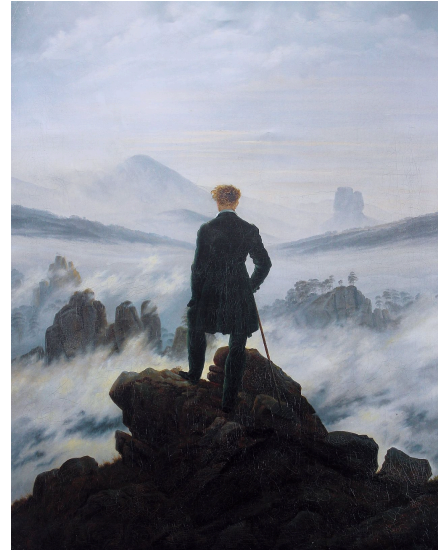


## Some thoughts on landscaping...

Henri T. de Hahn  
12.17.2017



The Wanderer above the Sea of Mist (c.1818)  
Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840)

*“Correcting the nature of the site by art.”*  
Vitruvius

**WHERE?** The natural environment is the significant foundation of the physical environment characteristic of site, place, and territory. Soil configurations, climatic constraints, and morphology of the landscape are some of the constraints, which need to be directed for advisable use or careful protection from the natural elements in order to create a suitable environment for human activities. Once upon a time, this was a prerequisite for convenience, hygiene, and survival. The natural environment is also the realm of the four natural elements that constitute physical matter, earth and its weight, air and its impulse, fire and its heat, and water and its cycle.

The site analysis and project can be thought as *architectural landscaping* and must be seen as a vital part of any project. To work with a site always carries the concept of modification. One alters, scars, and changes a site for the sake of improving, an improvement in which the placement of a new building –or composition of buildings, and its relation to the site enhances/contradicts the existing narratives found through the reading of the site.

When conducting a site analysis you may want think about the following subjects in a comprehensive manner but not limited to:

- **Identifying the constituent languages of the landscape**
  - a. Geographical data of the locality (longitude, latitude, altitude)
  - b. Morphology (study of form and structure, particularly to the urban geography)
  - c. Topology (study of a specific object, entity, place)
  - d. Topography (accurate and detailed description of a place; surface features of a region)
  - e. Typology of the landscape (natural, cultivated, and inhabited)

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- f. Slopes: overhang, level ground, uniform slope, steep slope, depression, convex slope, concave slope, valley, ridge, depression, drainage pattern, and plane surface (gentle/steep/severe steep, pasture, woodland, plain, meadows...). Question of siting and grade work
  - g. Orientation, path, and radiance of the sun (light/shade, winter, summer, equinox, solstice, humidity...), stereographic sun path
  - h. Climate/microclimate and meteorological characteristics (arid, dry and barren; humid, damp and moist; cold, chilly and frigid; and composite (hot-humid...))
  - i. Seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter
  - j. Winds, breezes and air movements (direction, intensity)
  - k. Vegetation (plant life and types...)
  - l. Scenery of views: visual contact with the site (natural/ man-made, desirable and undesirable, private and public), prospect
  - m. Size and surrounding features of the urban, suburban or rural site (direction and distance between contours (percentage), erosion areas, hydrology - flood plains, poorly drained soils, material components, slope
  - n. Relationship to roads, driveways, pedestrian pathways (access, view, noise)
  - o. Exploring the *genius loci* of the place -narratives and feelings invoked by the site (scents, sounds...), the aesthetics of a site, geometric lines, clues of nature and human ancestral gestures and efforts
  - p. Historical, archeological, environmental, cultural and geographical context (material for design)
  - q. Please add your thoughts
- **Identifying the processes of transformation**
    - a. The idea of time: Historical, environmental, cultural, geographical, urban context, territorial configuration (topography/morphology, land use, infrastructure and developments)...
    - b. Interpretation of the environment as a testimony to history and memory
    - c. Rapport between architecture and the environment through time
    - d. Please add your thoughts
  - **Notes for developing a principal of settlement**

While designing with a site you may want to thematize the following concepts:

- a. Principle of settlement (program or master plan for the site as a place): search for a dialogue with the environment by understanding the underlying opportunities of the site, integration/exclusion (vertical/horizontal relationship, parallel/perpendicular orientation, site drainage...) to respond to climatic, solar and programmatic influences
- b. Establish the limits of intervention
- c. To be innovative in ways that engage buildings and their landscape, to anchor the architecture within the site; to adroitly take advantage or turn site disadvantages into design advantages
- d. Understand the scale of intervention
- e. Develop a balance and coherence between building and nature (scale, mass/void, contrast...). The creation of a small artificial landscape set against/in harmony with the natural universe
- f. Incorporate the sensual and temporal qualities (sight, sound, smell, touch, and time); to exalt the fundamental characteristics of the site
- g. Connect to and develop a personal narrative with the historical, environmental, cultural, and geographical context of the site
- h. At an urban scale reinforce or reduce the formal characteristics of the fabric of the city or the object as architecture,

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- i. Contour manipulation between existing and new (i.e., retaining walls...)
  - j. Search for an economy of mediums (site conservation, earth manipulation...)
  - k. Location, organization and creation of public/private circulation (vehicular roads and pedestrian paths) and location of parking
  - l. Satisfying handicapped access standards (ADA)
  - m. Approach/entry and arrival sequence (on your site/to the building/from the building...)
  - n. Location of outdoor spaces (microclimate) and their relation to the indoor (intermediary zones of transitions between inside-outside, man-nature, private-public, element-context...)
  - o. Understanding the legal property descriptions and constraints on land development (zoning regulations, limits of construction, setbacks, floor area ratios, and easements. Rights of way, deed restrictions, land values...)
  - p. Please add your thoughts
- **Preservation of Historic Landscapes**
    - a. Historical research (period, significance...)
    - b. Inventory and documentation (record of material, features, conditions...)
    - c. Analysis (evolution, features, materials, spaces, organization...)
    - d. Selection of treatment (scope of work, repair, replacement...)
    - e. Question of rehabilitation
    - f. Question of renovation
    - g. Question of restoration
    - h. Please add your thoughts