics and planning* (1996, 32-41). The work explains how orientation in space is chiefly achieved visually, but that this requires understanding a complex phenomenon involving distance, light quality, colour, shape, and patterns of textural and contrast gradients. He also discusses how acoustic space is non-locational, spherical and all-surrounding and notes how sounds can be transitory, fluid, unfocussed and lacking in context but how sounds can be highly arousing sharpening our aesthetic experience of space.

Heritage practitioners need to describe the aesthetic quality of the spaciousness such as:

- the colours and textures of the space,
- the character of how the space it is delineated such as features that edge the space – buildings, tree trunks, tree canopies, hills and mountain ranges;
- what is important in the boundary features such as the colour and texture of trees, the clean lines of the hills or ranges silhouetted against the sky;
- terminal features of a space;
- the base plane or planes of a space – their form, texture and colour;
- how water works in a space does it contribute a flat reflective base plane, are their planted edges that give the water a dark rim;
- the aesthetic evocations of a space – how people respond to the space; visual properties of the space – views in, views out, major viewpoints, terminal features;
- sounds of the space – natural sounds, discordant sounds, quietness, key sounds and background sounds; and how people and wildlife use the space;
- the aesthetic response to the rural practices of the landscape

In addition there is a need to research of the historical narrative of all rural landscapes and communal values of meanings, associations and memories. Statements of significance should provide robust summaries of all the values of space.

Apart from describing a space thoroughly, another effective measure is to interpret the space in an engaging way so that its spectrum of values is understood and appreciated. There are creative ways of doing this such as photography displays, guided walks, art events. An example is the quilters of Canberra making a quilt of the scenic attributes of Lake Burley Griffin. The study for English Heritage, *Seeing the History in the View: a method for assessing heritage significance* is a technical paper that looks at set views in the urban context many of which may contain a several heritage assets in a defined visual perspective. It also explains how the impacts of specific developments could be assessed.

THE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF SPACE

Spaces as components of cultural heritage places contribute to cultural capital. Heritage spaces are part of a cultural system and failure to recognise the essential visual and non –visual qualities as well as conserve and manage such places could put a precinct or an area in peril and cause loss of community well-being, a loss of associational value, as well as

loss of economic output. The example of the Land Axis vista, Canberra with the proposed war memorials shows how this can happen.

The recognition that strategic sound investment in the cultural heritage of cities, such as by listings, grants and values-based management, is investing in a nation's cultural capital, the communities' well being and quality of life, as well as the ongoing sustainability is beginning to appear in some conservation directions but to a large degree, remains a challenge. Space, particularly urban space is precious and highly sought after by developers and now rural space is also

targeted. Heritage landscape spaces will frequently be contested. The respect to heritage landscape space is especially important as 'cultural landscapes are particularly rich, dynamic and vulnerable in the Asia Pacific region' (ICOMOS 2008) in the context of rapid economic growing.

Space is a non-renewable resource. Spaces are the settings for the existence of life. Space is not nothing.

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