

# Condensed landscape experience

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## Sensation of landscape

'Re-thinking interaction between landscape and urban buildings' participates in an interdisciplinary discourse about the theoretical and practical advantages of openly juxtaposing landscape and architecture without having one more advanced in importance.

Recently, the greenification of buildings is becoming a standard in contemporary architecture. Merging architecture and landscape has turned into a principle for an ecological / sustainable architecture. Yet, my aspiration is to achieve a wider interaction involving an application of a wider range of perspectives, such as: urban identity, social demands, quality of space, mixture of functions, urban complexity, public life and cultural heritage.

In order to launch such an approach, an understanding of the spatial, social and environmental significance of a radical re-thinking of relationships between architecture and landscape is necessary.

This paper addresses the question of whether the sensation of landscape can be condensed in function or to the size of an urban building. It also discusses the benefits and potentials of the amalgamate, by underlining the unique qualities of such a hybrid.

In an attempt to define the experience of landscape, eight attributes are introduced: discover, diversity, cyclic, equality, scale, transformation, topography and wilderness. The essay analyzes the attendance of these attributes in two existing fascinating hybrid structures. The first example is *The High-Line*<sup>1</sup> a public space in New York, and the second example is *Dubiner Apartment House*<sup>2</sup> in Israel. Even though the examples are rather different one from the other, they embody a beneficial exchange of architectural and landscape features.

## Blending boundaries

Traditionally urban planning differentiates between landscape and architecture; green space and built space; horizontal and vertical. This common

approach supports a development of each practice independently without inviting the potential of fusion.

This essay is about mixing the two entities into a hybrid. One entity is landscape, the other is a building. One belongs to nature, the other to the city.

*Landscape Urbanism*<sup>3</sup> is a contemporary discourse about the potential of engaging landscape characteristics into the domain of urbanism. "Landscape today can obviously not be separated from cityscape. The boundaries between city and landscape, between urban and rural have disappeared – at least they seem almost invisible. In a border sense, we can say that nature and culture are intermingling"<sup>4</sup>

The discourse reads the city as a dynamic relationship between permanent and temporary, built and unbuilt. It manifests that landscape can challenge the city by empowering its ability to cope with scales, diversity, and rapid changes. Mohsen Mostafavi describes the relationship between landscape and urbanism "On one hand, one might see it as a literal transposition of the techniques and vocabulary of one to the other; and on the other, this relationship might operate on a metaphoric and metonymic register"<sup>5</sup>

While the main focus of Landscape Urbanism is the scale of the city, this essay contributes by addressing the scale of a single urban component – the building. The essay seeks after the characteristics of a mixed-form made by interrelating architecture and landscape.

## Attributes

Addressing the paper question of whether the sensation of landscape can be condensed in function or to the size of an urban building requires an understanding of what the sensation of landscape might be. The notion of landscape is layered and complex. Many feelings, words, and

concepts could assist to define the sensation of landscape - so many that this paper can not address them all. Therefore, for the purpose of this essay, the experience of landscape is unfolded to eight representations of landscape attributes. The choice of these attributes is subjective and intuitive, the way I experience it. Here is a short explanation of each attribute supported with a quotation from various literatures.

**Cyclic** = landscape as a no waste system

*"Nature operates according to a system of nutrients and metabolism in which there is no such a thing as waste. A cherry tree makes many blossoms and fruit (perhaps) germinate and grow. That is why the tree blooms. But the extra blossoms are far from useless. They fall to the ground, decompose, feed various organisms and microorganism, and enrich the soil"*<sup>6</sup>

**Discover** = the depth of landscape

*"Creating secrets and a sense of mystery builds suspense and creates opportunities for personal revelation as well as revelation of the spirit of place"*<sup>7</sup>

**Diversity** = the richness of landscape

*"Landscapes are cacophony until sorted into individual dialogues by focusing on a primary signal to which many elements respond, by tracing a single set of dialogues"*<sup>8</sup>

**Equality** = the social neutrality of landscape

*"Most of the people own no land. Most of us live in cities and have no garden of our own. We demand more from this planet than it has the space and resources to offer"*<sup>9</sup>

**Scale** = the sizes of landscapes

*"Landscapes are as small as a garden, as large as a planet. To a person the garden is a landscape, to a people the nation is, to the human species, a planet... There are landscapes within landscapes within landscapes. Every landscape feature is both a whole and a part of one or more larger wholes"*<sup>10</sup>

**Transformation** = the dynamic changes in landscape

*"Landscape is a medium... uniquely capable of responding to temporal change, transformation, adaptation, and succession. These qualities recommend landscape as an analog to contemporary process of urbanization and as a medium uniquely suited to the open-endedness,*

*indeterminacy, and change demanded by contemporary urban conditions"*<sup>11</sup>

**Topography** = the three dimensional form of landscape

*"Topography is the study of Earth's surface shape and features or those of planets, moons, and asteroids. It is also the description of such surface shapes and features... The topography of an area can also mean the surface shape and features themselves"*<sup>12</sup>

**Wilderness** = landscape as greenery and vegetation

*"Before there were any humans, the world was in a state of wilderness. Now we have spread out and multiplied; our works have gotten everywhere. A variable ratio of cultivated land to wilderness is present at every spot, with the expanse of the ocean"*<sup>13</sup>

### **Abandoned infrastructure vs. overgrown structuralism**

Two fascinating examples feature the blending of landscape and urban building into a hybrid structure.

The first example is *The High-Line* a public space in New York, and the second example is *Dubiner Apartment House* in Israel.



Figure 1: The High Line is a linear collage in which allows landscape to cross through urbanity<sup>14</sup>

**The High Line** - Although the self-sown landscape triggered the official redevelopment of the structure, and although today it is a designed park, the amazing thing about the High Line is that it happened by itself. Nature literally took over the former railroad structure. After several years being out of order, the abandoned space got covered by wild grass, trees, and bushes. The result is hybridization of an industrial structure carrying an open landscape. The High Line is a linear collage in which allows landscape to cross through urbanity. It cuts through buildings and introduces alternative types of relationship between built and unbuilt, density and openness. (Fig.1)

"From an aesthetic and design standpoint, it has always been our position to try to respect the innate character of the High Line itself: its singularity and linearity, its straight-forward pragmatism, its emergent properties with wild plant-life – meadows, thickets, vines, mosses, flowers, intermixed with ballast, steel tracks, railings, and concrete"<sup>15</sup>

**Dubiner Apartment House** – The structure is a composition of concrete solids, voids and vegetation. The solids are the apartments. The voids are a built openness. In the voids, a green oasis is hidden. The building is a hybridization of programmatic use with scenic perception. An outdoor green path cuts through the building. It connects the top and bottom of the local hill inviting the public to cross secretly though it. Since the entrance to the apartments is from this path, each living unit has a quality of a ground level with a small entrance garden – at all the building's stories.



Figure 2: Dubiner Apartment House is a composition of concrete solids, voids and vegetation<sup>16</sup>

The fragmented structure creates an artificial landscape experienced differently from the street, in the building or in the apartment. The building's changes over time emphasizes the landscape character of the structure (Fig.2). "The hexagonal inside space creates a kind of stepped interior piazza with small scale landscaping...The piazza has its own microclimate -shadowy cool in summer and sun-warmed in winter"<sup>17</sup>

The examples reflect different context, time and place.

The High Line is a structure with an urban scale. The Dubiner Apartment House is a structure with a building scale.

The High Line is an open public space. The Dubiner House is a private property.

The High Line is a reusing project. The Dubiner House is designed and built from sketch.

The High Line is a linear form. The Dubiner House has an elaborated shape.

The High Line floats on its surroundings. The Dubiner House reflects its local context.

The examples are rather different one from another. Yet, their combination is interesting. What if nature took over an apartment building as happened in the High Line and influenced on it to be a mouton of individual houses as the Dubiner House is?

### Participation of the attributes

The attributes are seen as analysis filters. Investigation of the two examples through these filters show a possible involvement of the landscape attributes in the structure.

Starting with the High Line, **Wilderness** is condensed to The High Line space. Even in Manhattan, the mother of all metropolises, nature finds its way in and takes over abandoned architectural structures. Seeds of grass, bushes and trees were taken by trains, wind and birds, and greenery was self-sown in the middle of Manhattan. This poetic naturalization process revealed a new character of the existing structure and stimulated a re-using process of the abandoned rail-line.

**Cyclic** - The High Line is a re-cycled space. Rather than demolition, it was decided to re-develop the abandoned space and to give it another use and identity. This conversion generated new life, activities and developments in the nearby area. It conformed that a legitimization of a natural cycle initiates a chain of positive urban changes.

The redevelopment process offers the city a sense of **equality**. It provides the city of Manhattan a larger space to be and to recreate regardless their socio-economical position, color, marital status or political opinion. It was initiated by the citizens and made for the citizens.

The High Line enhances the urban **diversity**. It opens new views on the city, and exposes a new dialogue with the ongoing urban scene. It exposes the city to new exchanges between nature and culture, fast and slow, horizontal and vertical.

Possible characteristics of the other four landscape attributes are illustrated by the Dubiner Apartment House.

Dubiner House embodies a secondary urban route going up or down the hill framing unique views to the city. The walk in this path could associate the walker with a hidden spot in the Israeli landscape of the desert. It allows inhabitants and visitors to wander, to get lost, to **discover**, and to be surprised.

The apartment building articulates shifts in **scales**, from the contextual scale of the neighborhood to the scale of a detail. While walking in the open path, the users experience this jump in scales through panoramic outlooks to the city from one hand, and the smell of flowers from the other. The urban scale gets into the building as a shortcut route. From the street the building appears as a built cliff, and from inside the circulation space, the voids are experienced as a green oasis.

The structure creates a three-dimensional artificial landscape - a replicated **topography**. The structure is made by integrating the three coordinates – X, Y, Z. It is perceived differently while standing at different spots looking at the building from inside or from outside, up or down.

Dubiner House constantly changes. It reflects an ongoing **transformation** process. Since it was built, the concrete solids, the voids and the plantation have become one whole, one landscape. The climate, the seasons, the inhabitants, the visitors and the site keep on changing the appearance of the building and the experience of it. The plants have grown and some have wilted, the concrete has gotten worn down, the voids have “experienced” stories of people coming and going, kids playing, neighbors talking.

### **Beneficial exchange**

We carry on – as planners, the challenge is to explore the unique potentials of intermingling

landscape attributes and urban buildings. The examples are employed as an illustration of the spatial, social and environmental potential.

Spatially, a correlative interaction between landscape and urban buildings opens up the ordinary architectural vocabulary to an analogous vocabulary of landscape and nature. By an inclusion of replications and interpretations of landscape attributes, the spatial experience at the building is enhanced.

For instance, back to the example of the Dubiner House - the residential unit connects the limited **scale** of the apartment with the openness of the outdoors supporting a strong relationship between inside and outside. This quality enhances the spatial experience of the indoor space by providing the inhabitants a perception of a bigger space (from the actual size of it). It also liberates the interior space of the apartment from the common urban compression.

The relationship between inside and outside is strengthened also by the attribute of **transformation**. Changes outdoors (such as change of seasons, light or vegetation) penetrate indoors and boost the static space with dynamic atmosphere. The building changes also over time. It seems to get “older” with the years. Yet, the older it becomes, its scenic spatial experience is increased and becomes younger. This simple paradox enhances the sensation of landscape inside the building.



Figure 3: a green oasis is hidden in the void of Dubiner House<sup>18</sup>

The attribute of **discover** triggers a personal experience in the space. Often in apartment buildings the stairs are an efficient space connecting the apartments to the street. Yet, in Dubiner House the circulation space is a celebration of green. Mixing the private program with a public path let this secret garden to be discovered by wandering in the neighborhood. (Fig.3) An insertion of this attribute articulates the scale of the user, in which is often forgotten in the city. The focus on the user manifests the belief in publicness and openness.

Socially, an incorporation of landscape into urban buildings may assist in expanding the common urban identity and life styles. "Landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures and cultural heritage... Landscape is an important part of the quality of life... Landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being..."<sup>19</sup>

People tend to identify with particular landscape typology reminding them of their history and culture. Consequently, an inclusion of contextual landscape typologies in the urban scene increases the sense of place and social identity.

Through The High Line the social potential is exemplified. After being excluded for centuries, **wilderness** has returned to Manhattan. As a result, the image of public space in Manhattan has shifted towards fresher, opener, and healthier image.

The linear space has no social preference or limitations. It promotes **equality**, participation and belonging. The space on The High Line is almost a fantasy. It is an urban mirage, continuously unfolding. (Fig.4)

More than that, The High Line reflects cultural heritage and continuity. It is a built evidence of the historical development of Manhattan. The new generation grows up facing the **transformations** occurred in story-line of the city. Re-using, re-cycling, re-thinking – The High Line illustrates how to link the needs of the future with the outcomes of the past.

Environmentally, increasing green surface to reduce CO2 emission has become a significance design parameter in architecture. Yet, a creative integration of landscape and architecture has a greater potential than technical solutions such as green roof or green facades. For instance, the Dubiner House is located in a very dense urban tissue (13.1 people per hectare<sup>20</sup>).



Figure 4: The High Line promotes equality, participation and belonging<sup>21</sup>

Yet, it is experienced as openness. Playing with the notion of **scale** is a tool to manipulate the perception of urban density. More than that, the attribute scale could be understood as a link between the bigger scale and the smaller scale supporting a reading of an urban building as a whole which is a part of a bigger whole including a smaller whole. This sustainable attitude promotes planning methods of mixture, incorporation and juxtaposition of uses and users.

The re-using of The High Line space is an example for an urban **cyclic**. The High Line introduces new urban equilibriums. The open space cuts through the verticality of the buildings. It connects common separation of programs and ownerships. In a naive way it mixes built and landscape, density and openness. The High Line is an inspiration for new ideas about urban complexity and **diversity**.

In contradiction to the linearity of The High Line, the Dubiner House is formed as a (hollowed) hill. This artificial **topography** could assist in developing interactions between built and green. It could be the key to twist technical solutions (such as green surface) to spatial characteristic and social quality.

## Conclusion

By means of the eight attributes, the paper talks about the spatial, social and environmental potential of an interdisciplinary approach merging urban building and landscape.

Even though the sensation of landscape is broader than the sum of the eight attributes, and even though the analyzed examples illustrate only a

particular interpretation of these attributes – this paper demonstrates that scale, experience and perception of landscape can be condensed to, involved in and experienced at an urban building. It shows that landscape attributes could participate in the planning process of diverse functions and sizes of urban buildings.

By inserting the sensation of landscape into a building and playing with it, the boundaries between real and artificial are blended. More border zones are challenged by this approach, for instance: horizontal and vertical, built and unbuilt, bigness and detail, private and public, inside and outside, ecological and cultural, old and new. As a consequence, approaching a design of an urban building as a hybrid structure generates new architectural characteristics, and enhances the living environment in the city.

An inclusion of the notion of landscape allows the building to be a green spot in the urban context and to confront the common architecture with a fresh character and an optimistic spark.

The paper's both examples are a cultivated wilderness, a delineated openness, a built open space. They illustrate that the characterization of a building and the experience of landscape can be intermixed so that the meaning of building and landscape start to juxtapose.

What is the outcome of such hybridization? The hybrid structure is neither "pure" architecture, nor landscape. It is a mutual dialogue. It is a dynamic exchange of oppositions with the same degree of importance. It is about an equal "collaboration" of building and landscape generating a third entity, in which is greater than the sum of the two.

A hybrid structure is created by a broad understanding of the terms building and landscape. Landscape means more than plants. A building is more than structure and envelope. A wide and fresh reading of these terms can generate hybrids that integrate architecture and landscape in such a commitment that building becomes landscape and landscape becomes building.

As an intermediate planning approach, it could be termed Landscaped Architecture. This approach bridges the two separated practices. It does not blur the borders between them, but supports the tension of confrontation between them triggering new

qualities, in which could not be generated by each discipline alone.

However, this essay is only a teaser to express the potential of the approach of re-thinking interaction between landscape and urban building - a greater feasibility is yet to be explored.

### **The Place of Research / The Research of Place**

According to ARCC/EAAE 2010, the topic of the article is categorized as environmental research. This is correct, but not entirely precise. The interdisciplinary approach of **Re-thinking interaction between landscape and city architecture** is bordering between different modes of research. It is an environmental research searching for sustainable planning methods to build in the city. It is a design research aiming at exploring new architectural language. It is social research seeking to enrich urban life.

Photo credit: Thomas Krarup

Notes:

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- <sup>1</sup> Architect J. Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Manhattan, USA ([www.fieldoperations.net](http://www.fieldoperations.net)) 2004.
- <sup>2</sup> Architects Z. Hecker, E. Sharon and A. Neumann, Ramat Gan, Israel ([www.zvihecker.com](http://www.zvihecker.com)) 1961.
- <sup>3</sup> Started in the Landscape Urbanism symposium and exhibition in 1997 organized by C. Waldheim
- <sup>4</sup> H. Adam, Landscape Architecture in Mutation: Landscape as a Means to perception Staging Landscape: From Sentimental to Paradoxical (Zurich: Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, 155) 2005
- <sup>5</sup> M. Mostafavi, Landscape Urbanism, A manual for the Machinic Landscape (London: AA, 7) 2003.
- <sup>6</sup> M. Braungart & W. McDonough, Cradle to Cradle (London: Vintage, 92) 2009.
- <sup>7</sup> M. Potteiger & J. Purinton, Landscape Narratives (New York: John Wiley & Sons, INC, 137) 1998.
- <sup>8</sup> A. W. Spirn, The Language of Landscape (London: Yale University Press, 38) 1998.
- <sup>9</sup> R. Reynolds, On Guerrilla Gardening (London: Bloomsbury, 16) 2008.
- <sup>10</sup> A. W. Spirn, The Language of Landscape (London: Yale University Press, 18) 1998.
- <sup>11</sup> C. Waldheim, The Landscape Urbanism Reader (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 39) 2006.
- <sup>12</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topography>, 2010.
- <sup>13</sup> P. Shephard, The cultivated Wilderness – or, what is landscape (London: The Mit Press, 10) 1997.
- <sup>14</sup> Photo credit:  
[http://gothamist.com/2006/02/01/highline\\_constr.php](http://gothamist.com/2006/02/01/highline_constr.php)
- <sup>15</sup> J. Corner, Designing The High Line (New York: LLC, 30) 2008.
- <sup>16</sup> Photo credit: T. Krarup, 2008.
- <sup>17</sup> [www.zvihecker.com](http://www.zvihecker.com)
- <sup>18</sup> Photo credit: T. Krarup, 2008.
- <sup>19</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the guidelines for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, 2008.
- <sup>20</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramat\\_Gan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramat_Gan)
- <sup>21</sup> Photo credit: [www.thehighline.org](http://www.thehighline.org)