

# Hidden landscapes – The Enclosed Garden as a Prototype for New Urban Spaces

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## Abstract

*In the diffuse and fragmented metropolitan landscape, where the spatial, visual, geographic and programmatic differentiation is ever more disappearing, small scale, concrete interventions, open spaces on strategic locations in the urban tissue - urban acupuncture - can respond to the crisis of space, the loss of horizon. The smallest landscape architectural space, the Enclosed Garden, is researched on its possible potential to provide design means and strategies for the creation of urban spaces as a means to connect the generic network of the metropolis to the genius loci: Hidden Landscapes. Paley Park serves as an example of one of the possible types of Hidden Landscape, the Interstitial Garden that operates in the cracks of the urban fabric.*

**Key words:** small scale interventions, enclosed garden, urban spaces, urban acupuncture, genius loci

## Introduction

*“A bullet is not so large either. But if someone has the ability to throw it at your head with great speed, it does make an impression.” (Kennedy 2007)*

Global urbanization causes a diffuse and fragmented landscape in which the spatial, visual, geographic and programmatic differentiation is disappearing and the traditional opposition of landscape and city is being transformed into a “metropolis of villages, urban centres, suburbs, industrial areas, docks, airfields, woods, lakes, beaches, reserves and the mono-cultures of high-tech farming.” (Geuze 1995: 8). The city is included in a continuous field of forces and vectors and positioned in a uninterrupted network. In order to react adequately to this changing landscape we need to look for the underlying permanent landscape layer, that contains an annotated catalogue of situations, where the genius loci is recorded and secured. These latent compositional elements can be transformed into landscape architectural compositions in the topography of the city, the conscious staging of a comprehensive landscape-urban system. But the anchoring into the genius loci should not only be sought on the scale of the landscape (*integrazione scenica*). The crisis of space, the loss of horizon (expressed in e.g. increasing spatial claims and decreasing spatial differentiation) urges one to create new internal horizons, to search for small scale, concrete interventions, open spaces on strategic locations in the urban tissue, like urban acupuncture.

Throughout history the type of the Enclosed Garden has proved to be an influential spatial motif. What meaning can this ancient and seemingly obsolete type have for the present-day

metropolitan landscape architecture? Can it be made viable again as a landscape architectural model for these interventions? Do ideas about it still live on, consciously or unconsciously and can they be utilized for new solutions? What design means and strategies can the classical enclosed garden provide for the metropolitan landscape?

This paper focuses on one specific example, Paley Park, which is part of a comparative design research. In this research existing compositions are analysed to systematically expose the body of knowledge and the conceptual system of design underlying it, to gain knowledge about the system of architectonic composition of the Hidden Landscape. Composition is interpreted here as the physical structure, the way in which the parts are combined to form a whole, the representation that activates the content (the material, topographic, technical-cultural and economic substance). The comparative design research focuses on the design layers of basic form, spatial form, visual structure and programme form, specifying design instruments of boundaries, entrance, routing, ground plane [1]. It aims to result in a typology of Hidden Landscapes that can respond to the diversity of fragments constituting the montage landscape of the emerging metropolis. The hypothesis is that the different types of the Hidden Landscape, responding to their respective contexts, can serve as nodes in the metropolitan galaxy, not as an expression of the spatial-temporal continuum of the metropolis, but as discontinuities in this, as defined space in a continuous field and anchor points to the landscape topography, connecting the generic network of the metropolis to the genius loci.

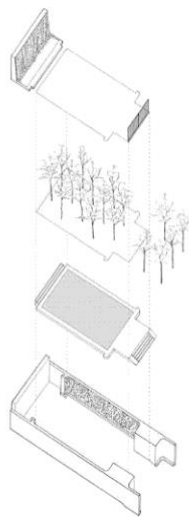


Fig. 1: Paley Park, New York, USA (Zion&Breen, 1963-1967)

### **Paley Park**

Paley Park - designed in 1963 by Robert Zion to support his plea for small parks, public gardens the size of a building lot, as a counterproposal for the official minimum size for parks of 12.000 m<sup>2</sup> - is a powerful example [2]. The design of Paley Park uses several tools to give the visitor the

illusion of an escape from everyday life [Fig. 1]. The main feature is a six-meter high wall of falling water the sound of which drowns all sound of the city. The water reflects artificial lighting and the fine foliage of the honey locust trees cause a shimmering, dappled pattern on the floor, suggesting perpetual sunlight in contrast to the reality of the high office towers that take away all daylight. The empty lot is transformed into an ivy-clad mountain canyon, carrying an abstract nature image: a 'forest' of trees, referring to the sylvan landscape of Arcadia, strong counterpoint for the civilized world of Manhattan. This image is opposed and questioned by a second, completely different one: the space is furnished like a living room, with fragile chairs and tables, flower pots and drinking fountains on a carpet of granite cobbles.

The deceptively simple ground plan employs no less than three organising principles: the grid, the axis and the central organisation. The grid determines the position of the trees, that seem to spill out from the park onto the pavement. Whereas the ground plan of the park is a triangular grid, on the pavement they follow an orthogonal grid, dictated by the direction of 53rd Street. Thus two in itself neutral grids reflect the interaction between the autonomy of the garden and the relation to the context. A central axis organises view and movement. The central carpet of cobblestones, framed by an edge of granite slabs and a granite bench continuing seamlessly in the pool at the back, form a central organisation. This combination of the axial and central organisation reflects the proportions of the plot, which in its turn is a reflection of the Manhattan grid; the basic form is an expression of the genius loci.

Spatially the garden is determined by the walls of the neighbouring high-rise blocks. But where these blocks reflect the scale of the city and exceed the visual scope of the garden the false walls that have been erected in front of them are proportioned in accordance with the dimensions of the plot, creating a space with an 'indoor' scale. The canopy of trees, blocking the buildings from view and providing a ceiling, supports this intimate scale. The orthogonal logic of the Manhattan street pattern is replaced in the garden by a continuous field, where the image produced by movement is no different from that when standing still. The transition is guided by a spatial sequence following the central axis of the garden. In an otherwise treeless street, trees are positioned in front of the garden, marking its presence without the garden itself being visible yet. The entrance is set back from the street, leaving space for a series of entrance spaces, defined by steps, gates and two kiosks. The lighted waterfall at the end of the garden seduces the passersby to enter.

### **Starry Sky City**

Since the introduction of a new Zoning Resolution in 1961 encouraging the provision of privately owned public space, over 500 small-scale informal public spaces - public arcades, urban and residential, elevated and sunken plazas, sidewalk widenings, gallerias and atria - were introduced in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens, forming an autonomous layer [Fig. 2]. What had started as the ad-hoc reaction of Robert Zion was turned into official urban policy. The

position of these interstitial spaces was determined by time, coincidence and circumstance, and it is their quantity that gives them a coherence: a non-hierarchical 'starry sky' pattern based on large numbers, a constellation existing of interstitial and coincidental spaces [3]. Just as the spaces themselves are determined by situation and at the same time autonomous, the constellation has its own internal logic, determined by the nature of its components, apart from the urban pattern, and at the same time strongly intertwined with the urban network [4].

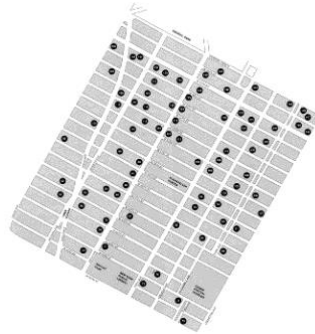


Fig. 2: constellation of interstitial gardens in Central Manhattan

“Often these fringes are the best meeting places. These informal spaces offer suspense and thrills, so characteristic for the city. [...] Is it possible to create places that invite temporary, spontaneous, and unpredictable actions, other behaviour and play, that make it possible to experience the city differently, in order to discover a different city?” (Rohmer 2007: 160) The pocket parks already existed as defined spaces, before they were turned into pocket parks. Yet they were invisible and useless. All they needed was an architectonic transformation to make them act as open space in the perception of the urban landscape.



Fig. 3: Paley Park is an interstitial garden, inserted in the urban fabric

### Hidden Landscapes

Paley Park could be called an 'Interstitial Garden', an interstice, a crack hidden in the urban fabric, inserted into the living tissue of the city and closely related to a highly urban context [Fig. 3]. The expression of the landscape in these leftover spaces, is implicit, hidden. But to define spatial nodes in the montage landscape of the metropolis we need to look for different types of gardens. Whereas the spatial definition of Paley Park is predetermined and the position coincidental, in an exurban situation the garden has to create its own space and the position

can be deliberately chosen. Such as the Swamp Garden that West8 Landscape Architects designed for the Spoleto Art Festival in 1997 [Fig. 4]. This exhibition garden is made in the silent, unpeopled cypress filled swamp landscape 40 kilometres from Charleston: an enclosure, a framework with steel wires, hung with Spanish Moss. Inside you find the same black water, water lilies and cypresses as outside, but the frame enhances the landscape and brings it to attention. This type of garden accentuates a crucial point in the landscape, creates spatial relationships, functions as a field glass enlightening the hidden logic of the context.

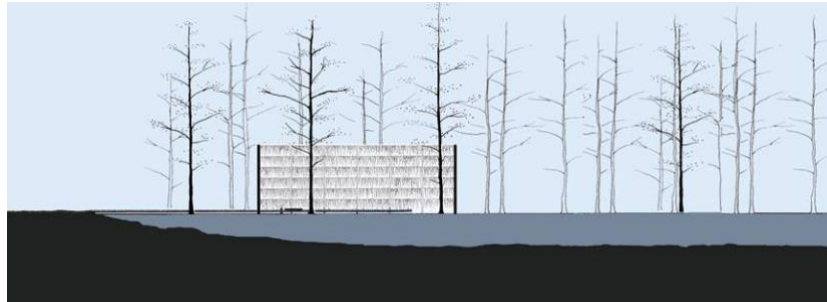


Fig. 4: the Swamp Garden creates its own space

In many situations the proportion between built and unbuilt is less unequivocal. The garden of the Fondation Louis Jeantet in the outskirts of Geneva brings a 19<sup>th</sup> century villa into accordance with its radically changed surroundings [fig. 5]. The garden is cut out of a monolithical socle, which gives the villa an address to the main road while at the same time hiding the traffic from view. The interaction between garden and socle negotiates the position on a sloping site, as well as the scale difference of the villa and the surrounding high-rise. Viewing from the villa the garden provides a representative front parterre, seen from inside the garden it becomes an intimate entrance space.



Fig. 5: the garden of the Fondation Louis Jeantet negotiates between building and landscape

These examples give a glimpse of a possible typology of Hidden Landscapes. Although the different types still need to be determined, their unifying aspect begins to present itself. They are defined spaces in a continuous field, as well as anchor points to the landscape topography. The simplified, emblematic and abstract image, the strong visual unity underpins their autonomy. This ideal, cultivated image can either be a paradisiacal nature, as in Paley Park and the garden of the Fondation Louis Jeantet, or an expression of the physical surroundings, as in

the Swamp Garden. At the same time it is a contextual space, that enters into a physical and visual relationship with its surroundings. Such spaces are indissolubly bound to the (urban) tissue, originate from it, and at the same time are essentially 'other spaces', contrary to their surroundings "in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect." (Foucault 1967:3)

But the essential expression of the tension between autonomy and contextuality - the quintessence of the Hidden Landscape - is the boundary. The enclosure is both the condition to create an autonomous space, as the connection to the outside, a reflection of the world on the other side. However impenetrable the boundary, physically and visually, there is always an infection by one side of the border of the other, there is a becoming otherwise of each of the terms thus bounded. As a result the boundary, that which defines the space, differs in each situation and the typology of Hidden Landscapes will have to be based on the spatial, compositional relations with the physical context.

## Endnotes

[1] Every landscape architectonic composition can be broken up in the layers of basic form (or layout, resulting from the geometric rationalisation of the topography), spatial form (architectonic treatment of the landscape's three-dimensional space), visual structure (in which the relation between culture and nature is expressed) and programme form (spatial organisation and interpretation of the programme).

[2] In his time-lapse photo analysis of park users conducted in 1980 the sociologist William H. Whyte concluded that the park was the most heavily used open space, on a square-foot basis, in all of New York City. This is still the case, thanks to its position in the centre of the business district, to the living room-like atmosphere and the kiosks in the corners, but also to the intensive maintenance, a permanent and impressively uniformed guard and gates that close after office hours, thanks to the ample funding of the private Paley Foundation which owns the Paley Park.

[3] The notion of the constellation as a spatial strategy for an urban problem was introduced by Liane Lefaivre in her analysis of the playgrounds Aldo van Eyck created for the city of Amsterdam in between 1947 and 1974 (Lefaivre 1999)

[4] These polycentric constellations are to be found all over the world: the residential courtyards of St. Petersburg, the pocket parks of Barcelona, the playgrounds of Aldo van Eyck in post-war Amsterdam.

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