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Wetlandscape

Wetlandscape

Towards an expanded definition of edges

An exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Design

Massey University, Wellington
New Zealand

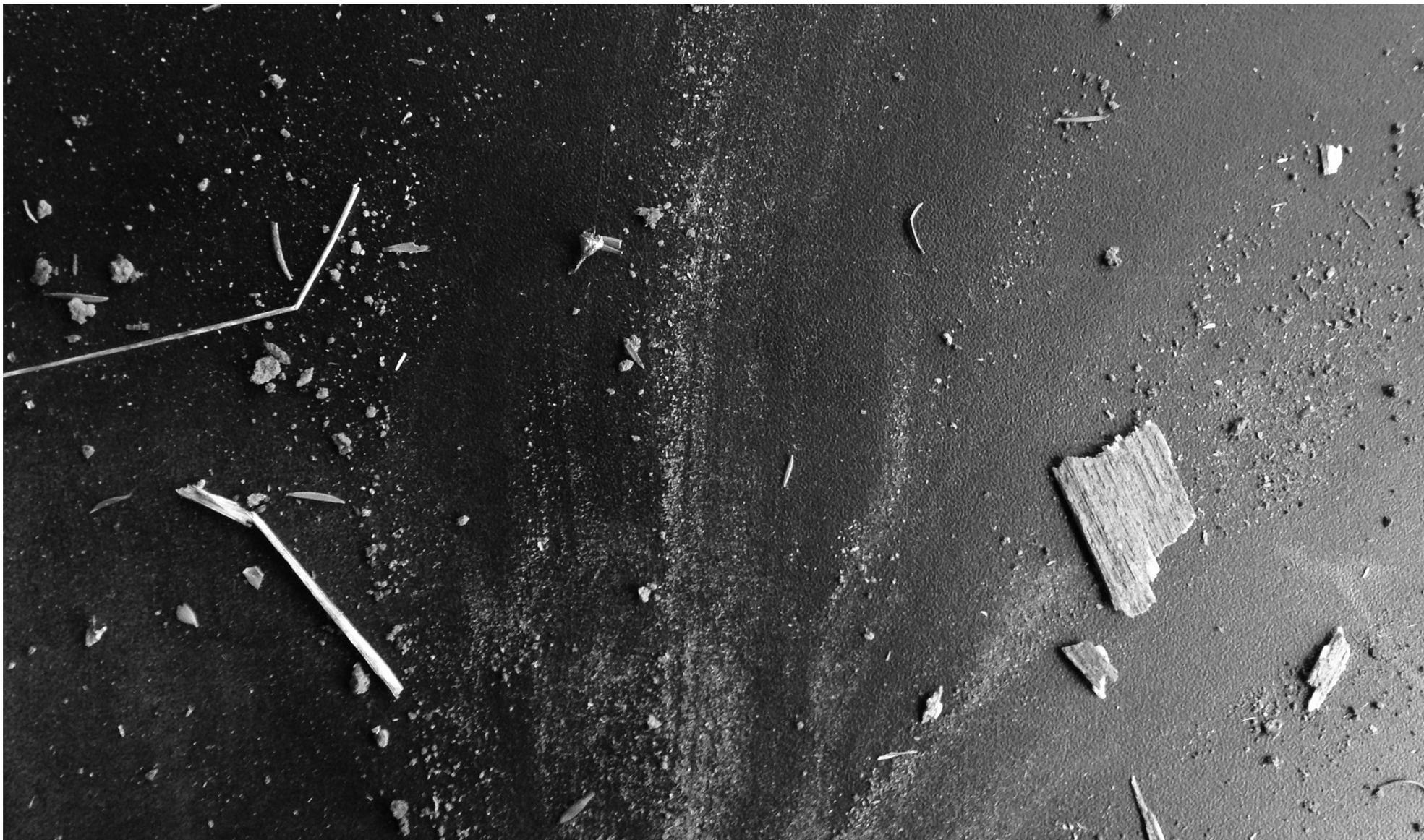
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Abstract

Over the course of an afternoon walk I explore and critically reflect on my Master of Design project Wetland-scape. I look to expand the definition of edges through the design of a walkway within their complex of beautiful native wetlands on the Rarangi vineyard for industry partner Wither Hills. This project is deeply rooted in ecology and uses design as a tool to deal directly with the implications of the eradication of wetlands within New Zealand. Wither Hills and I look toward a future of restoration and maintenance of these natural zones. The poetic journey through the site traverses through eight evocative follies designed to encourage wine tourism enhanced by site-specific design. I discover the ubiquitous quality of architecture to generate mood and atmosphere through sensitive treatment of materials and space. As a spatial designer I engage in the realms of landscape architecture, architecture and design to traverse the field of space making in the landscape. This text describes the wanderlust of design through the production of a landscape narrative which positions the sensate body as an important figure in enabling unique experiences within architecture and environment.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the people who have supported me during my Master of Design study. Firstly I wish to express a sincere thank you to my wonderful supervisors Julieanna Preston and Antony Pelosi for sharing both your time and wisdom with me I thank you for your continual guidance and critique. I have been tremendously fortunate to work with many outstanding individuals in the Master of Design studio this year, thank you all for listening and the many late night chocolate supplies. A huge thank you to Massey University for the Masterate scholarship I could not have survived the year without it and I am extremely grateful. This project would not have been possible without Wither Hills Winery, in particular Jacqueline MacLaurin and Rex Butt whose passion and dedication towards the rehabilitation of wetlands within their Rarangi vineyard is inspiring. Thank you for sharing this treasure with me. Thank you to my family for their constant enthusiasm and support. Hayley for her excellent editing skills, Michelle for her encouragement, And my parents, I will forever be appreciative of your love of the outdoors, a passion that you have passed on to me. And finally thank you James for bearing with me through the ups and downs of this project, your understanding and ability to keep me smiling through out it all has been amazing.



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Preamble

Grid reference: NZMS 260 P28 956750

Area: 200ha

Wetland: approx 50ha

Altitude: <5km

Bioclimatic zone: Coastal



Edge (*noun*)

the outside limit of an object, area, or surface.

(*verb*)

to give an edge to (something)

to be on the edge of (something)¹

The Rarangi Wetlands are “the most valuable unprotected area of the Wairau ecological region”²

This wetland “includes a mosaic of coastal communities that are not represented elsewhere in NZ in our system of reserves”³

In this design-led, practice based, Master of Design thesis I walk the boundaries between Spatial Design, Landscape Architecture and Architecture as I seek to conceptually expand the definition of edges in the context of a wetlands walkway design.

The world is abundant with edges. In a creative design practice, edges mark the boundaries of what is knowable and they explore the territories beyond. In this exegesis, edges are discussed in relation to my practice and process of design, as well as within my conceptual and theoretical framework. Edges imply a porous frontier that can be easily found within the landscape whether they take the form of the edge of a forest or wetland, or they are a boundary between two ecological zones.⁴ edges can be readily discussed in relation to the responsibility of designers to motivate change. Designers have always had the inherent ability to use their creativity to prompt change; I believe designers need to expose an edge before change can happen.

Like many designers with concern for the natural environment, I have reached an edge within my realm of design. There is increasing awareness around depleting ecologies, lack of clean water supplies and dissolving habitats in the world that is leaving many landscapes in strife. The global water crisis is expected to accel-

erate as the population is predicted to increase by 70 million every year for the next 20 years and there are not enough fresh water sources to sustain such growth.⁵ It is essential to employ design in order to combat the strife that will otherwise be brought to the landscape. In this Master of Design research project I have partnered with Wither Hills Winery to attend to a landscape feature unique to New Zealand. Wither Hills is a company currently working diligently on the restoration of a vulnerable and severely threatened complex of wetlands on their coastal Rarangi Vineyard, Blenheim. The region of Marlborough is dealing with the implications of having lost 90% of its native wetlands; this is in accordance with the rest of New Zealand, having also lost 90% on a national scale.⁶ These wetlands have endured years of mistreatment and extensive modification by previous owners who grazed cattle, logged, flooded, extracted water and let invasive weeds overtake native plants.⁷ Since 2009 Wither Hills have committed to nurture the five wetlands located among hectares of producing grapevines. A total of 3000 natives trees, shrubs and grasses have been planted in the wetlands so far as a result of Wither Hills' comprehensive restoration plan.⁸

Wither Hills procured my help to envision their goal to showcase these wetlands to the public through a

walkway designed with sustainability and accessibility in mind. Involvement in this project is a first step toward my personal goals to enhance spaces through thoughtful design responses and to encourage preservation and exploration of the other precious natural zones.

We New Zealanders love to explore our own backyard. We also love to show it off to visitors who travel from all parts of the world to witness our special landscapes. My project will expose this beautiful natural environment to the public as well as create a niche tourist experience for Wither Hills that takes advantage of the wine tour culture. This design will enable Wither Hills to welcome the public to access and experience the fragile wetlands. It will also allow them to showcase their commitment to environmentally sensitive wine growing and production to wine buyers from across the globe.

This project represents a significant expansion of my Bachelor of Design (HONS) research project to a higher level as it explores the spatial aspects of a landscape in greater detail and exhibits increased concern for ecological issues. I have developed a passion for ecology and design, in particular wetlands. I have acquired a heightened awareness of how fragile our world has become and how important it is for me as a designer of space to think about the repercussions of bringing more objects

into the world. How can I make sure I can leave a positive footprint behind? I do not want to be a producer of stuff. I enjoy working within nature and exploring sites, getting in touch with the earth and having a thoughtful response to those spaces. I endeavour to challenge the norm with respect to the ways of designing for the land in New Zealand, particularly the ways of design practised by the Department of Conservation (DOC), in order to prove that design is important when constructing within the landscape. There are many walkways within New Zealand that I believe are lacking the positive impact of a designer. This project poses a critique of many of the current DOC and regional council walkway developments. I hope to find new ways to experience and enhance New Zealand's natural spaces. (Fig.1,2,3,4)

This project is explored through the discipline of Spatial Design. Spatial Design expands the definition of edges as a creative practice by migrating liberally into many other fields of design. Often dominated by interior environments or performance design its focus is on space making. Spatial Design does not fit into the traditional discipline of architecture but is within the same family and uses the language of architecture to communicate design intentions. Massey University defines Spatial Design as a "practice of imagining, forming and constructing spatial and temporal environments"

as within its curriculum it explores the "corporeal and theoretical conditions of architectural and virtual environments and performance events. Offering opportunities to rethink space, to be innovative and speculative."⁹ The boundaries are flexible within the field of Spatial Design as to how design briefs are interpreted and explored. I have come to define Spatial Design within the realms of landscape, venturing deeply into place making and generating experiences within natural sites. I am not only concerned with the inhabitation of people but also with the ecologies and habitats within the milieu of landscape. Spatial Design is a relatively new discipline often occupied by people from varying backgrounds such as architecture. This has allowed me as a Spatial Designer to draw from a wide pool of knowledge to research work by artists, designers, landscape architects and architects to further expand the practice of Spatial Design.

Covering 50Ha of wounded wetlands within a busy vineyard, the scope of this project is so large that it would require a team of designers to fully develop and construct. Wither Hills desires a walkway within the wetlands to create a unique wine tour experience for their visitors and clients. This type of project highlights how important collaborative interdisciplinary design is, as I am dealing with a very complex and fragile



Fig.1. Miranda Bird Hide, Miranda



Fig.3. Lake Ngaroto, Te Awamutu



Fig.2. Howarth memorial wetland, Te Aroha

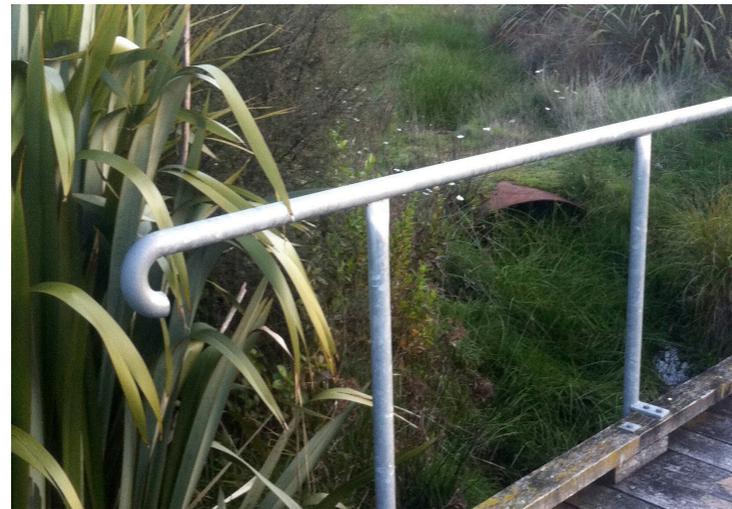


Fig.4. Kopurererua valley reserve, Tauranga

landscape. To reach its fullest state of potential, it would require the expertise and opinions of numerous people, including ecologists, experienced landscape architects and engineers. I bring to the table something unique in comparison to a landscape architect student because of my understanding on how to generate temporal and material experiences and utilise innovative spatial concepts to enrich environments.

On my intrepid journey of design I sought out special sites in the wetlands that I call nodes, defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary as "a place where lines in a network cross or meet".¹⁰ I started with over 30 nodes and eventually selected eight special sites to develop. These nodes are spaces of inspiration that each design has evolved from and sits within. Each node was recorded and surveyed meticulously. These eight sites are seminal to the formation of the master plan of the walkway as linking paths between each node; each node marks the location of a sensuous and tactile folly. (See liftout) The Oxford Dictionary describes the term folly as a "costly ornamental building with no practical purpose."¹¹ I liken the word folly to the way Bernard Tschumi spoke about Park La Villette "follies, in structural terms, are very simple buildings" but they are highly conceptual spaces of movement and event.¹² In Tschumi's broader sense of folly, they are described as having a strong dialog with their

environment and to be architectures of liberation rather than confinement.¹³ (Fig.5) The follies I have designed through this project are mostly micro architectures that are sensitive responses to their respective node. They have a close bond with the landscape and plant life around them and on foot each one of them remains connected. I discover a lot of my designs through daydreaming and getting lost in thought through walking in the fresh air. I build up a large knowledge base of site materials and precedents and over time the design evolves through visualisations, quick sketching and modelling. The walkway I have designed is an experience, evolving a deep conversation between mind, body and the earth.

Edges appear in the way that I work. I am a raven; I pick apart and hunt down concepts and precedents and I often find myself inspired by people from a variety of creative practices. I collect treasures that inform my design and allow me to rethink space in unique ways. I think this is due to the nature of Spatial Design and its flexibility to adapt into many other creative disciplines. I believe that as a spatial designer I am approaching an edge within the practice of space-making in the landscape. I can envisage a shift occurring that departs from a hard edge of landscaped, manicured, controlled natural spaces and moves towards the creation of softer

edges where the existing natural landscape and flora is highlighted. Many designers around the world are starting to celebrate the true substance of the site and as a result, they are relinquishing long-standing practices that aim to constrict nature. Edges make themselves present through my process; as I organise my ideas into sections and boxes they start seeping out over time and the edges between each start to blur and merge into one holistic vision for the design. I expand my own practice by having systems and process in place to stay in control of the project such as keeping things in folders, clear files, bottles and snaplock bags. I use labels and post-it notes to excessively organise things and admittedly also use this as a great form of procrastination. Within one particular part of my design process I have exposed edges. I have used a large wall in the postgraduate studio where I pinned up images and working documents for each of the eight nodes. They started off orderly and precise, each node having its own boundaries or place to occupy on the wall. As the year passed by I indulged in using the wall excessively; I included all of my ideas and developments. The wall grew fantastically wild and the invisible edges between the nodes began to blur and fuse. (See app. Wall development) Through this visual process the follies began to naturally develop and link up to become part of one story and one walkway.

How to use this book

In each of the following chapters I discuss relevant theorists and precedents who have informed my design in some way, weaving them in and out of the experience of the wetland.

There are two voices present. One is of my theoretical or imagined self, walking through the wetlands walkway that I have designed, describing the pure haptic pleasure of walking within, discovering, sensing, and immersing myself in the experience of each folly, defined by this typeface.

The other voice is of my critical self, reflection on the decisions made, theorists explored and the effect precedent work had on my design choices. This exegesis acts as a journey of discovery and reflection; it takes the form of an afternoon walk, defined by this typeface.

The walk traverses through different seasons and frames an experience of environment and physical changes to the landscape. Like the design of the walkway there is no set beginning or end or right way to walk; you are welcome to start the journey from anywhere, and take your time exploring each node.

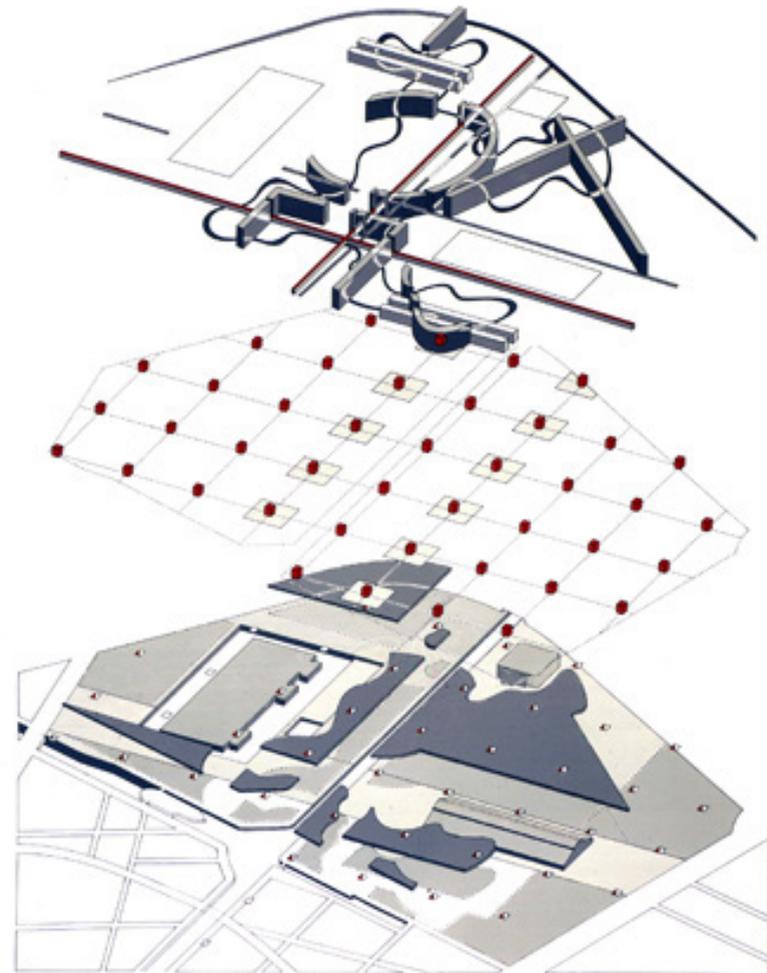


Fig.5. Bernard tschumi, *Park de la Villette*



Endnotes

- ¹ "edge". Oxford Dictionaries. Oxford University Press, accessed July 6, 2013, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/edge>.
- ² John Preece, *The Rarangi Wetland Complex : Conservation values, hydrology, impacts of groundwater extraction* (Marlborough: WetlandsNZ, 2007), i.
- ³ G. Y. Walls, *Botanical/ecological Notes on the Cloudy Bay Coast, Marlborough from Wairau River to Rarangi* (Nelson, NZ: Botany Division DSIR, 1977).
- ⁴ Wenche E Dramstad, James D Olson, and Richard T.T Forman, *Landscape Ecology Principles in Landscape Architecture and Land-Use Planning* (Washington, DC: Harvard University Graduate School of Design; Island Press; American Society of Landscape Architects, 1996), 27.
- ⁵ "Ramsar Convention - Ramsar FAQs," accessed May 5, 2013, http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-about-faqs-why-serve-wetlands/main/ramsar/1-36-37%5E7716_4000_0.
- ⁶ Preece, *The Rarangi Wetland Complex*, 5.
- ⁷ Ibid, 3.
- ⁸ Wither Hills, *Wither Hills, Biodiversity Fund and Marlborough District Council Rarangi Wetlands Project Report*, June 20, 2011, 1-11.
- ⁹ "Spatial Design@Massey," accessed January 5, 2014, <http://www.spatialdesign.ac.nz/>.
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- ¹¹ "folly". Oxford Dictionaries. Oxford University Press, accessed January 7, 2014, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/folly>.
- ¹² Samantha Hardingham, *Bernard Tschumi: Parc de La Villette*, Supercrit #4 (Abingdon [England] ; New York: Routledge, 2012), 59.
- ¹³ Ibid, 13-15.