

## Seeking an Integrative Aesthetics

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Globalization finds two of its most tangible expressions in the Westernization of architecture and cities, and widespread disregard for landscape identity and environmental sustainability around the world. Ecological designers are realizing that being ecological is not enough, and that appearance and scenic quality counts. Environmental aestheticians are calling for more inclusive, interactive, engaging everyday aesthetics. However, there is still an undesirable gap between current aesthetic theories and environmental design principles, which in turn hamper broad application of environmental aesthetics on the one hand, and success of sustainable design on the other.

This paper presents the following claims:

- (1) Sustainable design and landscapes must be built upon integrative aesthetics, to produce a sense of psychological ownership, identification and dwelling, and thus motivation to care for and protect landscapes and the every day environment,
- (2) Globalization brought westernization of design education and thus transforming architecture, cities and regional landscape around the world with many negative human, environmental and cultural consequences,
- (3) The discipline of aesthetics must join environmental designers to address these global issues, and produce aesthetic principles that can be transcribed into concrete design strategies, and
- (4) Landscape experiences and landscape-based East-Asian aesthetics and creativity can be a useful basis for formulating such an integrative aesthetics compatible with environmental ethics.

### **Need for integrative aesthetics**

For any landscape architectural design and planning to succeed and to satisfy the intended goal, it is essential that landscape be managed properly. Landscape is not constructed but cultivated, and this cultivation takes a longer time and a larger spectrum of stake-holders' involvement, compared to architecture. Particularly when landscape architects are concerned with large-scale landscape, the success of landscape management cannot be realized efficiently and effectively without engagement of the community. Without successful management, there is no successful landscape. After all, land means land and people, and landscape also means land- (managing)board in its original Dutch etymology. This means, therefore, that landscape experience, and its aesthetics must engender a sense of emotional attachment to the land, and provide an inclusive, lasting appeal through day to day experience of landscape. Once people understand the value and meaning of landscape to themselves they will have the motivation to care and to protect it. This is important because what count most today in democratic and increasingly urban society are not private, special, corporate landscapes and scenic natural landscapes, but the day to day, ordinary, public landscapes.

Landscape architects, however, need landscape aesthetics not just to describe and explain the aesthetics of landscape, but to design landscapes with predicted aesthetic outcomes. This means that integrative aesthetic principles must be transcribed into prescriptive integrative design principles. And this in turn means that aesthetic theory can have better opportunity to be applied and tested, and also to effect desired environmental change globally. For landscape architects and architects this also means that they need to examine their design principles to see if they are based on the right aesthetic theory and principles, and for aestheticians to see if their aesthetic theories are formulated in a useful way. One can easily find environmental designers seeking integrative and sustainable design using design and aesthetic vocabulary that is based on a reductionist view of the world and detached experience of landscape and environment. The idea of form, and design as form-making, are examples of such concepts.

Here we need to recognize the nature of the relationship between aesthetics and environmental design. Firstly, Architects make aesthetic judgments not only in the evaluation of others' designs, but also in evaluation of their own design ideas and choice-phases in their design process. In fact, in the past, architects have often been criticized for their tendency to place too much emphasis on aesthetics rather than on practicality. Secondly, to be creative is to think in image, imagination, which is to be aesthetically thinking, being more analogical than digital, being metaphorical, connecting the seemingly unrelated. Thirdly, many creative persons, both artists as well as scientists, tend to place a higher value on aesthetical and theoretical aspects than practical problem-solving aspects or material values. In other words, aesthetic value plays an important role in the design process and truly creative design tends to further our aesthetic experience, and intense aesthetic experience tends to provoke further creativity. That is why *poesis* is not just about beauty but also about making.

Integrative aesthetics, however, must also reflect different cultural contexts, each with a different cosmology, ontology and epistemology. Aesthetics that work in the Western cultural context will not necessary do well in the Eastern context.

### **Negative Environmental Consequences of Westernization**

The on-going modernization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought with it not only industrialization and democratization, but Westernization. This is apparent in the way we dress, as well as how we build our environment. Architecture and urbanscape around the world are transformed according to Western culture, with its logo-centric and Christian worldview, a culture that has its intellectual, economic and political roots in the city. This is done in the name of functionalism and also following Western formal aesthetics, which places emphasis on distinction of individual form rather than integration with context. The negative aesthetic and ecological results of such conspicuous Westernization of architecture and city around the world are numerous. They include disorderly fragmentation and homogenization, alienation from tradition and local culture, buildings and cities that ignore environment and connection with it, increasing 'fat building syndrome' with high energy subsidy and inertness, decreasing sense of place and place identity, (Christian) rejection of the spiritual, resulting in the loss of spirit of place, *genius loci*.

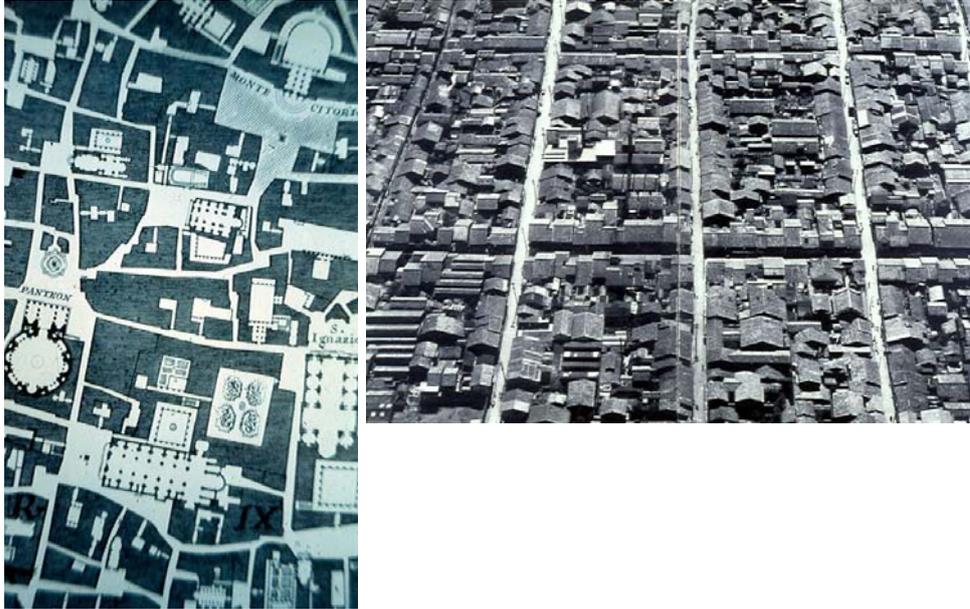
Western design, led by form-thinking and aesthetics combined with man- over- or man-against-nature ethics, led to fragmentation. Western culture was also an urban-centered culture. Cities were allowed to grow, countryside, or landscapes are simply to be sacrificed. The Western approach to city design was thus a more architectural approach than a landscape approach, the design having greater emphasis on geometrical, constructed form rather than geographical, cultivated process. Global discourses in aesthetics must therefore address the fundamental difference between Eastern and Western aesthetics and creativity, which paradigm of aesthetics is more relevant to integrative and sustainable design, and how we can combine them for mutual enrichment. Global discourses in aesthetics must also examine the outdated, disengaging aesthetics that are behind the theory and practice of contemporary environmental designers, architects, landscape architects and urban designers. And such aesthetic differences, we must discuss, derive not only from different bio-geographical contexts, but also a different cosmology, epistemology and ontology.

### **Differentiation and Integration of Western and Eastern Aesthetics**

Towards the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were many artists and designers in the West who were interested in and inspired by Eastern art, design, aesthetics and philosophy. Just as the rise of Impressionism was also influenced by Japanese art, teachers of the Bauhaus school, like Johannes Itten, were influenced by Eastern art and philosophy. The Barcelona Pavilion, an iconic modern design, is as modern as the traditional Japanese Ryoan-ji temple and garden. F.L Wright's Falling Water finds its precedent in Katsura villa in Kyoto. Walter Gropius saw in Japanese traditional houses the affirmation of functionalism as well as the minimalist aesthetics to which he aspired.

The reasons why Eastern aesthetics are relevant to our discussion are: first, that Eastern culture isn't based on city but on rural/landscape, not on human but on nature. Secondly, Eastern aesthetics are not only landscape-based but also body-based. Thirdly, Eastern aesthetics did not seek distinction, its art not used for class differentiation. By juxtaposing Western and Eastern aesthetics we can perhaps better reveal the mutual shortcomings and strengths of the respective paradigms (Fig.1). The in-depth and extensive comparison and cross criticism is certainly beyond the scope and intent of this paper. But extension into Eastern aesthetics is necessary, not only for global cultural integration and enrichment, but also because Eastern epistemology is justified by contemporary science and philosophy. Eastern aesthetics and philosophy have become more relevant to sustainable design and evolutionary ethics, and integrative aesthetics of ordinary environment and day to day experience. And perhaps more important to our discussion today is that an Eastern approach to knowing and making/creating is an aesthetic approach rather than a logo-centric one, leaning more toward harmony than control.<sup>1</sup>

In sum, we know today that our cosmology affects the way we speak, think and experience. And the language we use affects the way we think, and the very act of our perception affects the perceived, and the way we perceive is impacted not only by our social and cultural context but also by our deeply embedded cosmology.



**Figure1:** Map of Rome and Kyoto

### **Landscape approach to design and aesthetics, Landscape as integrator of design and aesthetics**

The test of art and design is, like that of science, to let us know how we are connected to nature and our environment. If our design is not only connecting us to the order of environment, but also revealing that connection to us, its beauty, meaning, spiritual and sensual satisfaction and delight, its mystery and wonder, then our design is going beyond practical problem solution, informing us how we are connected, and motivating us to connect further. That is the motivation necessary for the management of healthy landscape and environment.

A landscape approach is an inherently ‘glocal’ approach. Its glocal design and aesthetic practice are what we need for sustainable design and integrative experience. Landscape is glocal in that the need for landscape and landscape experience is global, but the way humans relate to landscapes through design and experience are local. We need landscape in our environment as we need vegetables in our food. A vegetarian diet is not only healthy for us but also for the earth. It is in this landscape approach to design and aesthetics that I would like to go beyond, or further articulate, my past efforts to elucidate ecological design and aesthetics (Koh, 1982, 1988, 2003). I have listed three principles both for design and (prescriptive) aesthetics as: Inclusive unity (with people and place), dynamic balance of order and disorder, complementarity of matter and mind. These principles are perhaps too abstract.

In this following section I would like to show how landscape can be a sound basis for integrative aesthetics (and evolutionary creativity), and how landscape-based design can lead to an integrative aesthetic experience and sustainable design. I will use three categories of design: an interactive sculpture as place; a garden localizing Western architecture, a landscape strategy for improving the architecture; and a public park that deals with local culture and ecological function.

## 1. Interactive sculpture as a place



**Figure 2:** *Sculpture as a place*  
*Student Uprising Memorial, Taegu, Korea*

The small sculpture I designed for the high school where I studied was intended to memorialize a student uprising in support of the democratic movement for which our class had acted as a catalyzing force (Figure 2). The sculpture is designed to be sat on and interact with, and to become a place rather than an object to stand alone. The colors symbolize the French flag (or French revolution) as well as that of Korea. The steel symbolizes ‘strength’, part of the school’s motto, and the form symbolizes ascendance (or rising up) as well as mutual cooperation (and is taken from the Chinese letter for people, which means mutual support). The group form symbolizes the student body as a community, rather than as individual heroes. The brick pavement relates to the existing building. A few trees were added for improvement of the environment and also to suggest loyalty to the nation (evergreen). The cost was around 28,000 Euro, in 1991; not much for a sculpture. Visitors may not appreciate all this symbolism but we hoped that the students would use this as a place. The sculpture became a small place, or small landscape.

## 2. A garden localizing a Western-style building

The Eastern Asian house is fundamentally different from that of the West. The former has a void in its center, a court, and the roof is a significant factor providing good horizontal connection between indoor and outdoor. In such a house it is not the form, but the positioning in the land that is important. Experience of landscape and garden from indoors is a paramount characteristic.



**Figure 3:** Western postmodern style architecture, Seoul, Korea

The architect designed this house in a contemporary Western style, more precisely in fragmented postmodern design à la Frank Gehry, in Seoul (Figure 3). The building makes an embracing gesture in expectation of a garden, rather than being a defensive and close-packed form. The landscape design turns the architecture of form into a place design with a total sensory experience and awareness of time. Architectural form does not dictate landscape composition, and trees are even set directly in front of the house. The experience upon entering is a sense of void and calmness, and the circular form is suggestive of Buddhism (which the family believes in) as well as East Asian flavor. Fragmented stone suggests recycling of leftover stone pieces, aesthetics of the ordinary, irregularity and frugality. Visitors' eyes are directed to the ground, here and now, rather than to the sky, the infinity. A contemporary architecture is localized. No form is invented. The design is modern as well as traditional, new as well as old, different as well as familiar.



**Figure 4:** Entrance Walk



**Figure 5:** Empty court in the garden center

### 3. Two public parks that deal with local culture and ecology

Asia has a tradition of gardens but not of parks. Being a private culture it has a shorter history of civic life and democracy. The first park is designed in connection with Korea's World Cup football event. The design provides a semi-circular civic space where people can 'sit around' in an egalitarian manner (Figure 6 and 7). There is no center, the center is void and the circle is incomplete. People along the arc have immediate experience of water "performing" a regenerative function. The area was heavily polluted because it was a dump site in the past, and the location of sewage treatment facilities. Attention is as much on repair as on creation, more on place-making and experience design rather than on scenic design and framed view.



**Figure 6 and 7:** Equality and Immediacy, Word Cup Park, Seoul, Korea

The second park is located in Korea's industrial city. We asked ourselves how to design a park that is integrated with the city and the surrounding landscape; how to bring the local tradition of gardens into the tradition of park; how to bring together ecological concerns with the tradition of Feng-shui and local cultural landscapes such as pear orchards; and how to heal the land and the people. These were some of the main questions that this design wanted to address. Lawns were avoided, damage to the site was repaired, and connections to the surrounding community were made. Korean mythology of the dragon and the tiger was brought in (Figure 8). The residents of the city are extremely happy, and the park has also worked as a catalyst to fueling a new cultural identity in the city.



**Figure 8:** Integration of the park with the urban fabric, local tradition and culture

### **Landscapes as sources of rich and integrative aesthetics languages:**

Once we designers and aestheticians go beyond the hegemony of vision and platonic ideal and static view of the world, going beyond architectural-based design and form-oriented aesthetics, and once we understand and appreciate landscapes as they are in their fullness, and that landscape is by nature for the public, and landscape is by definition land and people, we can then generate many other aesthetic languages and design strategies. As a designer with an orientation toward deep ecology and phenomenology, I can suggest the following concepts or principles:

1. Attention to **time, moment, and timing**. Here-now approach.
2. Scale jump and **scale variance**: zooming in and zooming out, de-framing and crossing borders, nested hierarchy and fractal geometry.
3. **Acupuncture design** with concept of landscape as body; design for healing and energizing, pushing strategic points for delayed pains or problems, solving downstream problems upstream.
4. Design through planning and cultivating; **open-ended creative and conservation process**, thus requiring aesthetic and creative engagement. Search for open design, and landscape as a tool for community experience and enhancement.
5. **Vertical interconnection** (palimpsest, sediment of memory and time) and **horizontal interconnection**.
6. Order, **expression and experience of change and process**, ordering of time experience (old and new, short and long, ephemeral and enduring).
7. Photosynthesis and **human procreation and ontogeny as model of creativity**; landscape as sensing and sensual body, embodied and immersed experience as

- opposed perspective view. Going beyond the divine creation and divine insemination, beyond human body, and earth as passive agent.
8. **Process focus** rather than product and finality focus: Ordering process is **allowing evolution** rather than being goal-oriented.
  9. **Designing and experiencing in and of field** just as the ecologist was a scientist in the field, eliminating the wall between self and world, landscape and garden.
  10. Simultaneous composition and decomposition, closing the cycle of production and waste, appreciating **aging** and dying as a part of life; Not passing the bugs, problems, pollution to others. Accept the **process logic** and succession sequence.
  11. Design as **process ordering** and **experience ordering**, not form-making. Form is process and consequence. Combination of digital thinking and analog thinking (form is of analog thinking), and logical/conceptual thinking with aesthetic/sensory reception.
  12. Understand **water as the other of landscape**, and water-based aesthetics as an **aesthetics of transformation** rather than formation (Koh, 2008).
  13. Acceptance and expression of the creative role of **disorder**, (if not necessarily creative destruction) accident, uncontrolled chance happening, unpredictability, irrationality, regularity, **beauty of moment**, beauty of imperfection and incompleteness (why building in progress is prettier, more informative and engaging than the completed, why a bay is always lovable?). Reveal disorder, and frame the messiness.
  14. Acceptance of **contradiction**, and **juxtaposition** of order and disorder, yin and yang.
  15. Acceptance of **imperfection**, and **insufficiency** (Saito, 2008). First, nature and creative products almost always have room for further improvement, Second, One does not eat to the fullness of stomach, third, incompleteness and open-endedness invite aesthetic and design participation, promote collective creativity and authorship, and represent ordinary life condition.
  16. **Fractal** geometry and self-similarity as opposed to the form of Euclidian geometry so that it can be more relevant to the geographical nature of landscape, scale invariance of complexity and nested hierarchy of ecology.
  17. Combination of **reading and imaging** landscapes as in Chinese landscape painting, combining left and right brain engagement.
  18. **Multi-sensory approach**: aesthetics of immersion and design of engagement.
  19. **Land-based approach** and recognition of spirituality and materiality of landscape. Land not as form or space but as field charged with invisible and yet unquantifiable energy, vital breath, **Ki. Genius Loci**, respect logic of landscape, order of change and nature, importance of site understanding, land as living, feeling, intelligent and creative body and place for cohabitation. Recognize the unconscious and invisible connection to land and landscapes that we feel and experience.

## **Conclusion**

Globalization is an irreversible process. The flows of information and capital are instant and ignore all political and cultural boundaries. Many non-Western countries are in a catching-up syndrome. Architecture and cities around the world are increasingly similar. Localization is however necessary and possible. In this regard, attention to

landscapes and use of landscape-based aesthetics in environmental design will open ways to accommodate this force of globalization while at the same time giving a sense of being at home and being a wholesome being. Environmental aesthetics for engagement and day to day life can have significant impact on building, urban and landscape designers, and at the same time such aesthetics can learn from and be enriched by East-Asian aesthetics.

Furthermore, it is now time to design the environment not just for beauty, but for healing, education, empowering and spiritual rootedness. And aesthetic experience will also be enhanced when we know that our environment has such value and meaning. Just as architects and urban designers need to go beyond the idea of form and form-making, landscape architects must go beyond the idea of the beautiful, picturesque and sublime. This is a way of making an integral part of our life, and this is a way of integrating global culture in a more sustainable and enriching way.

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i The writings of Japanese architect, Ashihara Yoshinobu; philosopher, Allan Watt; scientist, R.G.H. Siu; historians, Joseph Needham and Arnold Toynbee; psychiatrist, Carl Gustav Jung, physicists Ilya Prigogine and Fritjof Capra, Chinese philosopher Jiang Pa, and various writings on Taoism and Buddhism, including those of E. H. Suzuki on Zen Buddhism, have been useful sources of information in my work in this regard. More recently, Japanese philosopher, Yasuo Yuasa (*Cosmology of Body*, 1994), social psychologist Richard, E. Nisbett (*The Geography of Thought*, 2005), and philosopher, Yuriko Saito (*Everyday Aesthetics*, 2008) are helpful to articulate the differences between the two cultural regions.