Landscape as Tension: Exploring the Analytical and Generative Potential of a Focus on Tension in the Landscape[1]

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The rural landscape is the site of complex relationships that are often manifest as tensions. A natural inclination when confronted with tension is to seek to repair or resolve the situation. However, this process of removing tension can at the same time create anodyne landscapes – quiet and well-behaved, but inherently banal. Human relationships with landscape are fiercely complex. They can be personal or collective, subjective or objective, and fundamentally resistant to being distilled for analysis. While landscape architecture seeks to understand sociocultural relationships, the tendency to find order and systems can limit our understanding and blind us from recognising complex relationships (Meyer, 1997; Selman, 2006). Complexity is found not only in the spatial aspects of landscape, but also in its non-spatial dimensions, such as inhabitant perception and sociocultural value (Stephenson, 2008). The idea of 'landscape is tension' underpins John Wylie's (2007) *Landscape*, where landscape is 'precisely and inherently a set of tensions' (p 2). By focusing on tension, landscape research does not produce a more accurate definition of place, clarity or categorisation, but rather develops a deeper, comparative understanding of relations born out of difference.

Focusing on landscape tension has generative value as difference creates synthetic potential (figure 1). This synthetic potential can be harvested to develop design briefs that create spaces in which to explore the possibilities for this landscape (figure 2). A matrix can be used to develop the tensions into design possibilities. Conventional models of landscape value seek a unified understanding; in contrast, a landscape tension-oriented approach to analysis and design focuses attention on relationships, layers and points of interaction and opens out potential rather than narrowing it to a single solution (figure 3).

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REPORT

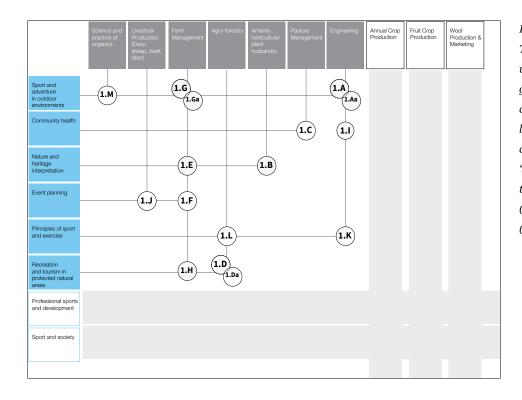|	Science and practice of organics	Livestock Production (Dairy, sheep, beef, deer)	Farm Management	Agro-forestry	Amenity horticulture/ plant husbandry	Pasture Management	Engineering	Annual Crop Production	Fruit Crop Production	Wool Production & Marketing
Sport and adventure in outdoor environments	1.M		1.G / 1.Ga				1.A / 1.Aa			
Community health				1.C			1.I			
Nature and heritage interpretation			1.E		1.B					
Event planning		1.J	1.F							
Principles of sport and exercise				1.L			1.K			
Recreation and tourism in protected natural areas			1.H	1.D / 1.Da						
Professional sports and development										
Sport and society										

Figure 1: Design projection table. Taking a (potentially opposing) value from each sociocultural group and using these to generate a multifunctional, multi-valued landscape response. 'Farmer' values are shown across the top, with 'walker' values down the left. Only those relevant to the design context (Banks Peninsula) are considered. (Image: Author's own).
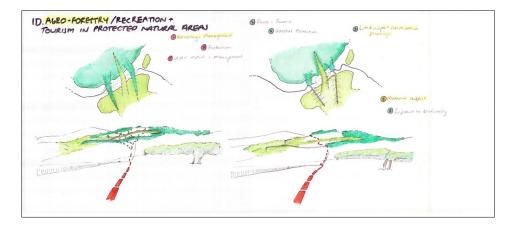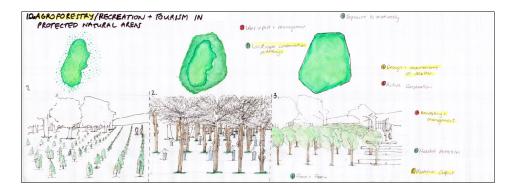

Figure 2: Design projection 1D interrogates the intersection between the agricultural landscape value of 'agro-forestry' and the recreationalist value of 'recreation and tourism in protected natural areas'. (Images: Author's own.)
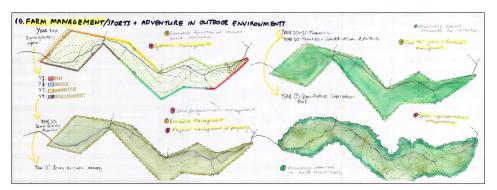
Figure 3: Forced design synthesis of farm management versus sports and adventure in outdoor environments, questioning technology's role within the rural Banks Peninsula landscapes. Recreationalists passing over farmland in this area are employed as monitors of hazards and safety and can alert landholders to any of their concerns (for example, about distressed stock, a broken fence or a fallen tree). (Images: Author's own.)

NOTE

1   For the MLA thesis on which this report is based, go to https://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/handle/10182/6504.

REFERENCES

Meyer, E (1997) The Expanded Field of Landscape Architecture. In *Ecological Design and Planning*, G Thompson and F Steiner (eds), New York, NY: John Wiley, pp 45–79.

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