

LANDSCAPES OF REVELATION: AN INQUIRY INTO SURREALISM IN THE  
LANDSCAPE

by

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(Under the Direction of Judith Wasserman)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores landscapes in which visitors can become emotionally and perceptually disoriented and imagine they are in a dream-like space. The surreal landscapes discussed range from an Italian Renaissance garden, to contemporary landscapes designed by professionals, to environments created by visionary artists. These diverse landscapes share elements of the art and literary movement of surrealism, especially their goal of eliciting revelations. The purpose of this thesis is three-fold: first, to analyze the techniques and forms that help create a surreal landscape; second, to elucidate the relationship between surrealism and landscape architecture; and third, to demonstrate the relevance of some of the ideas of surrealism to contemporary landscape architecture.

INDEX WORDS: Surrealism, Landscape Architecture, Visionary Art Environments, Labyrinths, Grottoes, Walled Gardens, Andre Breton, Martha Schwartz, Geoffrey Jellicoe

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MASTERS OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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## DEDICATION

To my wife, Suzannah, for her love and unwavering support during my education.

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## INTRODUCTION

“It is a long way from dream to reality”

Ferdinand Cheval inscribed these words on Palais Ideal, a monumental palace of his dreams he built in Hauterives, France. It certainly was a long way for he devoted thirty-four years of his life to translating a dream of his into concrete form. It is also a long way for the mind to travel from reality to dream in the landscape. There is a resolute reality in the experience of the environment. Regardless of imagination, we are still surrounded by the sky above, plants around, and the earth below. However, there are a few remarkable landscapes that are able to transform this very real environment into alternate realities. Visitors to these landscapes can become emotionally and perceptually disoriented and imagine they are in a dream-like space. This thesis will explore a variety of these surreal landscapes; from an Italian Renaissance garden, to contemporary landscapes designed by professionals, to environments created by visionary artists.

Each of these diverse landscapes exhibit traits of surrealism. Surrealism was an art and literary movement that was active from the 1920's to 1960's. The surrealists were dedicated to exposing the unconscious in their art and poetry. They sought to gain insight from the unconscious and elicit revelations through their artwork and poems. Only one of the landscapes discussed in this thesis was designed by a surrealist. Many of the designers were not even aware of surrealism. Nevertheless, they all share traits of surrealism, such as uncanny juxtaposition and disorientation of the senses. They also often have a goal of providing insights for visitors. These environments are more than

sheer fantasy, because they offer revelations to visitors. They are landscapes of revelation in two ways: the creators are revealing themselves through their landscape design, and visitors to these landscapes can experience revelations.

There are three objectives in this thesis: first, to analyze the techniques that help create a surreal landscape; second, to explore the relationship between surrealism and landscape architecture; and third, to demonstrate the relevance of some of the ideas of surrealism to contemporary landscape architecture.

## CHAPTER 1

### TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF SURREALISM

Andre Breton ignited the art and literary movement known as surrealism with the publication of Manifesto of Surrealism in 1924. In the manifesto he called for humanity to reclaim the rights of the imagination and overthrow the reign of logic in society. Following the lead of Sigmund Freud, Breton believed society would benefit from the insights of the unconscious. To tap into the unconscious Breton called for the “future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality” (Manifestoes of Surrealism 14). At first, poets such as Breton carried the surrealist banner, but later on artists joined the movement. Today surrealism is best known for its art, but it was an interdisciplinary movement that was active from the 1920’s through 1960’s. The surrealists were united in their goal to remake the world through the emotions. While they never succeeded in transforming society, they did produce some of the great works of 20<sup>th</sup> century art and literature. The images and ideas of the surrealist movement, such as the marvelous and convulsive beauty, were very influential and continue to influence contemporary art and the wider culture.

The roots of surrealism can be found in the spirit of revolt in the Dada movement. Dada was an avant-garde movement, begun in 1916, that was devoted to overthrowing the established orders of society. Artists and poets in the Dada movement were inspired by the horrors they had experienced in WWI. As artist Max Ernst described it:

We young people came back from the war dazed, and our disgust simply had to find an outlet. This quite naturally took the form of attacks on the foundations of the civilizations that had brought the war about- attacks on language, syntax, logic, literature, painting, and so forth (Montagu 6).

Artists like Ernst participated in Dada's "violent protest against all accepted values whether in society, morality, politics, literature, and art" (Montagu 8). Marcel

Duchamp's exhibition of a urinal, titled Fountain, in a New York gallery in 1917 captures the essence of Dada (Figure 1.1). The urinal questions society's definition of what art is,



Figure 1.1: Fountain, Marcel Duchamp, 1917 (Montagu 9)

and reflects the mischievous way that Dada attacked societal values. Many of the Dadaists, including the poet Andre Breton, eventually became dismayed with the nihilism

that pervaded the movement. Breton would later reshape the movement with more idealism to form surrealism.

In addition to earlier avant-garde movements like Dada, there were several other key influences in the development of surrealism, such as the writings of the Marquis De Sade, Sigmund Freud, symbolic and romantic poets, and communism. Karl Marx's communist theories and calls for collective struggle provided the political rallying cry for the surrealists. While Marx inspired their ideas of political freedom, romantic poets like Arthur Rimbaud sparked their interest in artistic freedom with his declaration "change life." This imperative expressed the surrealist's "faith in the power of art to revitalize the world" (Montagu 7). This belief in the power of art to transform was infused with vigor when they discovered Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious.

Freud's psychoanalytic theories provided the theoretical base from which they launched their attack on the dominance of rationalism in society. They saw reason as "Ego's protection against the maraudings of the Id and desires long dammed up" (Gersham 17). By fulfilling these desires the surrealists felt that man would find pleasure and happiness. Furthermore, they thought that the way to find this mother load of gold was by mining the unconscious. Following Freud's lead they knew that they would find that the unconscious was "a city dump of desires and libidinous caprices, the whole lot infested with maggots of guilt" (Gersham 133). By exposing the unconscious in their art and poetry they believed "we would have a new world to examine and profit by" (Gersham 133).

According to Breton, this transformation of society was necessary because

We are still living under the reign of logic. But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The



absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only the facts relating directly to our experience (Manifestoes of Surrealism 9).

Breton believed that Freud's discoveries about the influence of the unconscious opened the door to allow "imagination ...to reclaim its rights." Within the unconscious Breton believed man would find "strange forces" that could augment the powers of reason. As William Dunning expressed it:

Breton envisioned a rationality rendered virile and vital by its access to the autonomy and inventiveness of the irrational. He wanted to harness the irrational to the service of reason, like a wild and untrained horse harnessed and forced to pull alongside a well trained one (164).

Breton did not completely reject the use of reason, because he realized reason and science had a role in society. However, he believed that imagination and ideas from the unconscious were also needed to address humanity's problems. Thus, surrealism is meant to be a combination of reality and the world of dreams, the rational and the irrational (Dunning 165). Imagine if there was a coin with two sides, reality on one side and magic on the other, the goal of surrealism is to make these two sides one through the exploration of the unknown, the unconscious (Gersham 30).

Later in his first manifesto, Breton provided a definition for surrealism –

pure psychic automatism by means of which we propose to express either verbally, in writing, or in some other fashion what really goes on in the mind. Dictation by the mind unhampered by conscious control and having no aesthetic or moral goals (Manifestoes of Surrealism 26).

By automatism Breton was referring to a tool the surrealist used to suppress conscious thought and let the unconscious express itself. Surrealists used automatism when they wrote or painted so quickly that the conscious mind could not control the train of thought, hence the name automatism because the flow of thought was automatic. With this

technique they hoped to create a direct link from the hand to the unconscious (Dunning 165). Breton also offered a philosophical basis for this definition:

surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality [greater meaningfulness] of certain types of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to undermine all other psychic mechanisms and to take their place in the resolution of the principal problems of life (Manifestoes of Surrealism 26).

This definition illustrates how to Breton, surrealism was more than just an art or political movement; it was ultimately a way of knowledge.

For Breton the key to finding knowledge was in revelation, in exploring *le merveilleux* [the marvelous]. The marvelous is an important concept for understanding surrealist aesthetics, for Breton declared only the marvelous is beautiful. The surrealist found the marvelous in surprising juxtapositions, such as in the phrase “As beautiful as the chance encounter, on a dissecting table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella” (Montagu 42). This expression, by a poet they admired named Comte de Lautremont, conveys the wonder they felt in unexpected combinations. The surrealist also discovered the marvelous in random encounters and uncanny coincidences. Thus, the marvelous could be discovered in daily life or created in a poem or art. The marvelous was about transforming an ordinary object or discovering within phenomenon something extraordinary. In that striking revelation the observer’s outlook and perception of the world is challenged.

The concept of the marvelous reveals the surrealist lineage from the romantic poets. Their art is about eliciting revelations, and finding within the ordinary the extraordinary. William Blake expressed this idea in his poem Auguries of Innocence:

To see the world in a grain of sand,  
and a heaven in a wild flower,

To hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour (589).

Andre Breton conveyed similar themes when he wrote “What is eye-opening about the fantastic is that there is no fantastic, there is only reality” (Manifestoes of Surrealism 15). The more bizarre this reality seems the more it is esteemed by the surrealist because it is more revealing.

The surrealist valued bizarre and uncanny juxtapositions in their art because of the shock it engendered in viewers. Herbert Gersham explains that the

effect of shock, in art as well as elsewhere, is to disorient, to oblige the viewer to reexamine his baggage of beliefs and convictions, and hopefully to prepare him for that descent into the unknown, into himself, which one tradition from Socrates’ time on has held to be the basis of all true knowledge (21).

The Surrealists also based the incongruity in their art on the laws of unconscious associations. Freud discovered that the relationship between two realities might seem illogical, but this combination makes the meaning more profound to the mind. Freud and the surrealists believed that these unpredictable associations resonated with the workings of the unconscious mind.

The best way to understand this principle is by examining Meret Oppenheim’s famous surrealist object Breakfast in Fur (Figure 1.2). This piece exemplifies the surrealist concept of the marvelous because Oppenheim took an ordinary object and transformed it into a shocking work of art. There is the strange combination of a cup which the viewer imagines drinking from and the soft fur coating. But the thought of drinking from this cup creates the “image of a mouthful of wet fur” (Dunning 168). Breakfast in Fur is meant to disturb, or create what Breton called *depaysement* –“a sense

of visual, mental, and emotional dislocation or removing man out of his natural surroundings” (Matthews 1). The drive to disorient is an underlying theme in most surrealist work, and the goal of this is to elicit a revelation in the viewer.



Figure 1.2: Breakfast in Fur, Meret Oppenheim, 1936, (Passeron 104)

Convulsive beauty is another important concept for understanding surrealist aesthetics. This concept is closely related to the marvelous in that it revels in the union of opposites, as is suggested in the unlikely combination of the words convulsive (to disturb violently) and beauty (a quality in an object that arouses pleasure). In his book Mad Love Breton outlines three traits of convulsive beauty: “convulsive beauty will be veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive, magic-circumstantial, or it will not be” (Mad Love 19). The first characteristic of veiled-erotic suggests the relationship of convulsive beauty to eroticism. To Breton the “experience of convulsive beauty was analogous to the

fulfillment of erotic desire” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 42). Breton wrote that he didn’t value any art or natural spectacle “which did not straight off arouse a physical sensation in me, like the feeling of a feathery wind brushing across my temples to produce a real shiver” (Mad Love 8).

As the phrase “fixed-explosive” indicates, Breton experienced beauty when opposites are combined, particularly in images of arrested motion. “The word convulsive...” Breton explains, “would lose any meaning in my eyes were it to be conceived in motion and not at the exact expiration of this motion” (Mad Love 10). To illustrate this phenomenon Breton refers to a photograph of a speeding locomotive as it disappears into a virgin forest. The image captures the essence of the “fixed-explosive” because the locomotive is frozen in motion in the photograph.

Breton also found convulsive beauty in the “magic-circumstantial,” in the unexpected encounter of an object in daily life (circumstantial) that suddenly causes revelation (magic). Usually this encounter corresponds to unknown desires within the unconscious. This theory thus establishes that the world of dreams (the unconscious) has an active role in daily life (Montagu 13). “Such beauty,” Breton explains, “cannot appear except from the poignant feeling of the thing revealed, the integral certainty produced by the emergence of a solution, which ...could not come to us along ordinary logical paths” (Mad Love 14). This bolt from the blue usually occurs from an encounter with a found object (trouvaille).

This trouvaille, whether it be artistic, scientific, philosophic, or as useless as anything, is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it. In it alone can we recognize the marvelous precipitate of desire. It alone can enlarge the universe (Mad Love 14).

Convulsive beauty thus celebrates ideas or art that cause sudden insight into the unconscious. In surrealist art the found object plays a key role in linking reality and the world of dreams.

Convulsive beauty continues to be a significant construct for understanding art to this day. By valuing art that causes a visceral shudder, convulsive beauty establishes a place for art that doesn't just soothe and exist as something to behold beauty. The concept of convulsive beauty also accounts for how found objects are able to inspire creativity and insight. Along with the concept of the marvelous, it establishes the role in art of *depaysement*, or disorientation of the senses of viewers.

Convulsive beauty and the concept of the marvelous are some of the many contributions of surrealism to art and poetry. Other contributions of surrealists include the following: their combining of artistic creativity with philosophy, their position that art is a serious pursuit, their making art a way of protesting against morals and a way of knowledge of humanity (Passeron 198), and their "equation of life with art" (Gersham xii). Perhaps their most important contribution was their establishment of the role of the unconscious in the creative process. Most artists before the surrealists believed that the best art comes from the unconscious, but the surrealists created a technique of mining the unconscious in automatism. It became the method of choice for modern and postmodern artists to reach the unconscious, that wellspring of creativity (Dunning 166).

In fact, the transformation in poetry and art by surrealism is such that we no longer perceive its influence (Passeron 198). The extent of its influence is evident in the way the word surreal has been taken up by our language like no other term representing modern art movements. Many artistic movements are like moths; they have a brief but

vibrant life and quickly expire. However, surrealism persisted as a movement for forty years and continues to influence contemporary art (Montagu 23). It owes its longevity to its dialogue with all of the artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century (Rabate 43). One only has to see the presence of Dali's melting clocks on t-shirts and ties to perceive the influence of surrealism on the wider culture as well. What was once new and shocking has become widely accepted by society. This phenomenon inspired author Anne LeBaron to ask "Has the real become surreal" (62)?

While surrealism has certainly been influential, critics have been eager to highlight the movement's shortcomings. The surrealists often employed images and symbols in their art that have personal significance, however these symbols often do not resonate with other people (Muller 54). They assumed that their images were a reflection of an unconscious that everyone shared in. However, this depends upon the existence of a universal unconscious, which is debatable. The surrealists also filled their manifestoes with absolute statements: for instance, "the only kind of beauty is convulsive beauty" (Breton, Mad Love 8). While these polemical statements may advance the movement's cause they do not account for the complexity of the world. Furthermore, the surrealists never fulfilled Rimbaud's invocation to "change life," their goal of transforming society never happened. Their art rarely convinces the viewer to take action. Yes, it shocks and overwhelms the viewer, but only once in a blue moon does it cause true revelation (Gersham 18). Their technique of *depaysement*, or disorientation of the senses of the viewer, takes viewers into dream-like spaces. However, disorienting the viewer is not an end in itself (Muller 55). If surrealism serves as an escape from reality is there something that viewers come out of this escape with? This is an enduring question that has been

posed to surrealism. Surrealists sought to infuse their art with revelation but this challenge was not always met. Without fulfilling this challenge, surrealist art can be dismissed as a weird novelty. Yes, these dream pioneers take us on fantastic, exhilarating journeys into the unconscious, but what do we come back with?

Surrealism leaves you with more questions than answers. Herbert Gersham posits that the

surrealists were seekers more than finders. If a civilization is indeed known by the questions it asks and the clichés it coins, then the surrealists will have left an enduring mark...they questioned the basic postulates of rationalism and humanism as few had ever done before (131).

They challenged the acceptance of daily routines and sought to overturn the values of bourgeois society. In place of these values, the poet Octavio Paz declares, they asserted the values of “eroticism, poetry, imagination, liberty, spiritual adventure, and vision” (Lebaron 62).

Why did these themes resonate within Western culture? Perhaps surrealism expresses ideas that have always been with us but have been suppressed by modern civilization. Marcel Brion contends that

the recurrence of the fantastic in folk myth, painting, and literature, the appeal of love themes in all media and in all periods for which records exist, the universality of verbal incantations, all suggest that there is a firm biological or social anchor for surrealism, that it is a significant attempt to renew acquaintance with a part of man long ignored by a narrowly rational civilization (Gersham 27).

This suggests that surrealism connects people with deep-rooted ways of seeing and feeling that are missing in modern society. By stressing the rights of the imagination as equal to those of reason, and asserting the importance of the unconscious in daily life the surrealists were expressing a tradition that appeared in the romantic poets, medieval philosophy, and earlier times. Postmodern literature, by authors like Jacques Lacan and



Michel Foucault, represent another flowering of this tradition that values irrational thought and explores the unconscious. The postmodernists reached this realm through deconstructing language, while the surrealists used Freudian psychology as their vehicle. The two movements followed different paths to the unconscious, but the destination is the same. Surrealist philosophy is more at home within postmodernism than with its contemporaries in modernism. For this reason, its themes continue to reverberate within contemporary society. Maurice Blanchot alluded to surrealism's continued relevance in the following quote: "Surrealism has vanished? This is because it is to be found neither here nor there: it is everywhere. It is a ghost, a brilliant haunting. In its turn, by a well deserved metamorphosis, it has become surreal" (Rabate 42).

From its inception in the early 1920's surrealism grew from a pursuit of a few writers in Paris into a worldwide art and literary movement. The movement spread from literature to the visual arts, and then to movies and other fields. As surrealism expanded it splintered into factions that followed very different paths. Artists like Joan Miro and Hans (or Jean) Arp pursued abstract surrealism, where symbols and biomorphic shapes were used in paintings. Another group of artists, including Salvador Dali, created formal surreal paintings that utilized classical painting skills. The split between the abstract and formal factions in surrealism illustrates one of the many divides that developed in surrealism. Given the diverse manifestations of surrealism, it is difficult to concisely summarize the elements of surreal art. The following list attempts to define some of the common themes in surrealist art. These elements do not appear in all surrealist art. However, almost all surrealist art would have the first two characteristics.

### Common Elements of Surrealist Art

- 1) exposes the unconscious in art or poetry
- 2) elicits revelations
- 3) uses uncanny juxtaposition
- 4) uses or is inspired by found objects
- 5) sensual disorientation
- 6) finds the extraordinary within the ordinary
- 7) promotes the aesthetics of confrontation, shock (convulsive beauty)

These elements are also evident in the surreal landscapes that are explored in the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER 2

### SURREALISM IN THE LANDSCAPE

When you examine a surrealist painting you are looking through a window into the artist's imagination. What happens when you step through the frame and enter this dream landscape? In other words, what would a surreal landscape be like? This question will be explored through the analysis of visionary art environments. Visionary art environments are the creation of individuals who have transformed their surroundings into fantasy worlds. When visitors enter these environments they are overwhelmed by the sense that they have entered another reality, a dream world governed by its own logic. This chapter will analyze the techniques that are used to create these fantasy worlds. With the exception of Edward James sculpture garden, Las Pozas (which is discussed in Chapter Five), the surrealists did not attempt to translate surrealism into the landscape. However, surrealists did translate surrealism into a three dimensional reality when they created an art installation for the 1938 International Exposition of Surrealism in Paris. Figure 2.1 illustrates what visitors to this exhibit experienced. As they ventured into the gallery they were greeted by a series of bizarre surrealist sculptures such as Oscar Dominguez's Never. With the arm of the gramophone replaced by a hand, this sculpture utilizes the common technique of uncanny juxtaposition. Above Dominguez's sculpture is Marcel Duchamp's 1,200 Coal Sacks, perhaps the most successful work of the exhibit. This ceiling of coal sacks transformed the central hall of the exhibit into a dark grotto-like chamber. Visitors to this space were disoriented by the oppressive low ceiling. The

unease of visitors was enhanced by their perception that the sacks were filled with coal (they were actually filled with paper). Duchamp's work exhibits two of the hallmarks of surrealist art, the transformation of an ordinary object (the coal sack) and the disorientation of spectators. These techniques, along with uncanny juxtaposition, are the basic tools the surrealists used to transform the gallery in to a surreal space.

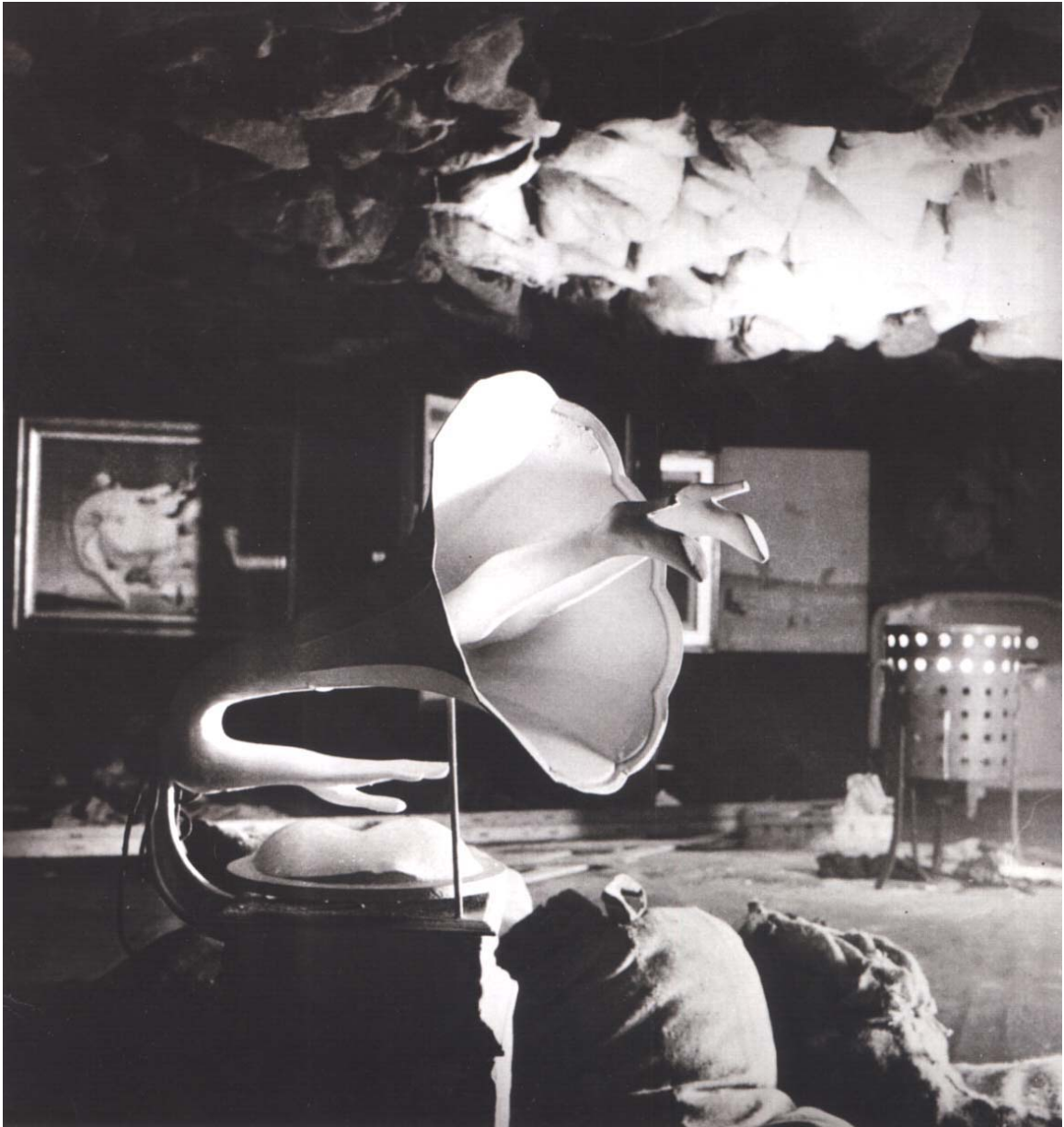


Figure 2.1: 1938 International Exposition of Surrealism, Paris, France (Passeron 105)  
Photo: Denise Bellon

What happens when surrealism leaves the confines of the gallery and enters the environment? The surrealists did not attempt to answer this question. This reflects the historical reluctance of most visual artists to shape the land. This is due to the fact that a landscape can not be sold and exhibited in the traditional venues of museums and galleries. Without hope of financial gain, there was little incentive for artists to use the landscape as their canvas. It was not until Robert Smithson and other artists created earthworks in the 1960's and 1970's that a large body of artists ventured into the landscape. Perhaps another reason surrealism was not translated into the landscape is the daunting reality of the environment. What could be more real than experiencing the earth below, the sky above, and plants and stone around? It is easier to create a surreal effect in a poem or painting where such tangible reality can be suppressed or escaped.

How can the all too real materials of stone, earth, plants, and water be transformed in a landscape? Visionary art environments provide an answer to this question. These landscapes are created by people that were not part of the surrealist movement (with the exception of avowed surrealist Edward James). Moreover, the creators of these visionary art environments were not aware of the goals and tenets of surrealism. They simply had a vision of how their environment should be and then reshaped their surroundings to reflect that vision. The fact that visionary art environments often do not correspond to reality is what links these environments to surrealism. They are surreal landscapes, but not surrealist landscapes. The use of the word surreal denotes that there is not an ideological relationship between these environments and surrealism. Visitors to these environments often feel like they are entering another world, a reality ruled by the particular illogic of their creators, not the



Figure 2.2: north side-Palais Ideal, Hauterives, France, Ferdinand Cheval (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 31)



Figure 2.3: northwest corner of Palais Ideal (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 41) Photo: John Beardsley

logic of reality.

The founder of surrealism, Andre Breton, was aware of this surreal potential of visionary art environments from his experiences with the Palais Ideal (Figure 2.2). The Palais Ideal is a magical garden that was created by Ferdinand Cheval in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Breton and the surrealists admired Palais Ideal because they saw it as a three-dimensional realization of the surrealist aesthetic. It even inspired Breton's conception of convulsive beauty (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 29). The landscape gave Breton the erotic-like shudder that he demanded of art (Figure 2.3). The sculptures of the garden also have the dimension of the fixed-explosive that he saw as convulsive beauty. John Beardsley describes the "place as an image of frozen motion" (Gardens of Revelation 42). The sculpture's serpents, plants, and other elements convey the sense that they are alive with poised energy. The relationship of Breton and Palais Ideal establishes that a visionary art environment influenced surrealism. So while, surrealism did not influence the creation of these environments, one of these fantasy worlds did influence surrealism. Surrealism, in turn, is useful in understanding how these environments work.

The environments work by making visitors feel like they are entering another world. This is often signaled to visitors by a threshold. A transformation happens at this point and reality fades away and the fantasy world takes shape. Oftentimes this threshold is a physical gateway. This is illustrated in Figure 2.4 where Sam Rodia, the man who built Watts Towers, is pictured standing in the threshold of his remarkable creation. In other cases the threshold is not demarcated by a structure, but occurs at an unmarked point in the environment.



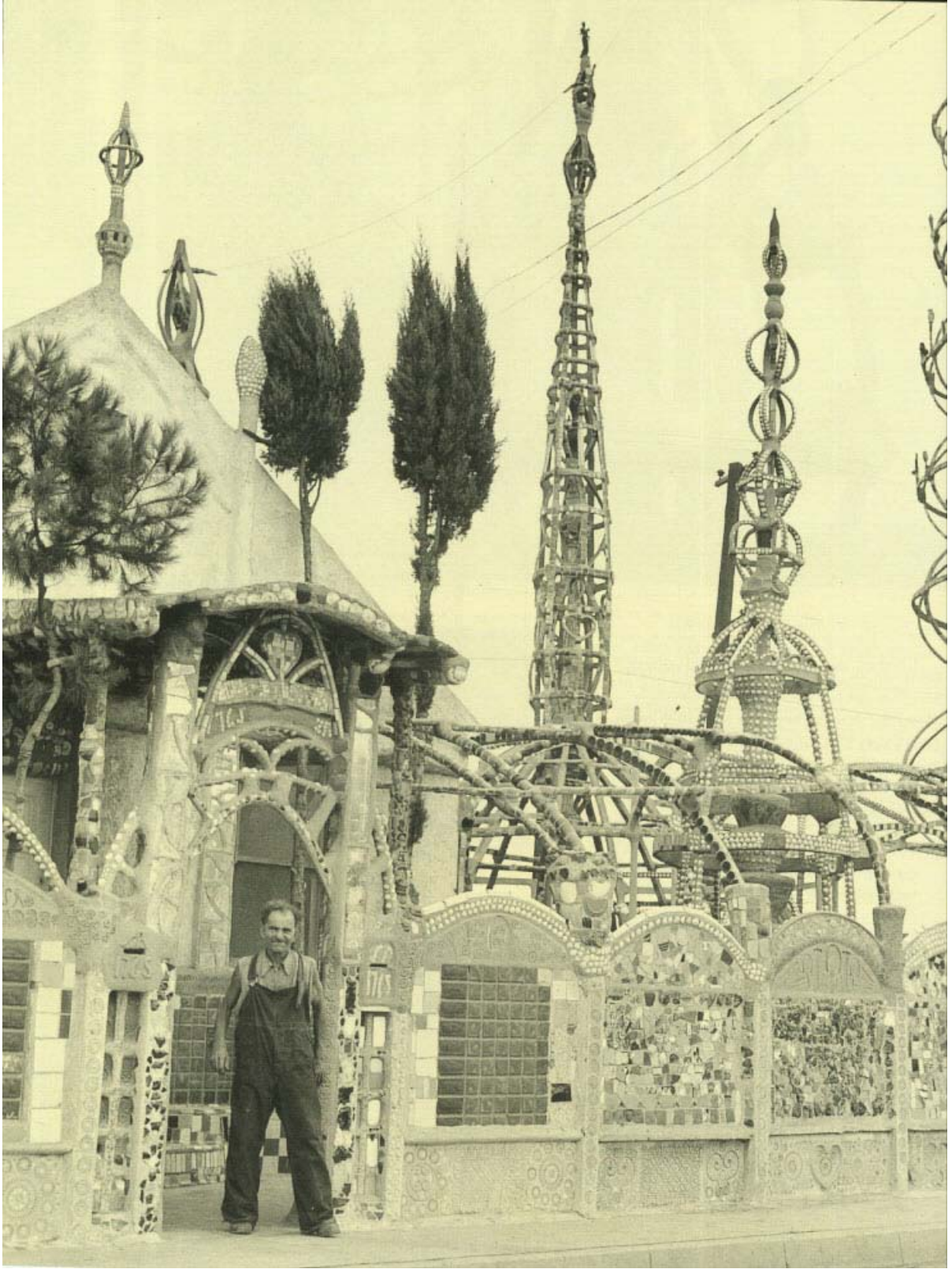


Figure 2.4: Sam Rodia at Gateway to Watts Towers, circa 1950, Los Angeles, CA, (Goldstone 24)



## Spatial Paradigms

This sense of being in a dream space is created through the use of garden forms that have an otherworldly quality, such as grottoes and labyrinths. A variety of structural devices strengthen the sense of being in a fantasy world: sudden changes of scale, the shrinking or enlargement of features, the replacement of the artificial for the real, the “combination of incongruous materials,” the juxtaposition of styles and modes, and the distortion of the ground plane (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 12). John Beardsley describes the effect of these techniques:

These structural devices are used in concert with spatial paradigms-grotto and maze- to provide rich visual and psychological effects. Together they render these environments perceptually and emotionally disorienting, challenging our assumptions about order (Gardens of Revelation 12).

The environments thus achieve what the surrealists termed *depaysement*, or disorientation of the senses. Visionary art environments employ some practices used in surrealist art, such as uncanny juxtaposition and transformation of the ordinary object. Other aspects of these environments are unique to these endeavors, such as the use of labyrinths and grottoes.

Grottoes, or artificial caverns, are ancient garden forms that were common in Renaissance gardens. They are used in both secular and sacred settings, and therefore have a variety of connotations. In religious gardens, they are replicas of the sacred cave of the Bible. Paul Dobberstein’s Grotto of the Redemption represents this form of the grotto (Figure 2.5). In other settings, grottoes evoke the marvels of creation, through the presentation of a dazzling array of sculpted animals and geologic wonders, such as The Grotto of the Animals at the Villa Medici at Castello (Figure 2.6). What visitors to these diverse grottoes share is the experience of sensual disorientation. First, the dark cavern



Figure 2.5: Grotto of the Redemption, West Bend, Iowa, begun 1912, Paul Dobberstein (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 109) Photo: John Beardsley



Figure 2.6: The Grotto of the Animals, at Villa Medici, Castello, Italy, mid 1500's, (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 113) Photo: Ralph Lieberman

separates visitors from the reality of the outside environment and then as their eyes adjust to the dim light they perceive the elaborate walls and ceilings. An overwhelming array of crystals and sculptures cover the surfaces of grottoes. This otherworldly character of grottoes is the reason why they are used to escape reality. Naomi Miller posits that

withdrawal into this illusory realm [of grottoes], into this world of fantasy implies a communion, not with the outside world of nature still dominant in the garden, but here within the enclosed orbit of the grotto, with the inner world of man (11).

This contemplative aspect of grottoes is why they are appropriate for visionary environments. In a grotto, one can escape the outside world and explore the unconscious, the place where the surrealist believed revelation can be found.

Labyrinths are another garden form that is conducive to meditation and revelation. Labyrinths, like grottoes, are ancient forms that are not completely decipherable in a glance. The only way to discern the form of a labyrinth is by viewing it from above. Since they are normally viewed from the ground, labyrinths remain a mystery that must be discovered by a meditative walking. It is this mysterious quality of labyrinths that makes them so appealing. When labyrinths are used in surreal landscapes they do not assume the classical form of a unicursal path that leads to a single destination. The destination of a labyrinth in a surreal landscape is ultimately the visitor's unconscious mind. It is in the meandering through the labyrinth that revelation occurs. Figure 2.7, a plan view of Sam Rodia's Watt's Towers, illustrates the use of the labyrinth form in a surreal landscape (Figure 2.8).

Watt's Towers also exhibits another spatial paradigm common in surreal landscapes, the walled garden. Walled gardens, or *hortus conclusus*, are another old garden form. They are found in a wide range of cultures; including Persian Paradise



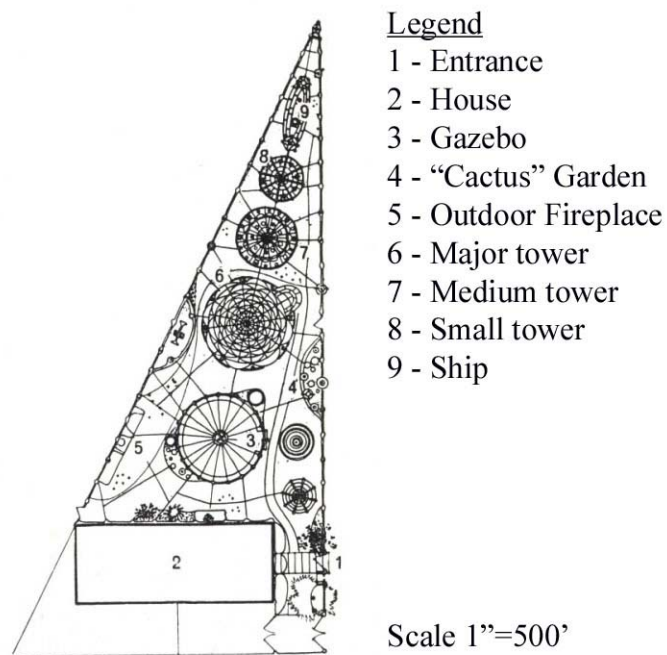


Figure 2.7: Plan view of Watts Towers, (Conrads and Sperlich 42)



Figure 2.8: Gazebo of Watts Towers, Los Angeles, CA, (1921-1955), Sam Rodia (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 162)

gardens, Japanese Zen gardens and medieval monasteries. In all of these settings the walls surrounding the garden separate visitors from the reality outside and create a space for contemplation. It is this ability to distance visitors from the outside world that makes walled gardens well suited for surreal landscapes. With the reality outside the walls suppressed, a fantasy world can be created within the walls.

Temples are an architectural form that frequently appears in surreal landscapes. These temples take on the form of a variety of shapes – from Japanese pagodas to Hindu temples and gothic cathedrals. These temples are usually derivations from these forms rather than replications of traditional forms. Moreover, these temples often combine multiple forms within the same structure, as is exhibited in the Palais Ideal (Figure 2.2). Regardless of the form these temples take, they all conjure associations with the supernatural in visitors. They create a space in which visitors feel like they are set apart from daily life. It is this distancing from reality that makes temples appropriate for surreal landscapes.

### Structural Devices

These four spatial paradigms (grotto, labyrinth, walled garden, and temple) are complemented by a range of structural devices in surreal landscapes. Miniaturization is one way a surreal effect can be created. Joseph Zoetl's Ave Maria Grotto, which includes a collection of replicas of Christian shrines, exhibits this shrinking of reality (Figure 2.9). Visitors to these miniature worlds feel like Jonathan Swift's Gulliver in Lilliputia. The hyper-enlargement of landscape features has an equally disorienting effect on visitors. This over sizing is evident in Raymond Morale's sculpture garden (Figure 2.10). The towering sculptures of rusting metal in this landscape loom over





Figure 2.9: Ave Maria Grotto, Cullman, Alabama, (1932-1961), Joseph Zoetl (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 100)



Figure 2.10: Raymond Morale's Le-Park Exposition, Port de Bouc, France, (1982-present) (Schaewen 57) Photo: Deidi von Schaewen

visitors (Schaewen 56). Another technique used in surreal landscapes that is related to these size changes is abrupt shifts of scale. The Grotto of the Redemption illustrates this phenomenon (Figure 2.11). Here a miniaturized “river” of minerals lies next to a normal sized grotto.

Contrast is another technique used in these landscapes. This includes the aforementioned size contrasts, as well as the juxtaposition of styles and materials. Ferdinand Cheval’s Palais Ideal is a classic example of juxtaposition of styles and forms (Figure 2.2). Here Hindu-inspired temples clash with medieval castles, mosques, and Egyptian temples. The forms are “quoted and arranged without grammar or syntax: a creation arises from such a logic of form as is ordinarily found only in dreams” (Conrads and Sperlich 30). This uncanny juxtaposition is a technique that was also utilized by surrealist artists and poets. This uncanny juxtaposition can also occur through the placement of objects in unexpected locations, such as the aerial train in a sculpture called The Cyclop (Figure 2.12). The train’s bizarre location challenges visitor’s conception of order. This echoes the illogical placement of objects in surrealist paintings.

This juxtaposition also occurs through the “combination of incongruous materials” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 12). In Tressa Prisbery’s Bottle Village, for example, blue bottles are used as “flowers” in a planting bed made of automobile headlights (Figure 2.13). This example illustrates two other surrealist traits, the transformation of the found object and the substitution of the artificial for the real.

At the Sacred Grove of Bomarzo, visitor’s senses are deliberately confused by a leaning house which appears to have toppled into the hillside from sinking earth (Figure 2.14). In reality, the house was deliberately built to appear like a ruin. It is a playful



Figure 2.11: River of the Water of Life, Grotto of the Redemption, West Bend Iowa, Paul Dobberstein (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 113)



Figure 2.12: The Cyclop, Milly-la-Forêt, France, 1969, Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle (Schaewen 27) Photo: Deidi von Schaewen





Figure 2.13: Bottle Village, Simi Valley, California, (late 1950's-1960's), Tressa Prisbery, (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 13)

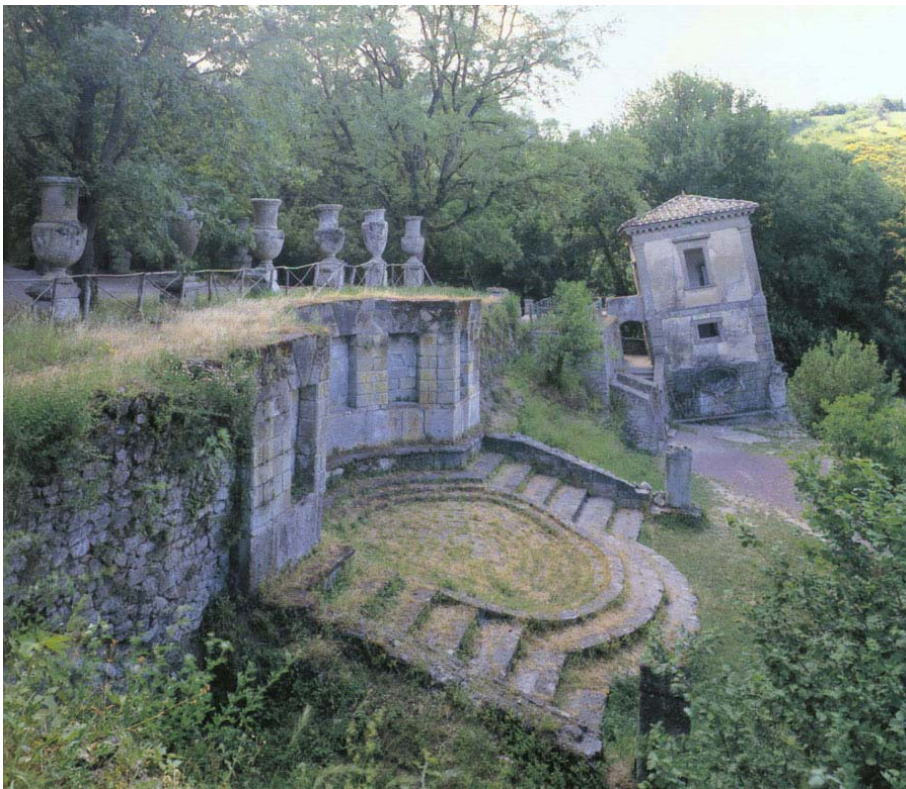


Figure 2.14: Leaning House, Sacred Grove of Bomarzo (Lazzaro 141) Photo: Ralph Lieberman

trick to bewilder visitors. One visitor described the disorientating experience of this house:

the floors and walls seem to be frozen in the moment of collapse...the sloping angle creates an undertow which sends everything –including one’s internal equilibrium – reeling” (Enge and Schroer 76).

This distortion of the ground plane is a device that is found in surreal landscapes.

### Types of Surreal Landscapes

Visionary art environments are not the only examples of surreal landscapes. There are some professionally designed landscapes that have surreal qualities. Theme parks like Disneyland may fall within this category. Visitors to theme parks like Disneyland do feel like they are entering another reality. Furthermore, these parks indulge in fantasy and transformation of reality, themes which resonate with surrealism. However, there are several reasons why most theme parks should not be considered examples of surreal landscapes. For a start, there are the aesthetic and moral constraints within theme parks. Theme parks offer an escape to what John Beardsley calls a “nostalgic past or a sanitized future” (Gardens of Revelation 19). In Disneyland’s Frontierland or Tomorrowland there is a sense of being in a simulation of reality that has been cleaned of all “awkward subjects” such as, “sexuality and death” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 21). This white bread, puritanical vision of reality does not correspond to the honest, erotic and shocking visions of surrealism. In addition, the aim of theme parks is to take the money of visitors, not to offer them revelation. Theme parks attempt to control the imagination of visitors, by offering limited visions of a sanitized past or future. In contrast, models of landscape surrealism “provoke and free the imagination rather than control it” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 21). This

element of revelation is the key difference between surrealism and sheer fantasy. The revelations that visionary art environments provide are unique to each individual. This is due to the idiosyncratic nature of these environments. They are the product of one person's unique vision of the world, and therefore present more personal revelations. In contrast, any insights offered by theme parks are shared by all visitors. Theme parks are designed for mass market appeal, and therefore lead to bland, general insights.

The sense of being in a dream space is created through the use of both spatial paradigms and structural devices. The following list summarizes these elements of surreal landscapes:

#### Elements of Surreal Landscapes

Forms : labyrinth

grotto

walled garden

temple

Structural devices: miniaturization and gigantism

abrupt shifts of scale

juxtaposition of styles and forms

combination of incongruous materials

substitution of the artificial for the real

distortion of the ground plane

Every surreal landscape does not exhibit all of these attributes. Each creator has their own way of taking people into their dream worlds. The designers of surreal landscapes lead their visitors on different paths to their fantasy worlds. All of these paths, however,

have a similar destination – a surreal world that offers revelations to visitors. It is this element of revelation that connects these landscapes with surrealism. These landscapes are often created without the guidance of surrealism. Even though the architects of these landscapes are not aware of surrealism, they created surreal worlds. This phenomenon provides support for Marcel Brion's assertion that there is a "...biological or social anchor for surrealism" (Gersham 27). The creators of these fantasy worlds expressed their unique visions to the world and allowed us to step into their gardens. Within these spaces we can experience the powerful imaginations of these artists.

### CHAPTER 3

#### SURREALISM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

When Surrealism met with landscape architecture it followed two paths, one path that lead into the profession and one that rarely enters the field. The current that flowed into the field carried the biomorphic forms of abstract surrealism. These forms have had a significant influence on the profession, especially in Modernist landscapes. The other current that has circulated around the profession contains the philosophy of Surrealism. The reasons these ideas have had little impact on landscape architecture will be explored in this chapter.

Surrealism has had a strong influence on our environment through the use of biomorphic shapes in design fields. Biomorphic shapes, such as the kidney, amoeba and boomerang, often appeared in the art of surrealists like Hans (or Jean) Arp and Joan Miro (See Figure 3.1 and 3.2 respectively). After World War II, these shapes became common in the design of textiles, furniture, curtains, and landscape designs (Treib 50). Critics such as Marc Treib and Catherine Howett cite surrealism as the source of these shapes (Howett 32). These forms translated well into the landscape because they resembled the shapes of land and water forms. The free form curves of these shapes echo those that appear in nature. For this reason, shapes like the amoeba became popular among designers because they appeared “natural.” These biomorphic shapes expanded the palette of forms for designers. The new shapes appeared most often in plan view, as masses of shrubs, lawns, pools, and flower beds (Treib 53). Artistic landscape designers



Figure 3.1: Dancer, Hans (or Jean) Arp, 1925, (Passeron 77) by AKG Photos

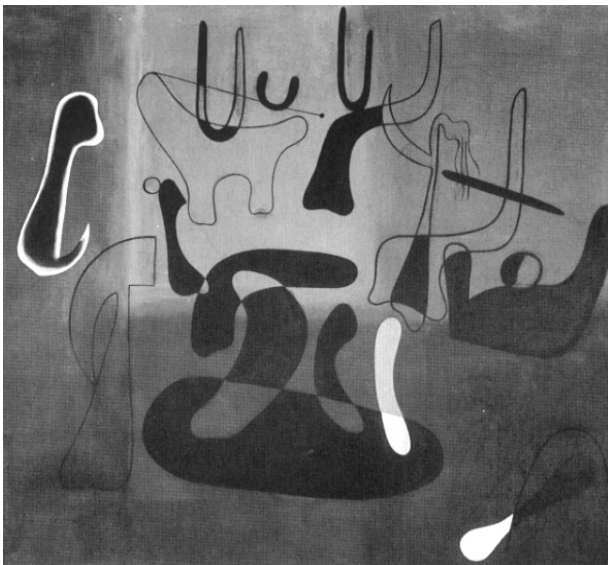


Figure 3.2: Painting, Joan Miro, 1933 (Treib 50)

like Roberto Burle Marx and Isamo Noguchi were some of the first designers to utilize these biomorphic forms. In designs such as Marx's Odette Monteiro Residence and Noguchi's Contoured Playground these free flowing curves are clearly evident (Figures 3.3 and 3.4 respectively). The kidney, boomerang, and amoeba soon appeared in the





Figure 3.3: Odette Monteiro Residence, 1948, Roberto Burle Marx (Rizzo 65)

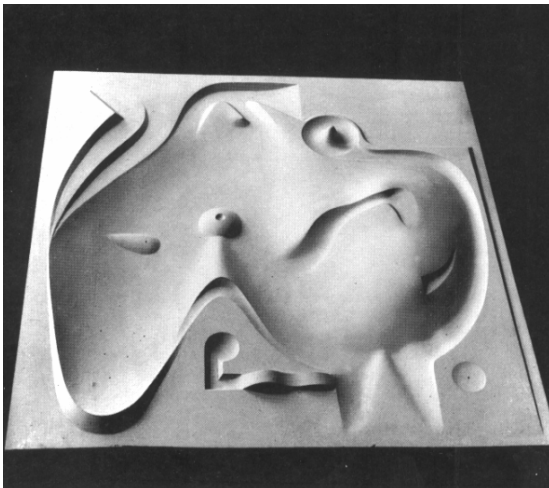


Figure 3.4: Contoured Playground, Isamu Noguchi, 1941 (Treib 52)

Figure 3.5: Kaiser Center Roof Garden, Osmundson and Staley, 1960 (Treib 52)  
Photograph by Bill Wasson

work of more mainstream landscape architects. The widespread acceptance of the biomorphic curve is evident in Osmundson and Staley's design of the Kaiser Roof

Garden in 1960 (Figure 3.5). The prevalence of kidney shaped pools illustrates just how far these biomorphic shapes permeated Western culture (Treib 53).

These examples show how the forms, but not the ideas of surrealism were adopted by modern landscape architects. There are several reasons why surrealist techniques, aesthetics, and philosophy had limited influence of landscape architecture. The high degree of technical knowledge within landscape architecture seems to preclude the use of the surrealist technique of automatism. In other words, landscape architects can not directly tap into the unconscious because rational thoughts about engineering and construction interfere. Landscape architecture entails “rational control of the design process” (Gersham 32). This rational control is likely to filter inspiration from the unconscious of the designer. The wild, imaginative ideas from the unconscious may appear early in the design process, but they are often diluted by functional, financial, and aesthetic concerns in final designs.

While surrealist methods of production, such as automatism, have limited application in landscape architecture, landscape architects could still design landscapes that have a surreal effect. Why have so few landscape architects designed surreal landscapes? This is due, in part to the innate conservatism of the field. Like its sister profession of architecture, landscape design is usually behind developments in the visual arts. The reason for this conservatism is that landscape architects are not “taste makers.” They rarely come up with new artistic ideas for the public to digest and debate. Rather, landscape architects respond to the established aesthetics and morals of the public. This is due to the client driven nature of the profession. Unlike visual artists, who often create artworks and then find a buyer, modern landscape architects respond to the specific



desires of a client. During the Country Place era in the early 1900's landscape architects had more freedom for artistic statements. Fletcher Steele's Naumkeg, for example, exhibits a degree of whimsy and artistic innovation that would be frowned upon in most modern landscape designs. The profession's conservatism is also due to the public nature of many projects. The design process for public spaces usually requires a great deal of input from the public, with all of the varied opinions within the public. In order to satisfy these diverse constituents, "middle of the road" designs usually are produced.

Another challenge to producing a surreal landscape is the nature of the media with which landscape architects design. While metal, concrete, and other materials can be transformed into bizarre forms, plants and trees usually assume conventional shapes. With intensive pruning techniques plants can be distorted into topiaries, but in general plants conform to reality. As plants are a principal media landscape architects work with, this limitation hinders the transformation of landscapes. Geoffrey Jellicoe alluded to this challenge in the following quote:

He [the landscape architect] cannot be abstract only, because unlike paint and canvas his materials are real and constantly changing, and his design must be utilitarian and serve a purpose in daily life (93).

These utilitarian demands that are made of landscape designs highlights another important reason why landscape architects have not delved into surrealism. This concern for satisfying social and functional needs precludes much emphasis on the psychological or revelatory interests of surrealism. Landscape architects have historically been concerned with solving society's problems, not expressing themselves. This implicit social purpose is what distinguishes landscape architecture from fine arts like painting or sculpture. Creations in these fields rarely have to satisfy functional or social needs, they

simply can exist as art for art's sake. This is not to say that the fine arts do not respond to social issues, for art does fulfill a social need when it creates a dialogue about an issue. However, fine arts, unlike landscape architecture, do not imply social purpose by definition. In landscape architecture, the artful landscape must also be functional. This value placed on functional concerns was evident in the storm of controversy that erupted when Martha Schwartz created the Bagel Garden (Figure 3.6). The seemingly innocuous placement of lacquered bagels in a boxwood garden attracted the attention of the profession. The debate over the Bagel Garden, and other landscapes with a focus on art,



Figure 3.6: Bagel Garden, Martha Schwartz, 1979, Boston, MA, (Landecker 4)  
by Alan Ward

demonstrates the widespread skepticism of art within the landscape within landscape architecture.

These functional and social requirements make landscape architecture incompatible with Andre Breton's definition of surrealism as "dictation by the mind unhampered by conscious control and having no aesthetic or moral goals" (Manifestoes of Surrealism 26). Given this definition a surreal landscape can not fulfill social, functional, moral, or aesthetic goals. This definition of landscape surrealism is too restrictive, but it does highlight the conflicts within landscape surrealism. Designing a surreal landscape entails putting more emphasis on the psychological and revelatory attributes of a space than on functional, aesthetic, or social concerns. This makes surrealism an uneasy fit within the traditional mold of landscape architecture.

A final reason why landscape surrealism has not been practiced by landscape architects is the dominance of picturesque and formal aesthetics within the profession. Since the beginnings of the profession, landscape architects have been under the spell of either Renaissance formalism or English picturesque landscapes. Attempts have certainly been made to redefine the landscape, but what has remained is the concern for creating spaces that sooth the mind or provide order. There is little room for Breton's notions of convulsive beauty, of landscapes that confront and shock viewers. This reluctance to shock people in the landscape, is perhaps with good reason. Most people do not want to experience landscapes that shock them into another reality. Rather, they want the experience of landscape to ground them to the eternal reality of the natural world. This is indicated by the phenomenon of people walking in a garden or a hiking trail as an escape from the stresses of daily life. We value gardens and landscapes as places to soothe and

relax, not to shock and offer revelation of the unconscious mind. In addition, the appeal of the shock value of surrealism can quickly wear off. Many critics have pointed to this as a limitation of surrealism. A landscape must be able to stand the test of time; it must offer multiple layers of meaning that can be experienced again and again. This demand is also made of sculpture and paintings, but landscapes are lived in and can not be as easily replaced when their appeal wears off. Thus, a surreal landscape must be more than a weird novelty with limited appeal.

The controversy over Richard Serra's Tilted Arc demonstrated the need for landscapes to be able to speak on multiple levels (Figure 3.7). In 1981 Serra installed a 120 foot long and 12 foot high steel plate wall in Jacob Javits plaza in New York City. Serra stated that he wanted "to dislocate or alter the decorative function of the plaza and actively bring people into the sculpture's context" (Beardsley, Earthworks and Beyond 128). He achieved this by dominating the public plaza with a massive curving wall. The sculpture was a powerful confrontation for visitors. It was a "critique of modernist architecture and an expression of alienation" (Landecker 109). Serra was working in the realm of phenomenology and Earth Art, not surrealism. However, Tilted Arc's aesthetics of confrontation does relate to surrealism. Like surreal art, it attempted to dislocate viewers from their surroundings. Generally, public reaction was negative and after much controversy it was removed in 1987 (Beardsley, Earthworks and Beyond 128). Serra took over the public realm and dominated it with his vision. When individuals encountered this sculpture they didn't have a choice about confronting the work. In contrast to a gallery exhibition where viewers can choose whether or not to experience artwork, public art demands engagement. In a similar way, landscapes demand the

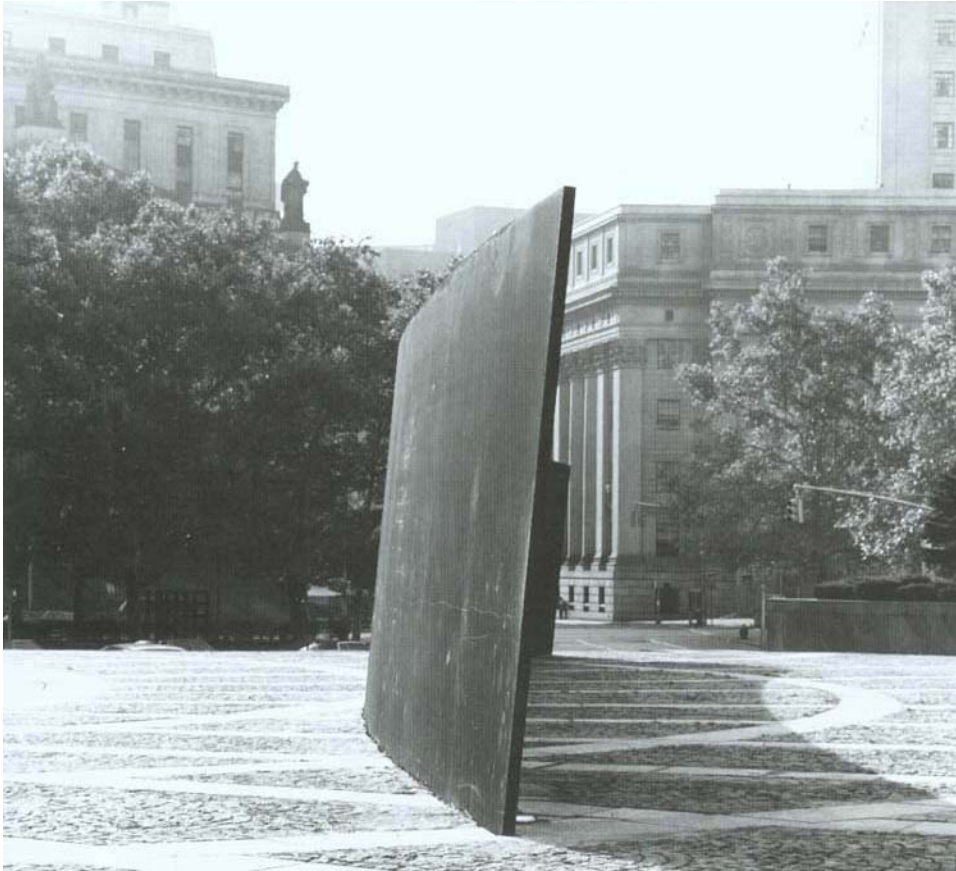


Figure 3.7: Tilted Arc, Richard Serra, New York City, (Beardsley, Earthworks and Beyond 128)

involvement of visitors. In a public space there is little room for confrontation because this would dominate the experience of the environment. This is why in most public spaces designers must offer visitors a choice of responses. There is little room for the unfettered expression of their ideas.

In summary, there are several reasons why surrealism's ideas had limited influence on landscape architecture: the field's conservatism due to client driven projects, the challenges of distorting forms using the medium of plants, the profession's focus on social and functional concerns, and the incompatibility of a surrealist shock aesthetic with our notions of landscapes. Given these challenges, it is not surprising that only the forms and not the ideas of surrealism had a strong influence on the profession.

## CHAPTER 4

### MODERN LANDSCAPES WITH SURREAL ELEMENTS

This chapter is a whirlwind tour that starts in a French Modernist garden and ends up in Manhattan. Along the way an English manor and an American rooftop garden are visited. What links these diverse landscapes are their shared surrealist sensibilities. None of these gardens were designed by avowed surrealists. Most of them were not even designed with Surrealism in mind. Influences for these landscapes range from Cubism to Postmodernism. Nevertheless, these landscapes still exhibit surreal tendencies. A surreal landscape can be created without knowledge of surrealism. All it takes is a designer who expresses a vision in reality. When this vision does not conform to rational thought then this landscape can be called surreal.

#### Garden for Modern Living

The 1925 International Exposition of the Decorative Arts and Modern Industries in Paris France was included an experiment in garden forms. Organizer J.C.N Forestier challenged designers to “redefine the concept of the garden” (Imbert 27). Jan and Joel Martel along with Robert Mallet Stevens answered the call with an experiment in the contemporary construction medium of concrete (Figure 4.5). The presence of utilities and rail lines underground and a summer planting time limited their ability to use trees on the site. Given these restraints they came up with the novel idea of using concrete trees. The four trees were created by attaching planes of cement at 45 degree angles to a cruciform trunk. The sculptures were not exact copies of trees because the masses



suggested rather than mimicked living foliage (Imbert 4). The trees were located in two raised planters with “positive and negative planes of lawn and flower beds” (Imbert 38). The overall effect of the design was a rigid Modernist composition of straight lines and precise volumes. The abstracted planes of the concrete trees reveal the influence of Cubism in this garden.

The Exposition audience was puzzled and amused by the concrete trees. One visitor commented that the “concrete trees planted around craters formed by artillery shells represented a landscape from an extra-planetary world” (Imbert 38). While this garden may not seem radical from a contemporary perspective, its imaginative transformation of concrete was innovative at the time.

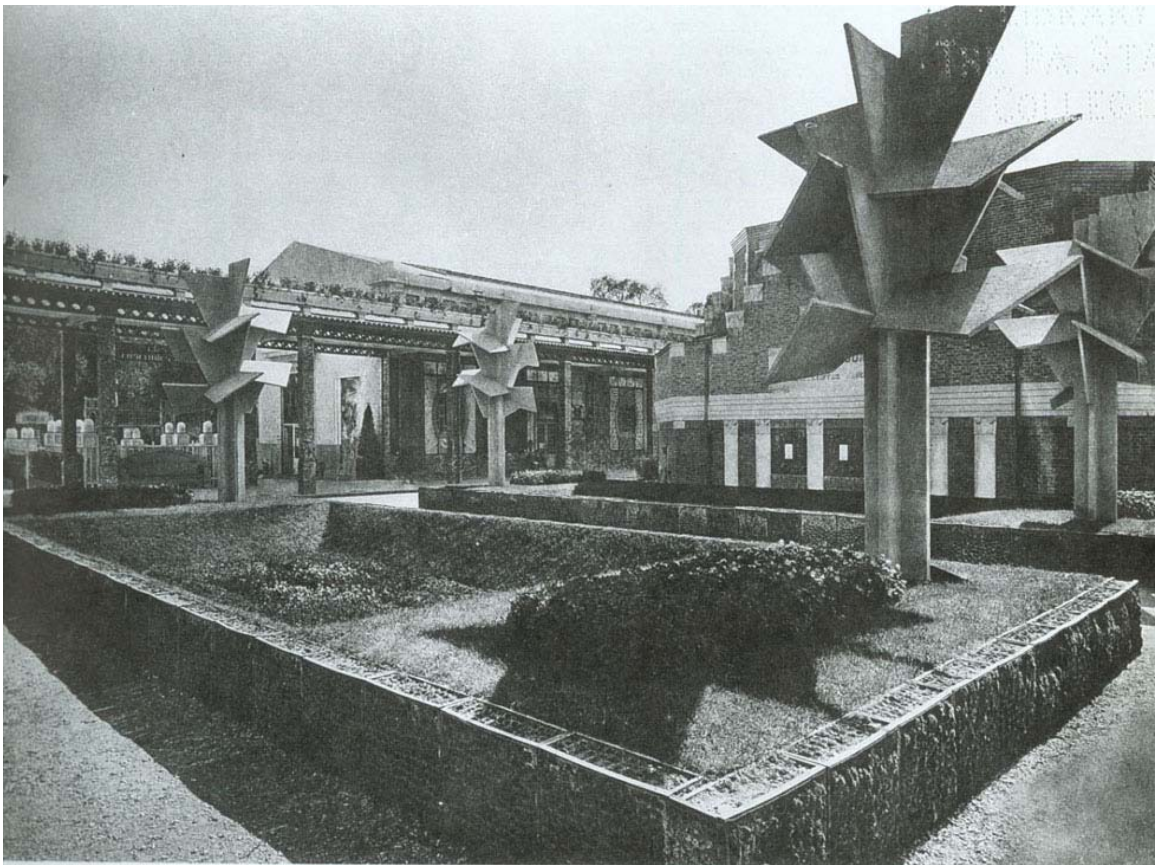


Figure 4.5: Garden for Modern Living, Robert Mallet Stevens, Jan and Joel Martel, 1925 (Imbert 39)

## Sutton Place

Near the end of his career Geoffrey Jellicoe was ruminating about how he could “put the mind of the modern man, including the subconscious into the landscape, how to put an invisible world into a visible world” (Lambert 113). In 1980 he was able to realize this vision at Stanley Seeger’s home in Guildford Surrey. On the surface Sutton Place’s landscape appears to be a classical garden. Jellicoe developed strong symmetrical axes in the layout with a series of garden rooms within the long walk. Jellicoe’s intent was that as visitor’s strolled these spaces they would discover behind the “seductive delights” of each part “an idea that reflects...either a darker or lighter mood of the subconscious” (Spens 161). At the south end of a “sensible” long walk through



Figure 4.6: Magritte Walk – Sutton Place, 1981, Geoffrey Jellicoe (Lambert 117) Photo: Derry Moore



the garden, visitors encounter a garden that appeals to the darker side of the subconscious (Spens 162).

Here five enormous urns “line a grand avenue that leads not to a suitably grand climax, but only to a square hole in the wall, framing a view of a magnolia” (Lambert 116). This is the Magritte Walk, Jellicoe’s homage to the surrealist painter Rene Magritte (Figure 4.6). The oversized urns undermine rational measures of proportion and disorient visitors. Jellicoe remarked that “any true-blue architect who sees these proportions is furious. They’re enough to put anyone’s mind into a chaotic condition, and that’s deliberate” (Lambert 116). This disorientation is countered by the next thing visitors experience, a calm Ben Nicholson wall (Figure 4.7). The design thus disturbs visitors



Figure 4.7: Ben Nicholson wall of 1981 - Sutton Place (Spens 159) Photo: Derry Moore

with the imposing Magritte Walk and then soothes them with a tranquil sculpture. While Jellicoe’s foray into surrealism is rather tame, it does represent an explicit link with the field of landscape architecture. At Sutton Place, Jellicoe asks a significant question: how

do you make the invisible world of the subconscious visible? While he may not have fully realized the answer, he should be commended for trying.

### Splice Garden

When visitors gaze out the window of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical research in Cambridge, Massachusetts they behold a surreal spectacle (Figure 4.8). A plastic topiary boxwood shrub projects out of a wall, a plastic flower perches on top of a wall, and Astroturf leaps from the floor to the wall (Landecker 9). On one side of the garden is a Japanese Zen garden, of a sort, that is “apparently tended by a highly mischievous monk” (Johnson 100). The typical white pebbles and moss covered stones have been replaced by green aquarium gravel and plastic topiary (Figure 4.9). The gravel is raked into patterns that accentuate the topiary shrubs and the triangular layout of the garden. The Zen garden contains the traditional elements, but everything is askew. This is what makes the garden so disorienting. On one level it conforms to reality, but on another level it does not. Adjoining this space is a French Renaissance garden with

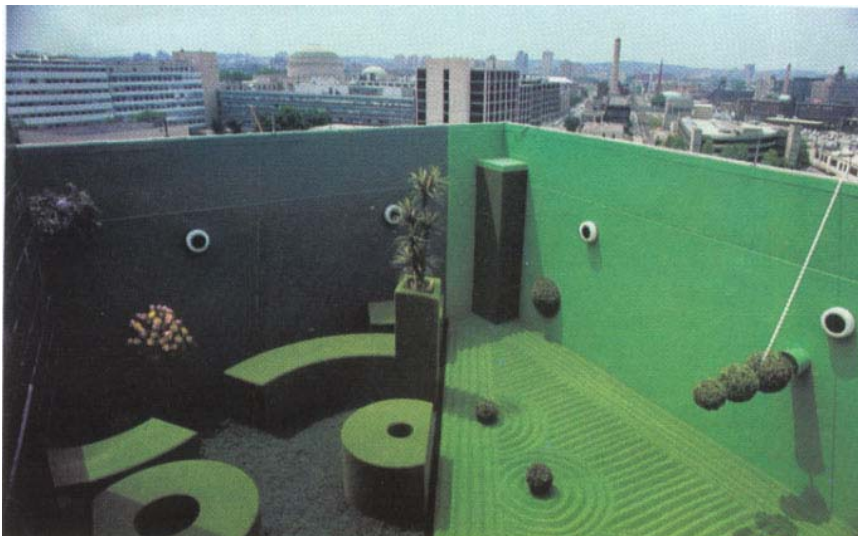


Figure 4.8: overhead view of Splice Garden, 1986, Cambridge, MA, Martha Schwartz (Johnson 100) Photo: Alan Ward

Astroturf hedge that double as seating benches. Plastic plants from every climate sprout from odd locations. Fake ferns, bougainvilleas, tulips, and birds-of-paradise are all jumbled together. The colors of the ground plane are carried on to the walls, so that the distinction between horizontal and vertical is blurred. The laws of reason are subverted in this wacky iridescent green garden. Fake plants are substituted for real ones, plants assume odd locations, garden forms are parodied and juxtaposed, and the ground plane is distorted.

All of these distortions are the work of landscape architect Martha Schwartz. In 1986, she was challenged to transform a 25x30 foot rooftop deck into a garden. A host of obstacles stood in her way: the roof could not support soil; there was no water source, no maintenance staff, and a low budget. She rose to the challenge and produced a design that is both fun and thought-provoking.

On one level the Splice Garden is a playful parody of garden forms. She satirizes the “meticulous pruning of Japanese gardeners with the lifeless perfection of plastic topiary shrubs” (Johnson 101). In the French garden she pokes fun at the artificiality of Renaissance gardens by combining fake plants from all over the world. Behind this play, Schwartz posed serious questions about the relevance of these garden forms in our time and culture. She asks what do Japanese Zen gardens and formal French gardens say to us? By juxtaposing these unrelated forms she highlights our cultures “uncritical acceptance of past forms and precedents for our gardens and our lives” (Johnson 103). The design also engages the scientists who view it from the nearby lounge. The garden is actually two gardens that have been spliced together along a distinct line that divides the space (Landecker 115). Two garden forms from radically different cultures are joined

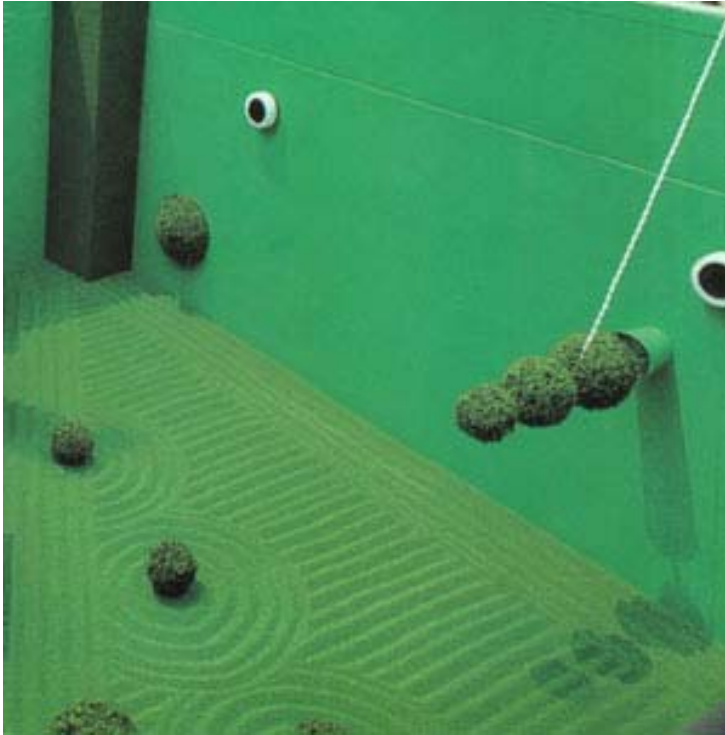


Figure 4.9: Zen garden, Splice Garden, Martha Schwartz  
(Landecker 17) Photo: Alan Ward



Figure 4.10: French Renaissance garden, Splice Garden, Martha Schwartz  
(Landecker 16) Photo: Alan Ward

together like Siamese twins (Figure 4.11). The design “reinforces our perception of this splice by the use of solids and voids” (Johnson 103). The French side is a place where people can sit and interact, while the Zen garden is a void that is viewed but not entered. These devices combine to create a monster – a hybrid Japanese Zen/ French Renaissance garden. The garden asks the scientists, are you producing a monster when you manipulate genes? It is an allegory about the “dangers inherent in gene splicing” (Landecker 115).



Figure 4.11: the splice, Splice Garden, Martha Schwartz  
(Landecker 18) Photo: Alan Ward

The Splice Garden thus answers Paul Klee's maxim that art should make the invisible visible (Johnson 103). Schwartz works within the tradition of the surrealists by confronting viewers with shocking visions with the goal of eliciting revelation. The garden's fake plants, distorted ground plane, and uncanny juxtapositions takes visitors into a surreal world. However, Schwartz's aim is not just a fantasy trip; she seeks to offer insights to visitors. In a similar way that Marcel Duchamp strove "to put painting once again at the service of the mind," Schwartz attempts to put landscape design at the service of the mind (Johnson 101). In other words, she tries to engage the mind as well as the senses in the Splice Garden.

### Irish Hunger Memorial

What if a quarter acre of a rural Irish hillside was placed on top of a spaceship and then landed in Manhattan? While this sounds like a premise for a bad science fiction movie, it appears to have happened in Battery Park City in Lower Manhattan. In the midst of this urban landscape a slice of pastoral Ireland circa 1850 has been recreated. From the concrete sidewalk of Manhattan one can step into another time and place complete with an abandoned stone cottage, stone walls, fallow potato fields, and the flora of the North Connaught wetlands. A packed earth path winds up a slope to offer sweeping views of the New York Harbor (Figure 4.12). The surreal experience of being in this rural Irish landscape is heightened by the surrounding modern buildings that tower overhead. The juxtaposition of urban and rural is continued when visitors step through a threshold and enter a tunnel beneath the faux Irish landscape. Suddenly one encounters a modern memorial with crisp lines of glass and marble. Bands of lighted text describe the horror of famines in Ireland and elsewhere (Figure 4.13).





Figure 4.12: aerial view of Irish Hunger Memorial, 2002, Brian Tolle (Kay 115)

The Irish Hunger Memorial is the design of artist Brian Tolle, landscape architect Gail Wittwer-Laird and architect Juergen Rielm. The design's intent is to memorialize the Irish potato famine (1845-1852) and the suffering of famine victims all over the world. It is a living memorial that is designed to change over time. In bands around the memorial, silk screen text is inscribed on bands of resin. These poems, quotations, and descriptions will be updated to reflect new tragedies. The designer explains that he wanted the text to be able to change "to match the times its viewers are living in" (Kay 103). The memorial seeks to inspire change, to make people realize that the problems which caused the Irish potato famine still haunt us today.

The memorial accomplishes this goal of revelation by confronting visitors with a striking vision. The monument clashes both with its bland urban context and within itself. The memorial has a “split personality presence –a tourist’s mini-Ireland to the east; a monumental structure to the west” (Kay 114). It is both an imposing modernist structure and a theme park-like fantasy land. One critic derisively declared that it’s “Chandigarh [Le Corbusier’s modernist city] meets ye ole putt-putt mini golf” (Nobel 82). Roberta Smith described it as a “...form of populist postmodernism – a combination of reality and simulacra, of high and low [culture], a layering of different



Figure 4.13: threshold of Irish Hunger Memorial, 2002, Brian Tolle (Kay cover)



historical periods and contrasting points of view,” as well as, “existing art styles- realism, conceptual art, and Earth art” (C5). Regardless if the labels of kitsch or populist postmodernism are applied to the memorial, the work demands the attention of visitors. It looms over the landscape with a sculptural presence. The concrete roof cantilevers twenty five feet over the sidewalk in a dramatic fashion (Figure 4.14). Some critics see



Figure 4.14: western view of Irish Hunger Memorial, 2002, Brian Tolle (Kay 116)

the memorial’s boldness as beneficial in that it “can grip the viewer with its combination of information and spatial experience” (Smith C5). Others complain that it is “unfriendly” and that it haunts the neighborhood with its bleak architecture and somber theme (Kay 114). Regardless of the criticism leveled at it, critic Jane Holtz Kay contends that it:

achieves originality, substance, and weight. A mini-journey to the past, as well as a script to the present; it offers far more than so many of today’s lackluster, artistically challenged memorials of all genres (115).

The memorial transforms an urban block into a relic of Ireland’s past. It challenges visitors with an aesthetic that echoes surrealism. Forms and styles are juxtaposed to disorient the viewer. However, this confrontation is not pointless. It is

done to shock people into thinking about the terrible problem of famine – both in the past and in the present. The memorial’s problems accentuate the difficulty in translating surrealism into the landscape. In a public setting, the shock aesthetic of surrealism alienates people. Critics have valid concerns when they complain that it is not a friendly public space. However, given the goal of public education, the memorial should not be “too easy on the eyes and mind” (Kay 114). The message of a conventional memorial could easily be lost in the hubbub of Manhattan’s streets. Instead, of fading in the background, the Irish Hunger Memorial creates a setting for people to experience this message. There is a place for landscapes that confront visitors and transport them to other times and places.

These four case studies (Garden for Modern Living, Sutton Place, Splice Garden, and the Irish Hunger Memorial) do not represent all of the professionally designed modern landscapes with surreal tendencies. Other landscapes that fall into this category include Antonio Gaudi’s Park Guell, Le Corbusier’s Beistegui Rooftop Garden, Isamo Noguchi’s California Scenario, and some of the work of SITE. However, these three examples do illustrate the wide range of contexts within which the ideas of surrealism have been used. These contexts include private residences, garden expositions, memorials, and enclosed gardens in semi-public spaces.

The common thread that connects these gardens is their openness to innovation. Garden expositions feature gardens designed to last short periods of time. These gardens allow for greater freedom of expression because few functional or social demands are made of them. Private residences and enclosed gardens (such as the Splice garden) also can allow for freedom of expression. In private residences, designers develop more

personal relationships with clients. There is room for the shock aesthetic of surrealism because the design only has to satisfy the wants and needs of one client. To a lesser extent, this is also the case in semi-public spaces such as the Splice Garden. In this case, the design primarily had to satisfy the desires of the director of the facility. The fact that this garden is enclosed by walls also makes it suitable for the expression of surrealism. The walls screen the garden from the view of people who do not want to experience it, and screen out the reality of the surrounding world. The debate over the Irish Hunger memorial demonstrates a typical reaction from the public when they don't have the choice of engaging with a landscape with which they are uncomfortable. In this case, the memorial is in a public location that people use often and this causes controversy. The Irish Hunger Memorial demonstrates that it is important for art in the landscape to satisfy multiple needs and speak to many different people. For this reason, surrealism is questionable in many of the contexts landscape architects work in.

## CHAPTER 5

### VISIONARY ART ENVIRONMENTS

The impulse to decorate one's home and mark it as a personal space is a primal urge. It is a practice that stretches back to Neolithic times, and is even found in other animals. Some individuals take this beyond simple painting and devote years to expressing themselves through their homes. Sometimes their obsession spills out into the landscape and they create fantasy worlds around their home. They seek

to leave a unique and undeniable mark in the world which reflects their own inner vision. It is an attempt to create a genuine alternative reality for themselves, their very own earthly paradise (Schaewen 10).

Four of these visionary art environments, Palais Ideal, Watts Towers, Las Pozas, and Pasaquan are the subject of this chapter. These four are only a sample of a phenomenon that is found all over the world in a variety of cultures. They only hint at the wide range of existing visionary art environments.

Many different labels are used to describe these environments; from folk, naïve, to outsider. Each of these terms raises problems. The commonly used label of folk is not appropriate because these environments are too individualistic to be linked with folk art, which is more rooted in tradition. Naïve has derogatory connotations, and outsider reinforces the marginal position of these artists in society (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 8). The term visionary best describes these environments. Miriam Staples explains that the

environments are called visionary because they are manifestations of the artists' private utopias, because of their imaginative nature, and because they portray visions of the unseen (50).

Into this stewpot of labels one more term could be used to describe these environments, surreal. This word is not used to establish an ideological relationship with surrealism. As discussed in Chapter Two, with the exception of Edward James, these artists were not aware of surrealism. Nor were they attempting to create a surreal landscape. However, as Edward James observed:

Great numbers of people are surrealist without ever having heard of surrealism...They are people who are close to their subconscious...who make the dream world more vivid (Edward James).

The creators of these environments certainly fit this description.

A question that often arises about these environments is why did the creators devote so much time to building them? Each individual has his own personal reasons, but there are some common motives that drive these visionary artists. These people often occupy a marginal position in society. This marginalization takes the form of economic, social, racial, or geographic isolation. Most of these individuals are poor and uneducated (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 11). In other cases, they are wealthy but are social outcasts, such as Edward James. For whatever reason, they often feel alienated from society. The environments are a means to prove to themselves and to society that they are worthwhile. They are a way for them to boost their self esteem and make a lasting mark on society. It is a way to be remembered. For example, Sam Rodia declared that he built the Watts Towers because he “wanted to do something big” (Goldstone 12). However, it is more than a desire to be famous that drives these individuals. In their marginal positions in society these individuals do not have “access to the

usual forums of public address” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 11). Their environments become a way for them to express themselves to the outside world. Through their gardens they are able to communicate ideas about the world and their place in it. This represents an old conception of a garden as a “place of inquiry and moral assertion” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 8). Historically a garden was not just a physical space, but also an “emotional, moral, and philosophical construct” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 8). The garden was more than a place to display plants or relax in. It was a place for a designer to express moral and spiritual themes. It is in this sense that the word garden is used to describe these environments. They certainly do not fit our traditional conception of a garden, because they often lack plants.

Within their environments these creators find solace and support for their identities. They are able to escape from a world in which they may feel isolated and find comfort in their gardens. Anna Wadsworth explains that “these are personal worlds, serene, perfect, ideal, offering an escape from the insecurity and confusion of the outside world” (12). The gardens are an effort to bring order to their lives and establish their place within the wider world.

The fact the creators of these environments are driven to devote so much of their lives to escaping their surroundings suggests that they are disillusioned with the modern world. The modern era has been a time of tremendous change and social upheaval. Established morals, family structures, religious beliefs, and traditions have been uprooted. Many of these changes have been made under the banner of modernism. The modernists attempted to “illuminate or improve the human condition” through critical

rationalism but in the process they “struck heavy blows at basic beliefs and values”

(Huxtable 101). Miriam Staples contends that

critical rationalism denied the intuitive, emotional, spiritual, and mythic element of human nature, and those people whose very existence seemed centered in the spiritual and mythical world were, in effect, victimized and alienated. One of the ways, then, to express or overcome this alienation would be to try to capture the forms of emotion, spirit, or intuition through art” (51).

In the case of these visionary artists this art took the form of built environments. The environments are a forum for expressing emotional, spiritual, and mythical themes that are discouraged by wider society.

This disillusionment with modern society felt by these individuals was paralleled by the attitude of the surrealists. The movement was born out of a disgust with the values and aims of modern society. Andre Breton explained that

in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only the facts relating directly to our experience (Manifestoes of Surrealism 9).

In place of rationalism the surrealists sought to express the emotional and mythical side of human nature through their art. There is an interesting parallel between the efforts of the surrealists and these visionary artists. Both felt out of touch with the modern world and expressed this disillusionment through their art.

These visionary art environments often do not fit our conceptions of good design and beauty. They usually have coarse, salvaged materials arranged in confusing ways. There is seldom “compositional hierarchy” in the design because every element is equally elaborate (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 11). Moreover, they rarely utilize rational Beaux arts organizing devices such as axes, or bilateral and radial symmetry. This leads to layouts that appear haphazard and unorganized. These characteristics mean that these



landscapes are not beautiful in the traditional sense. Given this, why are many people still attracted to these environments? Their honesty, testament to perseverance, and moral and spiritual themes certainly draw visitors. However, their most alluring quality is the sense they convey of being of another realm. The experience of being in one of these environments is overwhelming. The reality outside fades away and visitors become lost in the dream world of the environment's creator. The first stop on this tour of visionary art environments is an Italian Renaissance garden. The creator of this landscape, Vicino Orsini, does not fit the mold of the other visionary artists because he was a wealthy aristocrat. However, the garden shares many characteristics with these visionary art environments. It doesn't quite fit in a category as a professionally designed landscape or a visionary art environment. Nevertheless, it offers weird and wonderful visions to visitors that are worthwhile to explore.

#### The Sacred Grove of Bomarzo

You who go wandering about the world in search of sublime and awesome wonders, come here where horrendous faces, elephants, bears, ogres, and dragons are to be seen (Agnelli 54).

An inscription at the entrance to the Sacred Grove of Bomarzo intones this ominous message. Beholders of this sculpture garden in a rugged valley of Italy do indeed find awe-inspiring marvels. Mythical beasts and giant animals are all brought to life in stone in this garden. This phantasmagorical landscape was built for Vicino Orsini between 1552 and 1585. The gardens were inspired by Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, a book written by a Francesco Colonna that recounted dreams. The author describes dream-like gardens with ingenious artifacts and odd architectural embellishments. This dream like quality was translated into the gardens of Bomarzo. The gardens extravagant

fountains and sculptures attracted legions of admirers during the Renaissance, but over time its fountains dried up and the sculptures were overgrown with vegetation. It lay largely forgotten for two centuries until its “surreal charm was discovered by artists like Salvador Dali” (Enge and Schroer 76). When Dali visited the gardens in 1949 he was captivated by this world of monsters. He drew attention to Bomarzo and soon the public rediscovered the grotesque visions of Orsini. The gardens have recently been restored and continue to enchant visitors.

This magical garden enchants visitors through its playful surprises and its masterful craftsmanship. The sculptures were all carved from boulders existing in the garden, so the resulting arrangement is not symmetrical. Unlike other Renaissance gardens, order and geometry do not rein in this landscape. There are no clean axes that provide ordered views through the garden. Instead, there is a jumble of sculptures juxtaposed with one another. This disordered arrangement leads the viewer to experience surprises at every twist and turn through the garden.

The scale, as well as the location, of the sculptures was inspired by the existing boulders on the site. This lead to sculptures that are not rationally scaled, as Agnelli states “every rule of proportion has been subverted in the carving of these statues” (58). For example, a giant tortoise is paired with a small personification of Fame in one sculpture (Figure 5.1). A message of this sculpture is that fame comes slowly. All objects within the garden differ in scale. These abrupt shifts of scale contribute to the disorientation of visitors.

The juxtapositions of forms and content also add to the surreal effect of the garden. In one sculpture of a dragon battling with lions, a mythical creature is juxtaposed

with a real creature (Figure 5.2). The frozen motion of this sculpture surely fits Andre Breton's conception of the "fixed-explosive" in convulsive beauty. After experiencing violent, grotesque visions like the dragon battle, visitors are then exposed to tamer didactic sculptures like the aforementioned sculpture of the giant turtle. Thus, violence

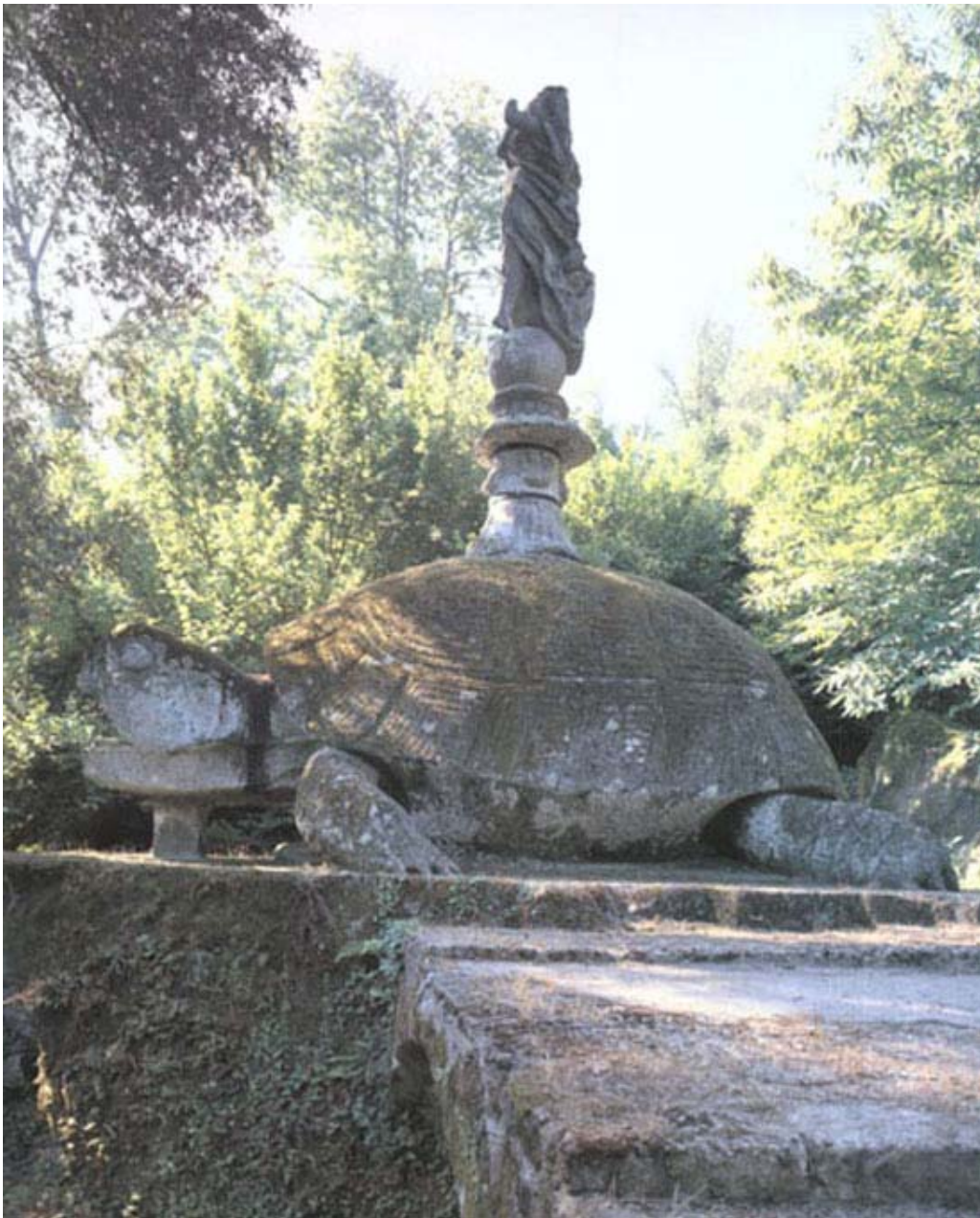


Figure 5.1: Turtle, Sacred Grove of Bomarzo, (Lazzaro 141) Photo: Ralph Lieberman  
and moral lessons, the myth and reality are all mingled together.



Another staggering experience can be found at the Gate of Hell grotto (Figure 5.4). Here a monstrous face with a wide open mouth, flaring nostrils, and bulging eyes looms over visitors. This ferocious visage was built into the hillside as a playful parody of Gates of Hell. Instead of Dante's warning of "Leave every hope, you who enter

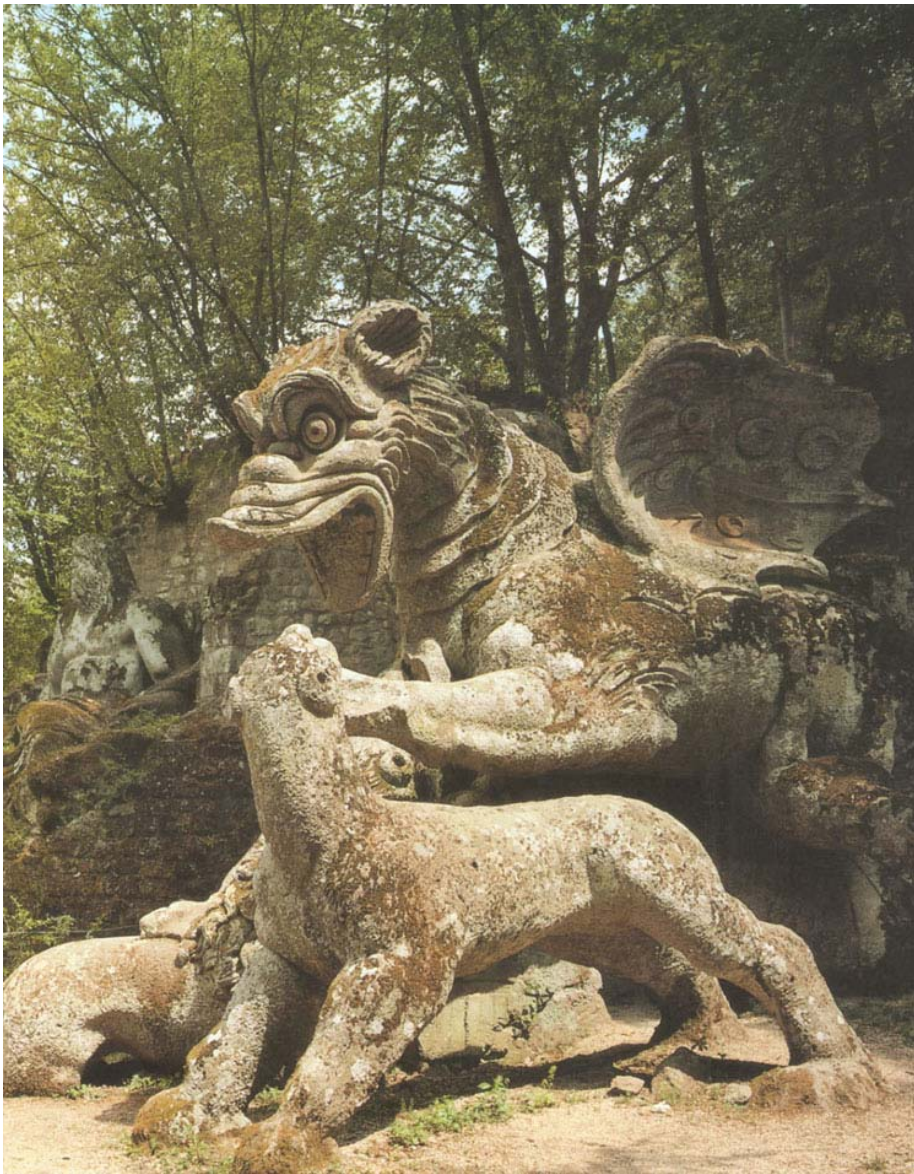


Figure 5.2: Dragon and Lion Battle, Sacred Grove of Bomarzo (Enge and Schroer 79)  
here," an inscription on the monster's upper lip proclaims "Leave every care you who enter here (Lazzaro 142)." When visitors step through this threshold they enter a

subterranean world constructed for music and dining. The monster's tongue served as a table for these parties. There is a humorous contrast here between the horrifying exterior and a playful interior. This contrast is further enhanced, according to one visitor, when laughter emerges from the grotto. It appears that the face is laughing, but interior festivities are the source.

The Sacred Grove of Bomarzo exhibits many of the hallmarks of surreal landscapes, such as substitution of the artificial for the real, uncanny juxtaposition, gigantism, and abrupt shifts of scale. The leaning house discussed in Chapter Two also exhibits the technique of distortion of the ground plane (Figure 2.14). These structural devices along with spatial paradigms like the grotto combine to form a surreal experience for visitors. After centuries this magical garden continues to cast a spell on visitors.



Figure 5.3: Gate of Hell Grotto- Sacred Grove of Bomarzo (Lazzaro 141) Photo: Ralph Lieberman

## Palais Ideal

Palais Ideal swirls out of the earth with a chaotic vision that leaves visitors in a hallucinatory daze (Figure 2.2). Concrete palm trees sprout from towers, twisting vines spiral out of control, and giants and beasts animate the façade of this visionary art environment. A rural postman named Ferdinand Cheval spent thirty-four years building this palace of his dreams. It is one of the oldest and most extensive visionary art environments in the world.

A vision of the Palais Ideal came to Cheval as he walked eighteen miles a day to deliver mail. To pass the time he would often daydream about escaping his routine.

Cheval remarked in his unpublished autobiography:

What else could one do while walking eternally against the same background? I used to dream. And what about my readers will ask... Well to divert my mind I used to construct in a dream a fairy palace; one that would surpass all imagination...with gardens, grottoes, towers, castles, museums, and sculptures, seeking to create again all the ancient architecture of primitive times” (Brunius 147).

This dream stayed with him for ten years until one day in 1879 he stumped his toe on a bizarre stone in the road. He picked up this unusually shaped piece of porous limestone, called tufa, and was awestruck by its beauty. This stone sparked a fire in Cheval’s soul that kept burning for the rest of his life as he labored to make his dream a reality. Cheval later recalled that “from this moment I had no rest morning to evening. I was always leaving to find stones” (Brunius 147). He scoured the countryside in search of odd stones and piled up his treasures in his garden. First he created a fountain by embedding the stones in cement with wire reinforcement. This creation grew until 1912 when it covered an area of 86’ x 46’ and reached a height of 39’ (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 39).

When the surrealists discovered this architectural sculpture, they were amazed.

Palais Ideal represented a dream that was realized in concrete form, as an inscription on it proclaimed “Out of a dream I have brought forth the queen of the world.” Cheval constructed the palace using the surrealist technique of automatism, or gaining ideas direct from the unconscious. He often awoke in the middle of the night with inspiration from a dream and then built that vision into the palace. In addition, it confirmed their idea that the best creativity came when the artist was free from cultural constraints and artistic training. They saw Cheval as someone who was able to tap into his unconscious and express his imagination freely. Furthermore as discussed in Chapter Two, Palais Ideal inspired Andre Breton’s conception of convulsive beauty. After experiencing Palais Ideal, Breton outlined the following three dimensions of convulsive beauty: the fixed-explosive, the veiled-erotic, and the magic-circumstantial. The magic-circumstantial part can be seen in Cheval’s discovery of a found object (the stone) that inspired his vision. The structure also seems to be alive with a poised energy. This frozen motion is evident in Figure 5.4. Lastly, the veiled-erotic aspect of convulsive beauty is illustrated in the profusion of sexual imagery (Figure 2.3): towers suggest “swelling breasts,” and the environment also displays “phallic mushrooms, womblike grottoes, and pendulous serpents and elephant trunks” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 41). This literal imagery of sexuality was not as important to Breton as the pleasurable shiver he felt at the Palais Ideal (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 42). The landscape affected him in the profound way that he required of art.

Palais Ideal is also a library of the forms and structural devices of surreal landscapes. Visitors to Cheval’s dream world certainly feel out of their element. This disorientation of the senses is created with a variety of methods. What is perhaps most



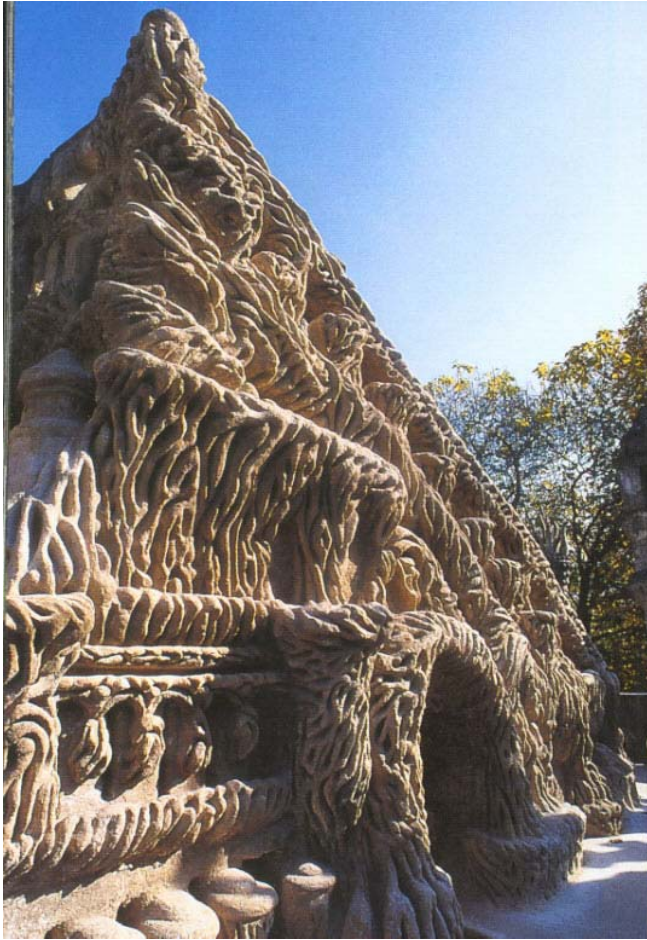


Figure 5.4: east side of Palais Ideal (1879-1912), Ferdinand Cheval, Hauterives France (Schawen 47) Photo: Deidi von Schawen

striking is the juxtaposition of styles and forms in the structure. Oriental and Western styles are mixed together with little separation. An Egyptian tomb, a Hindu temple (visible on far right of Figure 2.2), a mosque, a Swiss chalet, and a medieval castle (left side of 2.2) are some of the forms that are lumped together (Figure 5.5). While these diverse elements would seem to clash, the structure “achieves a remarkable coherence” through the elaborate ornamentation that covers the structure (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 39). Every square inch of the façade is embellished with stones, shells, and animals, so that there is no rest for the eye. This ornamentation “provides the visual glue that holds the whole edifice together” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 39).



Figure 5.5: “Egyptian tomb” Palais Ideal, 1879-1912, Ferdinand Cheval (Schaewen 48) Photo: Deidi von Schaewen

Several other structural devices contribute to the bewilderment of visitors; such as the substitution of the artificial for the real, gigantism, and abrupt shifts of scale. This is evident in the use of concrete plants and animals throughout the structure. There are an abundance of animals in the structure, ranging from elephants, bears and lions, to dragons. Concrete fig, palm, and olive trees crown one of the towers and simulated vegetation ornaments the façade (Figure 5.6). The exaggerated height of the three figures in Figure 5.6 is another surreal element. The abrupt shift of scale between these figures and the surrounding elements adds to the confusion caused by the structure.

Cheval employed common spatial paradigms of surreal landscapes in Palais Ideal, including the grotto and temple. The elaborate ornamentation of the exterior is continued inside the numerous grottoes of the structure. He built one grotto as his tomb (inside the “Egyptian tomb”). The authorities forbid him from using it, but it remains as an otherworldly space (Figure 5.7). Another grotto contains his trusty tools – a wheelbarrow, a mixing bucket, and a trowel. The grottoes of Palais Ideal are the primary enclosed spaces that Cheval created. The rest of Palais Ideal functions more as architectural sculpture interacting with its surroundings through open doorways, and views from towers.

The form the structure assumes is that of a garden temple. The profusion of animal and vegetal motifs signals its role as a shrine to the “abundance and variety of nature” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 39). Roger Cardinal saw meaning in this abundance of organic forms. He surmises that Palais Ideal

summons us to an intuition of life as natural growth, to respond to the pulse of an extra-human vitality, in which is transcended our civilized fear of stepping into life and stepping into death (153).



Palais Ideal is also a temple devoted to an “ecumenical embrace of the world’s major religions” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 39). This religious element can be seen in Christian imagery, such as a grotto of the Virgin Mary, as well as the representations of the Hindu temple and mosque.

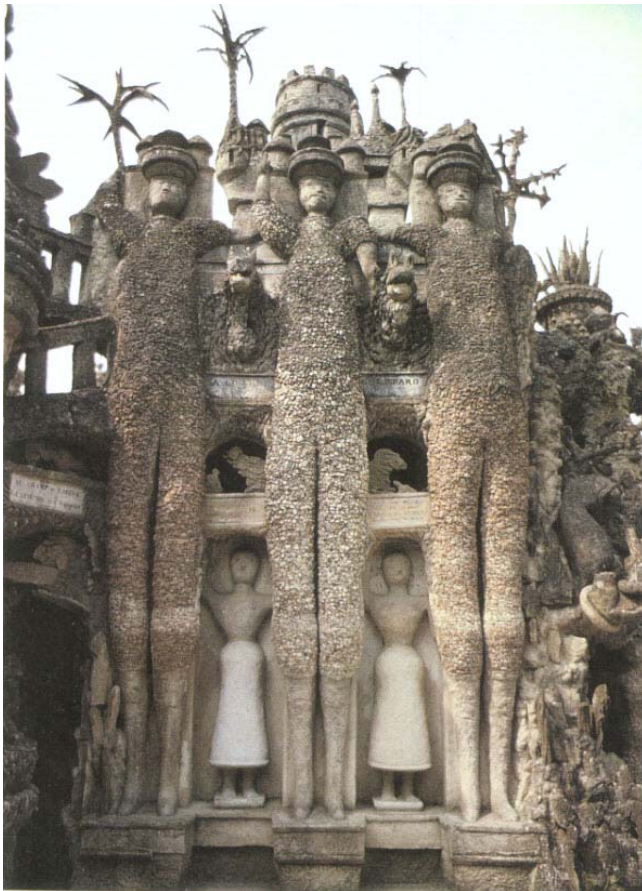


Figure 5.6: “Three giants” Palais Ideal (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 38) Photo: John Gary Brown

This combination of religious forms points to an important dimension of the Palais Ideal, its revelatory capacity. The juxtaposition of these religious forms in the same structure conveys the message that these religions share more than is generally perceived. This ecumenical theme is an idea that is particularly relevant in these times of religious strife.

Other themes expressed through the structure's forms and inscriptions include brotherhood and the virtues of hard work, courage, and perseverance. The structure

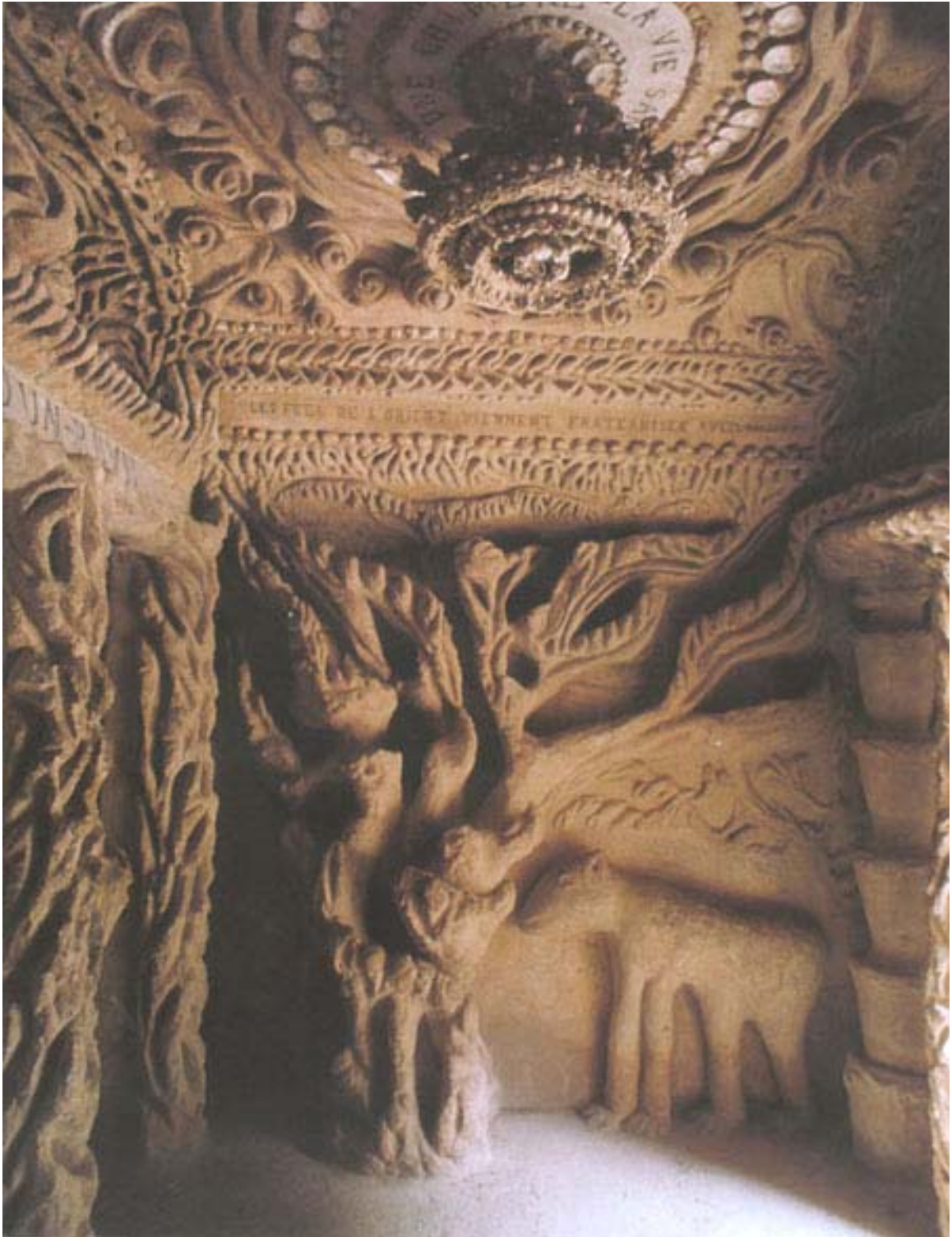


Figure 5.7: Grotto, Palais Idéal, (Schawen 49) Photo: Deidi von Schawen

elicits personal responses from each visitor, but a common realization may be the ability individuals have to realize their dreams through perseverance and hard work. While this may sound like a Hallmark card cliché, there is something remarkable in Palais Ideal. One man toiled alone for more than three decades and withstood the ridicule of his neighbors to produce a unique and amazing environment. After more than a century it continues to awe visitors and elicit revelations.

### Watts Towers

The Watts Towers soar skyward with a colorful blast that leaves visitors in awe. The tallest of these skeletal structures is nearly one hundred feet tall. The spires are made of cement-coated steel rods that are embedded with an elaborate mosaic of seashells, ceramics, and glass (Figure 5.8). They shimmer with a riot of bright colors in the California sunlight. At the feet of these towers is an intricate garden that includes several smaller towers, a gazebo, a ship replica, a fountain, planters, and a patio. This space is surrounded by two walls which are elaborately decorated with mosaic and bas relief designs. The towers have become widely celebrated by art critics, engineers, and the wider public. One critic described them as a “crescendo of form, texture, and color” (Goldstone 3). William Seitz commented that:

innate artist is evident everywhere in masterful contrasts and analogies of sizes and textures, man-made and natural materials, organic and geometric form, monochromatic and complementary color schemes, and opacity and transparency (Goldstone 18).

What makes this environment remarkable is that it is the work of one man, Sam Rodia, who had no art and engineering training, no machinery at his disposal, and little money. Rodia immigrated to America from Italy as a teenager and spent many years



moving around the west coast. Around 1920 he settled on a tiny triangular lot (0.1 acre) in the then rural Los Angeles suburb of Watts (Figure 2.7). Using his skills as a cement



Figure 5.8: Watts Towers, (1921-1955), Los Angeles, CA, Sam Rodia (Goldstone 2)  
Photo: Marvin Rand



worker he set out to transform this unassuming patch of earth into his own fantasy world. He started building around 1921 and toiled on it alone until 1955. He salvaged most of the materials for his creation from trash piles and the beach. The sand, cement, and some steel were purchased with his meager funds as a construction worker. With these ordinary materials he created one of the first ferro-cement structures in the world. This is a building technique using thin shell concrete that is ubiquitous in modern construction. This innovation, as well as the tower's artistry and cultural significance earned it National Landmark status in 1990.

The elaborate garden of Watts Towers creates the impression of another reality. A variety of structural devices play a role in this deception, such as abrupt shifts of scale, gigantism, substitution of the artificial for the real, and uncanny juxtaposition. The enormous size of the towers contributes to this otherworldly feeling. There is an abrupt shift of scale between these towers and the surrounding one story homes. There is also a clash between the towers and the bland architecture in the area. Watts Towers would look out of place in any neighborhood, but it especially stands out in the sea of ordinary homes in Watts. Within the garden there are other surreal elements, such as the cactus garden. The prickly spines of real cactus have been replaced with shards of green glass (Figure 5.9). The surreal experience is enhanced by two spatial paradigms in the design – the walled garden and the labyrinth. The triangular lot is bound on two sides by a scalloped wall (Figure 2.4) which creates a constricted space that adds to the disorientation of visitors. In addition, the strong angular form of the garden is uncomfortable. This wall screens visitors from the surrounding environment. Roger Cardinal describes this wall's effect:

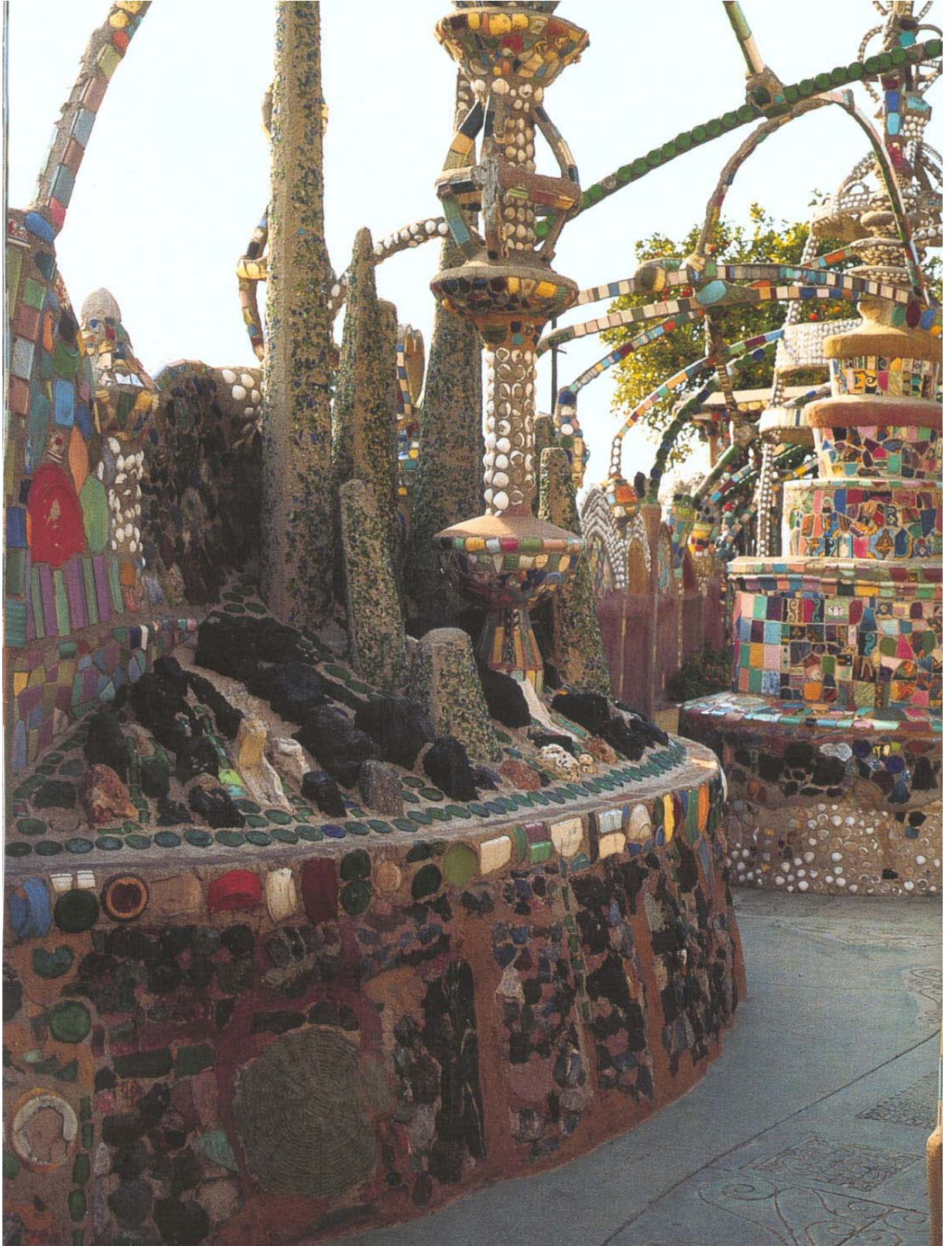


Figure 5.9: “Cactus Garden,” Watts Towers, Sam Rodia (Goldstone 14)  
Photo: Marvin Rand, 1986

The surrounding wall is high enough to dismiss the outer world from one's consciousness: the array of disparate parts takes on an exhilarating coherence and forms a harmonious space set apart, a closed garden which nourishes the sense of wonderment and refuses the ordinariness of its suburban context (170).

With the outer world excluded another garden form can work its magic on visitors, the labyrinth. This is not the traditional labyrinth, with a unicursal path which leads to a single destination. Instead, it involves multiple paths and destinations (Figure 2.7). As visitors meander through the labyrinth they encounter marvels in every direction. Overhead the lacework structure of the spires can be seen, the surrounding walls have mosaics, and the ground is enlivened by the intricate shadows of the towers. The triangular form of the layout leads visitors to a mosaic boat at the apex of the triangle (Figure 5.11). John Beardsley sees this ship as an

analogue for Rodia's larger garden. Overall, it resembles a ship with the exterior walls coming to a point and forming the bow and the towers rising like masts in the middle (Gardens of Revelation 165).

The ship-like appearance of the towers suggests an answer to a question that is often posed about the towers: What do they mean? This can never be definitively answered because Rodia rarely talked about the tower's symbolism or his reason for building them. One theory for the towers is that they are a homage to a festival in his homeland of Italy. When he was a child Rodia probably witnessed a *giglio* festival in the town of Nola, Italy. Each year the town would build tall thin ornamented towers and parade them through the streets. A ship bearing a statue of an Italian saint was also featured in this festival. Watts Towers resembles these Italian towers in structure, size, and proportion. Moreover, the garden's "ship" is similar to the one in the *giglio* festival (Posen and Ward 157). Perhaps he was trying to "mark his home place" by creating a



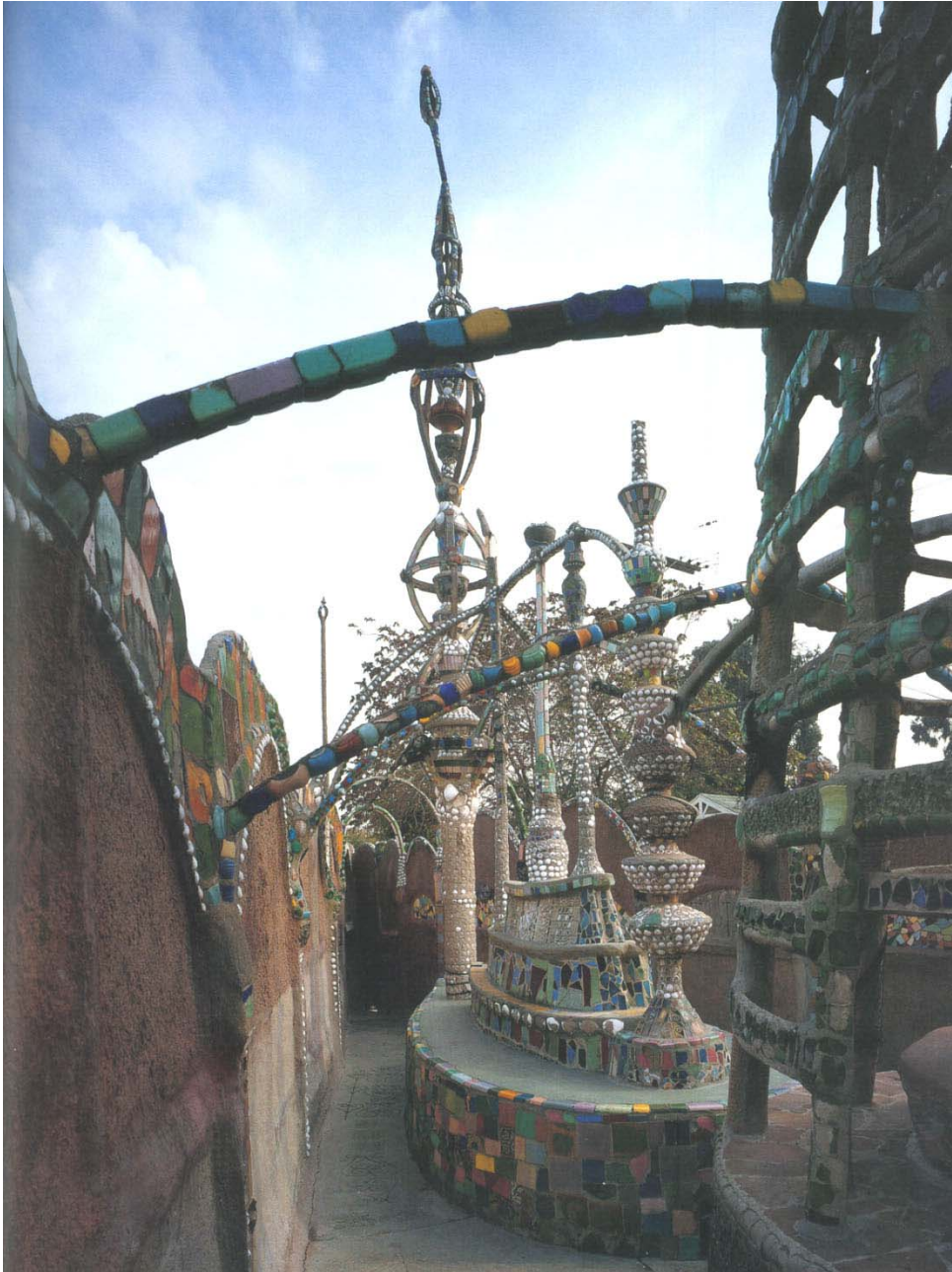


Figure 5.10: Ship of Watts Towers, Sam Rodia (Goldstone 51)  
Photo: Marvin Rand, 1986

landmark that recalled his childhood in Italy (Goldstone 19).

The *giglio* festival celebrated liberation. John Beardsley cites this theme, as well as Rodia's marginal position in society as basis for a theory that the towers are a "metaphor for the liberation of spirit and soul" (Gardens of Revelation 168). Rodia never

felt at home in America and he never experienced the American Dream. Perhaps the towers were his way of freeing “his spirit from feelings of disaffection” (Beardsley, Gardens of Revelation 68). The towers could have been his way of distinguishing himself and affirming his own self-worth. The location he chose next to a busy commuter rail line supports this conjecture. He quickly gained accolades for the towers from the audience that passed by the towers everyday.

Rodia’s comment that he built them because he “wanted to do something big” would support the idea that he built the towers to boost his self-esteem. Roger Cardinal offers another reading of this remark by Rodia:

It might be held that the towers are a challenge to triviality and ugliness, a ‘something big’ that is not mimetic of American bigness, but a brilliant alternative to it in the way it exploits the very things that America discards (172).

Rodia took society’s trash, its broken bottles, rusting steel pipes, and cracked plates, and weaved them together into a work of art. Whether or not it was his goal, Rodia’s towers do stand as a counterpoint to the wasteful and sprawling growth that has consumed Los Angeles. Instead of being spread horizontally utilizing machinery and new materials, Rodia’s towers rose upward with human labor and recycled materials.

We will never really know why Rodia built them. He took those secrets to his grave in 1965. However, the towers remain as an enduring testament to his creative spirit and perseverance. With a renovation underway, they will continue to provide visitors with an escape to another world.

## Las Pozas

Edward James, an eccentric English millionaire, was a friend and patron of the early twentieth century avant-garde. Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Rene Magritte, Igor Stravinsky, and Aldous Huxley were just a few of his famous friends. Surrounded by such talent, James amassed an extraordinary collection of art over the years. He also aspired to be an artist and dabbled in poetry, but his poems were panned by critics. His lack of acceptance as a peer by the surrealists caused him great disappointment. With this rejection in his heart, one day he visited Watts Towers. The experience moved him deeply and would change the direction of his life. The towers were beyond the scale of any artwork he had ever imagined. Here was “something so big and grand that it literally transformed reality” (Edward James). This was a revelation for him and he saw a new way of realizing his ambition to be a surrealist artist.

With a vision in his mind he returned to his retreat in rural Mexico near the town of Xilita. Here he owned eighty acres of lush jungle with waterfalls and nine spring fed pools which fed into a small river. This semitropical paradise was known as Las Pozas (the pools). Here he teamed with Plutarco Gastelum, Sr. and set out to give his fantasies concrete form. Gastelum provided the construction knowledge and James supplied the artistic inspiration and money. From 1962 to 1984 the pair erected a “swirling dream in concrete” that included thirty-six significant structures and countless other sculptures. The map in Figure 5.12 illustrates the large area where these structures are located. James spent around \$5 million (\$20 million in today’s money) on this venture. Employing as many as seventy laborers, James became absorbed with transforming his vision into reality. He died before the project was completed, but “he had always felt

that an unfinished state was its destiny. He liked to think of it as an archaeological mystery for the future” (Taschen 124).

Figure 5.11: map of Las Pozas (“Las Pozas”)

Concrete flowers bloom in profusion, paths beckon in all directions (Figure 5.12). Some of them lead to gates which open not to a defined space, but to the jungle (or the visitor's subconscious). On other sculptures, winding staircases twist up and down and then suddenly end (Figure 5.13). With tricks such as these, James was trying to engage the





Figure 5.12: Floral fountain, Las Pozas, Xilita Mexico, Edward James (Schaewen 138)  
Photo: Deidi von Schaewen





Figure 5.13: Stegasaurus Column, Las Pozas, Xilita Mexico, Edward James  
(Kernan 65) Photo: Scott Francis

minds of visitors. Other paths lead to sights such as a stand of artificial bamboo columns “so delicate that they quiver when a bird takes off from them” (Kernan 66) (Figure 5.14). The sculptures sprout out of the jungle all over the hillside. Visitors to Las Pozas find themselves lost in this fantasy world. Patricia Sharpe remarked “the longer I stayed, the more the outside world faded away and I became lost in the present (109).

Las Pozas casts its spell on visitors with a bag of magic tricks that includes uncanny juxtaposition, substitution of the artificial for the real, and gigantism. The combination of concrete (an urban material) with the jungle is the most striking juxtaposition in Las Pozas. Uncanny juxtapositions abound in this wilderness fantasy. Short, stubby columns appear to hold up a mountainside, but are only for show. Two giant concrete hands are imprinted on a cliff (Figure 5.15). Plant leaf shapes and flowers in the sculptures mimic the surrounding vegetation (Figure 5.16). Paths are lined with undulating snakes and mushroom like structures.

Las Pozas is more than an assemblage of unrelated sculptures. The sculptures are a part of the environment. They are integrated with the landscape and “would be less meaningful if they were in another location” (Edward James). This is illustrated by the aforementioned columns which appear to hold up a hillside. The sculptures combine to form an integrated landscape that enchants visitors. In Las Pozas, Edward James finally “found his true artistic medium” (Kernan 67). The fantasy world has been declared a world class visionary art environment. Patricia Sharpe asserted that “...by all rights the place should be a Mexican national monument” (109). The environments beautiful waterfalls, lush jungle, and bizarre sculptures all contribute to its appeal. Is there something more than these sensual delights at Las Pozas? Perhaps there is, because

many visitors say they “find themselves” when they visit Las Pozas ([Edward James](#)). The landscape must offer people revelations as well as visions of weird architecture.



5.14: Bamboo columns, Las Pozas, Xilita Mexico, Edward James, (“Las Pozas”)



Figure 5.15: giant hands, Las Pozas, Xilita Mexico, Edward James (Schaewen 140)  
Photo: Deidi von Schaewen





Figure 5.16: Organic sculpture, Las Pozas, Xilita Mexico, Edward James (Schaewen 141) Photo: Deidi von Schaewen

### Pasaquan

Rural South Georgia is a monotonous landscape of pine forests, clear cuts, and small towns. Blacktop roads wind through endless rows of pine trees and half abandoned towns whose glory days faded with the boll weevil. However, the dull sameness of one highway outside of Buena Vista is interrupted by a four acre visionary art environment that has been described as a “psychedelic Assisi in the Southern pines” (Patterson 30). From the highway, visitors first see a mass of bamboo and river cane. Through the leaves, they glimpse a kaleidoscopic array of colors. If they venture down the gravel

driveway and emerge from the bamboo screen a bizarre spectacle comes into view, the land of Pasaquan (Figure 5.17).



Figure 5.17: walls of Pasaquan, (c. 1960-1986), Buena Vista, GA, St. EOM (Patterson 42) Photo: Roger Manley

Pasaquan is the creation of Eddie Owens Martin (who called himself St. EOM), a fortune teller who spent the last thirty years of his life transforming the land around his family's farmhouse into his personal fantasy land. He built a compound enclosed by brightly colored cement walls that are covered with religious symbols, flowers, suns, and moons. Within the high walls he erected temple and pagoda like structures, totems, and smaller walls. This landscape is entered through a gateway that is flanked by "Polynesian" totem faces that resemble Easter Island statues (Figure 5.19). A path leads to the main house and intricately designed walls surround the viewer. A carpet of lawn



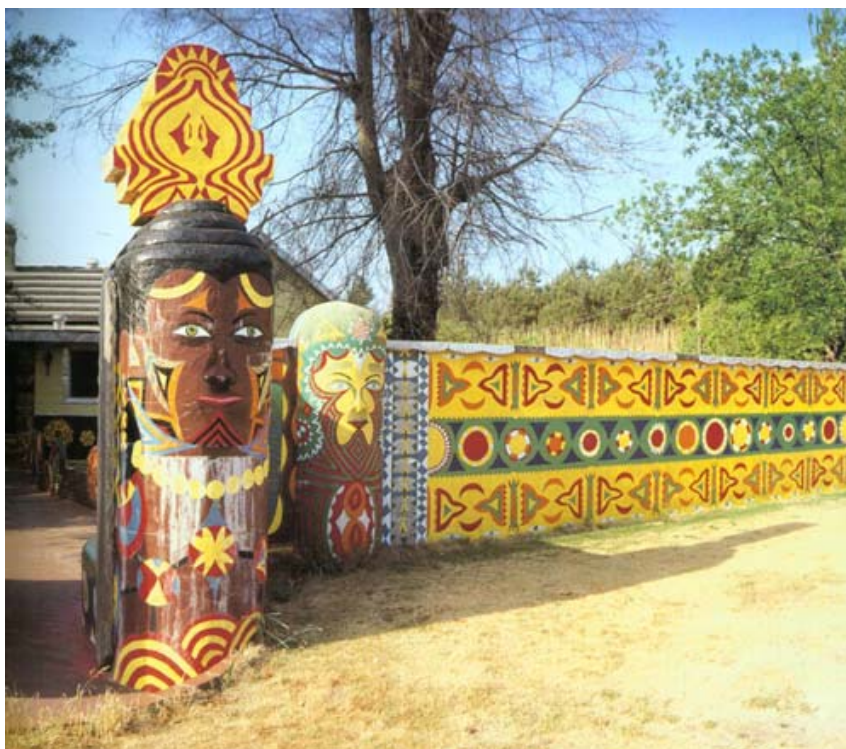


Figure 5.18: right side of gateway to Pasaquan, (c. 1960-1986), Buena Vista, GA (Patterson 36) Photo: Roger Manley

and large pecan and oak trees are the only visible vegetation. The imagery and architecture are so overwhelming that any other plants would be unnecessary. Curving walls connect each of the buildings and separate spaces within Pasaquan. Giant, undulating snakes slither atop these walls and connect the spaces. Every available surface is embellished with faces, geometric designs, sexual imagery, and symbols from Hinduism, Taoism, Christianity, and other religions. Even the multicolored roof shingles are arrayed in a pattern. Despite the disparate colors and designs, the environment is ordered with a sense of rhythm and unity. Tom Patterson describes it as a “subtly balanced, garishly harmonious architectural compound which seems to have been built for the elaborate rituals of some long vanished cult” (30).



Pasaquan is a world apart from its surroundings. Its Eastern influenced architecture, vivid colors, and high degree of ornamentation contrasts dramatically with its context of pine forests, simple farmhouses, and white painted churches. Juxtaposition also occurs within the compound: Japanese pagodas, Polynesian totems, and Indian derived architecture are close together (Figure 5.19). Walls are covered with an amalgam of iconography; including crosses, yin and yang, and yoga symbols. Surprises greet visitors at every turn, such as one building corner that features a sculpture of a woman's upper body (Figure 5.20). The eyes of giant faces stare at visitors from every side.

One building appears to be a head that is peeping over a hillside. Two giant eyes gaze out at visitors from the building. This structure is a sweat lodge that has been built into the hillside. This building represents an example of how Pasaquan is integrated with the environment. The curving walls which are evident in Figure 5.18 also demonstrate this aspect of Pasaquan: these walls serve both to retain the soil and to create separate



Figure 5.19: architecture of Pasaquan, (c. 1960-1986), Buena Vista, GA, St. EOM (Schaeven 157) Photo: Deidi von Schaeven

spaces within the compound. As a whole, however, Pasaquan is not connected with its environment. The large walls which surround Pasaquan separate the compound from the surroundings and deny interaction with the environment. This was a deliberate design choice by St. EOM. He wanted to escape, rather than be a part of his rural Georgia surroundings.

St. EOM utilized three spatial paradigms in creating his dream world: the walled garden, grotto, and temple. The most striking spatial form in Pasaquan is the walled garden. A ceremonial gateway frames the entryway into this walled compound. These totems signal a transition into a sacred space, much like the pylons that flank the entrance to the temple of Kanak in Egypt. The walls which surround Pasaquan enclosed Martin within his own world and offered him sanctuary from a world he saw as corrupt and violent. Martin describes this experience:

I built this place to have somethin' to identify with, 'cause there's nothin' I see in this society that I identify with or desire to emulate. Here I can be in my own world, with my temples and designs and the spirit of God (Patterson 219).



Figure 5.20: building with female sculpture Pasaquan, (c. 1960-1986), Buena Vista, GA (Patterson 39) Photo: Roger Manley

Like a medieval monk he created a cloister garden to isolate himself from the rest of society and provide a space for contemplation. These walls continue to separate visitors from the reality outside Pasaquan. A pagoda also serves this purpose (Figure 5.21). The pagoda's sweeping staircase leads the visitor to an elevated space where the supernatural can be communed with. On the opposite side of the compound from the pagoda Martin created a sweat lodge which resembles a grotto. It is reached by descending down a staircase into a cool womb of earth and cement.

Martin offered an explanation for his creation:

I wanna prove to society that even though I've been ostracized all my life, I have good qualities and good potential. I built this place just to prove that I could do it—to prove it to my own self, really. And I wanted to prove that I do have some ability and imagination, and can be innovative for the society if given a chance (Patterson 219).



Figure 5.21: pagoda at Pasaquan, (c. 1960-1986), Buena Vista, GA, St. EOM (Beardsley 1995, 146)



He certainly succeeded in being innovative. Pasaquan is cited as one of the best visionary art environments in America. Many people make pilgrimages to it from afar to see its exotic architecture and rainbow-colored designs. Those who linger in its realm and later return are drawn by something deeper than these novelties. Pasaquan speaks to them about individual self-expression, perseverance, and tolerance. Revelations like these will continue to attract visitors to the land of Pasaquan as long as its concrete walls stand.

### Conclusion

These five visionary art environments provide valuable lessons about surrealism in the landscape. They illustrate how spatial paradigms and structural devices can create a surreal effect in the landscape. Watts Towers and Palais Ideal demonstrate the important influence of the found object in the design process. The encounter with an unusual stone or a colorful piece of ceramic can inspire extraordinary works of art. It is this encounter with the found object that compelled these creators to bring their dreams to life. These case studies also exhibit the importance of symbolism and meaning in these landscapes. Unlike many gardens, these environments are not dedicated solely to function and natural beauty. They communicate messages to visitors through symbols and inscriptions. Moreover, these gardens express a side of human nature that is often missing in many modern designed landscapes, that of intuition, emotion, and myth. Moral, spiritual, and erotic themes are rarely broached in modern landscapes, but they have an important place in many of these environments. Everyone dreams at some point

of having their own personal space, but few bring that dream to life on the scale of these visionary environments. Anna Wadsworth remarks that these environments are the realizations of the secret gardens we all have, ...[they] have been created with those with enough imagination, perseverance, and courage to interpret their fantasies in solid materials (12).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

There are not many landscapes in which the disturbing aesthetics of surrealism are appropriate. In most contexts there are important functional, ecologic, and social goals which preclude the use of surrealism. However, there are a few settings in which surrealism is germane. In these landscapes, surrealism creates stimulating experiences and revelations for visitors. While surreal landscapes have little direct relevance for landscape architecture, the profession can apply lessons learned from surrealism to landscapes that are not surreal. There is, thus, an indirect relevance of surrealism to landscape architecture.

The contexts in which surrealism can be suitable include; museum installations, private residences, garden expositions, and enclosed gardens in semi-public settings. In these settings surrealism can provide provocative escapes from the ordinary for visitors. These surreal experiences are created through the use of a variety of structural devices and spatial paradigms. The landscapes discussed in this thesis illustrate how these techniques and forms are used in the environment. These landscapes offer more than mere fantasy trips for visitors. Landscapes like the Splice Garden, Watts Towers, and the Irish Hunger Memorial demonstrate that they can also offer valuable insights to visitors.

Surreal landscapes are well-suited for eliciting revelations to visitors because of the shock they engender. The experience of a surreal landscape disorients visitors. With their mind and senses reeling they are often compelled to become introspective and

reconsider their beliefs and convictions. Sometimes it is at this point that visitors have revelations. In other cases, revelations from the experience of a landscape occur at a later time. Regardless of the timing, eliciting revelations is a goal to which any surreal landscape should strive. Without this element surreal landscapes can be dismissed as weird novelties with limited appeal.

There may be few contexts in which landscape architects should design surreal landscapes, but they can learn design lessons from them. At first glance, these landscapes may seem like unlikely sources for design wisdom. They often subvert the rules that govern most landscape design. However, if landscape architects look beyond the coarse appearance and haphazard layouts of these designs they may learn something. The forms utilized in surreal landscapes, such as labyrinths, walled gardens, and grottoes are powerful spatial paradigms that are infrequently used in contemporary landscapes. They can create valuable spaces for contemplation and introspection. Abrupt shifts of scale and gigantism can add drama to designs and help emphasize elements in a landscape. Uncanny juxtaposition and the combination of incongruous materials produced rich and vibrant designs in these landscapes. Landscape architects can invigorate their designs with this use of contrast. These landscapes also demonstrate the innovative ways we can express ourselves in the environment. Taking artistic risks is not something for which the profession is known. It has even been said that landscape architecture is a “dull pragmatic” field (Clay 444). While this may be an overstatement, it does point to a lack of artistic innovation in the profession.

The landscapes discussed in this thesis also demonstrate the importance of symbolism and meaning in designed landscapes. The symbolic statements evident in



these landscapes occurred at both personal and public levels. Some, like the Splice Garden, were public meditations on the use of garden forms from other cultures and the dangers of gene manipulations. Other landscapes, such as Watts Towers, were private expressions that are not as easily read. Regardless of the level of discourse, all of these landscapes were imbued with meaning. Landscape architects can also integrate richer meanings into their designs so that their work goes beyond ornamentation and hollow functionalism.

It is through the use of symbolism that landscape architects could engage the minds of the public. The subconscious is the part of the mind with which symbolism communicates most effectively. When elements become disassociated from reality and figurative representations the conscious mind is not able to find meaning. It is the subconscious that is able to grasp the association of seemingly unrelated ideas and symbols. In the landscape, it is primarily through the subconscious that designers communicate ideas to the public. Recognizing that the subconscious is the root of all art is not a novel idea. Palladio, for example, knew that his buildings primarily affected the subconscious mind, not the eye (Jellicoe, Geoffrey Jellicoe 13). In light of this, Geoffrey Jellicoe contends that landscape architects can benefit from recognizing and studying the “strange furnishings of the subconscious mind” (“Contemporary Meanings in the Landscape” 52). He remarks that

the repression of instinct is the cause of quite unnecessary unhappiness. I believe it is a prime purpose of our profession to release the instincts, and that only by probing into the different layers of the mind can we acquire the knowledge to do so (“Contemporary Meanings in the Landscape” 52).

Surrealism is one vehicle for exploring and expressing the subconscious.

Visionary art environments illustrate how this can be carried out in the landscape. They provide lessons about the expression of emotion, myth, spirit, and intuition in the landscape. These concerns were largely banished from the landscape with the advent of modernism. It is important for designers to have feelings for a landscape and to express these emotions through their designs. Without this landscapes become soulless and do not engage the heart and mind. Landscape architects have vital ecologic, social, and functional concerns to address but along the way they can also address the emotional, mythical and spiritual needs of the public.

An analysis of a contemporary landscape can illustrate how the ideas of surrealism can enrich landscape architecture. Landscape Park Duisburg North (Duisburg-Nord) is a 230 hectare park in Duisburg-Meidrich Germany (Schroder 120). Peter and Anneliese Latz and their firm Latz + Partner developed this park from the remains of an iron and steel mill abandoned by Thyssen Steel in 1985 (Figure 6.1). Its



Figure 6.1: Aerial view of portion of Duisburg-Nord, Latz and Partners, (Hill)

enormous buildings, gigantic ore dumps, chimneys, blast furnaces, railway tracks, and bridges lay unused until 1990 when Latz + Partners came up with a new vision for the old industrial plant (Beardsley, “A Word for Landscape Architecture” 60). Through selective removal of structures, the transformation of other landscape elements, and the planting of trees, the firm transformed an eyesore into an amenity that is used and appreciated by the public. The park remediates some of the ecological problems and provides recreational opportunities in an area that lacked open space. The project is, therefore, both an environmental and social restoration. Duisburg-Nord is a very real site; it is deeply rooted in its time and place. However, even though it is not a surreal landscape it demonstrates the lessons we can learn from surrealism. It shows how surrealism has relevance to the field in an indirect way. While the design is imbued with the ideas of surrealism, Latz + Partners were probably not designing with surrealism in mind.

The park exhibits uncanny juxtapositions throughout the landscape. Peter Latz emphasized this element of the park when he stated that he sees Bomarzo, the Italian Renaissance sculpture garden, in Duisburg-Nord (Weilacher 124). As in Bomarzo, there is a haphazard layout to the park with surprising elements within. The abandoned steel mill consisted of many layers of history that were fragmented and disconnected. Latz + Partners decided that these historical periods should be preserved in the design. The steel mill was a vital part of the region’s industrial and cultural heritage that needed to be preserved. They removed some buildings and transformed other elements, but retained the essence of the landscape. There were four primary methods of circulation in the landscape: canals and reservoirs, roadways, railways, and pedestrian areas. These

layers existed independently and sometimes overlapped one another. These different layers were connected visually, functionally, and symbolically at various points in the design (Weilacher 124). This shows how Latz reinterpreted elements rather than covering up the fragments of the park.

In Duisburg-Nord Latz answers a question he has posed: “Where is the imagination most challenged, in a state of harmony or in a state of disharmony” (Weilacher 129)? The answer he articulated through the park is that disharmony best challenges the imagination. This is clearly evident in the center of the park where the blast furnaces tower overhead (Figure 6.2). Latz planted a grove of trees around these



Figure 6.2: Blast furnaces, Duisburg-Nord Landscape Park, Latz + Partners (Weilacher 127)



“terrible and awe-inspiring” blast furnaces (Beardsley, “A Word for Landscape Architecture” 60). The contrast between these harsh industrial remains and the trees is very effective. The design also transformed coal bunkers into lush walled gardens (Figure 6.3). Doorways and windows were cut into the concrete walls to allow



Figure 6.3: walled garden, Duisburg-Nord, Latz +Partners, Photo: Lauren Colunga

access into these gardens. There is a dynamic contrast here in the setting of a garden in a “menacing, industrial frame” (Beardsley, “A Word for Landscape Architecture” 60). Uncanny juxtaposition abounds in this landscape, vegetation sprouts from ore carts and playful slides are found in the industrial remains.

When Peter Latz began designing Duisburg-Nord he used the traditional rational analysis methods used by landscape architects. However, he also wrote stories inspired by his visits to the site. In one story a falcon was circling high in the air overhead. Latz saw a parallel between the soaring flight of this falcon and the massive blast furnaces of

Duisburg-Nord. He saw this as a sign from his unconscious that he had to preserve the blast furnaces. This suggests the way landscape architects can use inspiration from the unconscious during the design process.

Another relationship between this park and surrealism is its celebration of the found object. Found objects played an important role in surrealist art. The surrealists sought to take ordinary objects and transform them in amazing ways. In the case of Duisburg-Nord, the entire steel plant functioned as a found object for the designers. Latz and Partners, like the surrealists, were able to find the extraordinary within these ordinary remains. By using rather than removing these remains, they were able to save money in their design. They also reduced the amount of waste generated by keeping the buildings on site. More importantly, the industrial remains strongly tie the park to the site's history. Latz + Partners fulfilled the goal of any quality landscape design by restoring and preserving the park's *genius loci*, or sense of place (Weilacher 121). This demonstrates the important role found objects can play in a landscape design.

Duisburg-Nord also exhibits the peculiar aesthetics of surrealism. The enormous blast furnaces can cause visitors to experience the erotic-like shudder that Andre Breton called convulsive beauty. This is particularly evident at night when the park becomes a light theater of multicolored neon lights (Figure 6.4). The surreal effect of the park is greatly enhanced by these lights (Figure 6.5). The park also exemplifies the "fixed-explosive" dimension of convulsive beauty. There are ore carts and machinery with plants sprouting out of them that are frozen in their tracks. The park's use of found objects also relates to the dimension of convulsive beauty Breton called "magic-circumstantial."





Figure 6.4: Lighted blast furnaces, Duisburg-Nord, Latz + Partners, Photo: Christoph Moseler (Moseler)



Figure 6.5: Light Theater, Duisburg-Nord, Latz + Partners, Photo: Christoph Moseler (Moseler)

These examples show that Duisburg-Nord does not conform to the traditional aesthetics of landscape architecture, of picturesque or formalism. Instead, the park relates to the aesthetics of surrealism. It utilizes uncanny juxtapositions to produce a powerful and stimulating design. More importantly, by allowing juxtapositions in the park, the designers preserved the history of the site. This demonstrates how juxtaposition is beneficial as more than just a clever design trick. By not erasing layers of history and allowing juxtaposition, designs can better express the *genius loci* of a place. Allowing for this will become increasingly important in future landscape designs. As green spaces become developed there will be fewer sites with little evidence of human disturbance for parks. Industrial wastelands and landfills will be a new frontier for open space design in the future. Robert Smithson remarked that “the pastoral, it seems is outmoded. The gardens of history are being replaced by the sites of time” (Beardsley, “A Word for Landscape Architecture” 63). By sites of time, Smithson was referring to places that exhibit the effects of human disturbance. It is vital that designers express the history of the places they design. If these layers of history are not interpreted we can not learn from our past. As the aphorism reminds us those who don’t remember history are doomed to repeat it.

There is one final lesson that can be learned from Duisburg-Nord – that of revelation in the landscape. Visitors to the park experience the aftermath of environmental destruction. Huge piles of slag lie next to polluted fields that are being remediated. Experiencing this causes visitors to wonder about the ecologic costs of modern industrial practices. The park also offers visions of an ecologic paradigm with its innovative storm water design and the use of a windmill to power water circulation.

These messages would not be communicated as well in a conventional design that covered up these problems and posted educational kiosks. By juxtaposing this evidence of environmental damage with restored landscapes the park communicates a powerful message.

Surrealism is not the only source landscape architects can look to for new aesthetic concepts and ideas. Deconstructivist philosophy also values irrational thought and uncanny juxtapositions. The influence of these ideas was evident in some of the submissions to the Parc de la Villette international competition in 1982 and 1983. The winning entry of Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas's second place entry both exhibit juxtapositions (Barzilai 35). Parc de la Villette shares many attributes with Duisburg-Nord in that it is a massive space that once an industrial site. The designs of Koolhaas and Tschumi both embraced rather than covered up the juxtapositions existing on the site.

Parc de la Villette and Duisburg-Nord demonstrates the exciting opportunities and challenges that landscape architects will face in the future. To meet these challenges landscape architects will have to broaden their knowledge and collaborate with other fields. They will also need to enrich their aesthetic concepts beyond the picturesque and formalism. Surrealism is one source they can look to for new ideas. Convulsive beauty establishes a place for landscapes that engage the mind as well as the senses. The disharmony produced through convulsive beauty does challenge the imagination of visitors. It can provoke visitors to rethink their view of the environment and their place within it. Although it is not appropriate in all settings, in the appropriate context surrealism can instill landscapes with meaning, emotion, humor, and the power of revelations.

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