COLOR(FUL) PREDICAMENTS IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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1 ABSTRACT
In this paper, I examine the history of ideas, themes, and debates about color in landscape architecture. I use the successive theories of five prominent English landscape and garden designers—Humphry Repton, J.C. Loudon, William Robinson, Gertrude Jekyll, and Sir Reginald Blomfield—who dominated the evolving color taste in 18th- and 19th-century England. These color outlooks provide a lens for understanding several discursive themes that were active in the evolving Western discourse on color and landscape architecture, including natural versus artificial, native versus exotic, and sensation versus concept. I use primarily primary texts to map affiliations, oppositions, and intersections of theoretical color models and ideas between landscape design and the disciplines of art, architecture, optics, chemistry, and botany of the time. I demonstrate specific shifts in color concepts from structural color, to decorative color (or blinding polychrome), to natural color harmony, to pointillism, to plain color mass, the latter of which continued to dominate the modern garden scene. I further show that color propensities in landscape architecture have been historically linked to media technologies and, especially, to disciplinary attitude about nature and art, a perpetual conceptual dichotomy that have perhaps muted the creative use of color to affect and transform human experience.

1.1 Keywords
color theory, landscape architecture, art-nature debate, print media technology, 18th- and 19th-century England
2 FROM PAINTING TO LANDSCAPE

Landscape architecture, as opposed to gardening, acquired its status among the Western arts in 18th-century England. Conceived as a copy of 17th-century landscape painting it translated 2-D image into 3-D reality. In this paper, I examine ideas about color through the writings of five prominent English landscape and garden designers—Humphry Repton, J. C. Loudon, William Robinson, Gertrude Jekyll, and Sir Reginald Blomfield—who dominated the evolving color taste in 18th- and 19th-century England. I show that color propensities in landscape design have historically been linked to disciplinary attitudes to the opposite concepts of nature and art. I highlight several color thematics; central among them is natural versus artificial, and its corollaries, color versus line (i.e., colore versus disegno), design versus draftsmanship, sensation versus concept, and native versus exotic. I also elucidate links between the color ideas and practices in landscape architecture and those in the related art and design disciplines, the sciences, and social sciences as well as technological and botanical advancements.

A central point in this paper is that arguments concerning color have often misused the nature-art concepts or used them carelessly. Thus, seemingly similar words were muddled, meaning different things at different times and often implying opposite ideas and vice versa.

2.1 Privileging Color Over Line: Giorgione and the Landscape Painting Genre

The discursive underpinnings of 18th-century English landscape gardening, for which landscape painting served as a guide, followed an earlier discourse on the relationship between nature and art that coincided with the emergence of the landscape painting genre in 16th-century Italy. Giorgione di Castelfranco of the Venetian school of painting, who is credited for the first painting that took landscape as its object, La Tempesta (1508), is also the first to be singled out for his use of color without prior line drawing. When Giorgione began painting directly with color and without a sketch he replaced Leonardo da Vinci’s soft lines and shadow gradation (or “chiaroscuro”) with inventive warm and cool tints. The modern art historian E. H. Gombrich argued that this radically new conception of the landscape genre presented art as an autonomous activity and a source of sensation and pleasure rather than of intellect and religious spirituality (Gombrich, 1971).

Gombrich’s 16th-century counterpart, Giorgio Vasari, agreed with this assessment, referring to Giorgione’s production as “the most pleasurable and realistic relief-like pictures of any time,” but considered it a regression of art (Vasari, 1868, p. 395). In his seminal collection, Lives of Artists (1563), Vasari argued that art relied on the rigor of line and form rather than on the ambivalence and sensation of color, as expressed in the new landscape painting genre. Vasari believed that proximity to nature compromised art and that color meddled with and muddled form and composition. “Concept,” he contended, “does not manifest to the eye when attractive color takes precedent” (Vasari, 1868, p. 247). Vasari’s criticism of Giorgione (and Titian) and alternately his praise of Michelangelo and Raphael clearly laid out a division within painting, and the debate over color versus line, sensation versus concept, and nature versus art. The realism, illusion, and sense of pleasure that color afforded Giorgione was passed on to his 17th-century successors, Claude Lorraine and Salvador Rosa, and in turn became the basis for landscape discourse among English intellectuals and the newfound bourgeoisie, who avidly collected these masters’ paintings, yet remained loyal to the line-concept preference when it came to gardens.

The debate on line versus color in 18th-century art and architecture circles must also be understood within the context of printmaking. The lack of effective color print technology promulgated an orthodox opinion in the growing academies of art and led to a broad preference for the line. According to the print historian Susan Lambert printmaking in the mid-18th-century was therefore fundamentally associated with draftsmanship and was correspondingly dissociated from color. “Colour,” she argued, “being as it were a grace note added to the image, [was] unnecessary to the true connoisseur and possibly a distraction from the elegance and significance of the image” (Lambert, 1987, p. 87)

2.2 Green Shades and Golden Hues: The Colors of the Picturesque

The early 18th-century English garden makers followed the teaching of art connoisseurs and aestheticians on landscape painting and gardening. Their style came to be known as the “Landscape” or “Picturesque” garden school. In his exposé, Essays on the Picturesque, the aesthetic authority Sir Uvedale Price considered colors to “have the power of exciting emotions,” yet he confirmed Vasari’s assertion that tint is inferior to form and composition. He began his instruction on color with the statement “I have said little
of the superior variety and effect of light and shade in scenes of this kind, as they of course must follow
variety of forms and of masses, and intricacy of disposition" (Price, 1842, p. 72). Price’s key principles of
landscape design were therefore form, mass, and the experience of movement that sets the scenes in
motion, and to which light, shadow, and color were merely subordinate.

Price concurred with the painter’s favorite colors, or “the painter’s season,” those deep and mellow
effects of autumn colors resulting from age and decay, and he argued that autumn colors are the most
suitable picturesque colors. He further reasoned that bright colors of fresh spring blossoms “are not those
which are best adapted to painting,” because they destroy the richness of variety and gradation of distance.
They produced glare and spotliness, thus ruining the harmony of a picture, “whether in nature or imitation"
(Price, 1842, pp. 138–139). Deeming the colors of Claude Lorrain and Peter Paul Rubens “more fresh” and,
therefore, inferior to the Venetian school of painting, he wrote of his preference of Giorgione’s and Titian’s
golden hues of autumn, “which gives [their paintings] such superiority over all others” (Price, 1842, p. 141).

Explicating on gardening, Price laid out the dichotomy of structural color versus ornamental color.
Accordingly, structural color agreed with the form and volume of objects and space, whereas ornamental
color was independent of space and akin to decoration. His preference for the colors of tree foliage,
especially evergreens, that accentuated solid masses and scenic composition over the spotty, merely
ornamental color of flowering trees and blossoms became a guide to the early renowned gardeners William
Kent and Capability Brown. Kent and Brown favored the varieties of green shades and textures in landscape
composition and relegated brightly colored flowers to the kitchen garden.

3 FROM REPTON TO BLOMFIELD: FIVE COLOR THEORIES

3.1 Structural Color: Humphry Repton and the Landscape Gardening School

Kent’s and Brown’s successor, Humphry Repton both followed and expanded Price’s teachings. Repton, an avid theatergoer and watercolor artist, labored to unite the art of landscape painting and
gardening through his writing and drawing. From 1787 until his death in 1818, he built only a few gardens
but made over 400 design proposals, half of which were compiled into bound books, known as “red books.”
He became famous for his inventive before-and-after watercolored drawings (see Figure 1).

Like his predecessors, Repton preferred the color of verdure for the chief compositional tint and
agreed with the propriety of Price’s golden colors of autumn foliage. He also concurred with Price’s primacy
of structure over color. Repton held two main color propositions. The first, distinguished between landscape
and artifact, including building, reserving different color tastes and schemes to each. The second, conceded
to nature the role of colorist. By relegating the role of colorist to nature, Repton freed himself to “scape” the
land, that is, to shape the garden form and space and choreograph the experience in it. This concession
however involved a highly controlled color design, which among other sources borrowed selective tints from
paintings. Yet, Repton was not a purist. He developed his color sensibilities based not only on the
picturesque aesthetics of Price but also on the science of Isaac Newton’s color theory of light and on the
more subjective visual perception of the observer.
Figure 1. Humphry Repton, before-and-after watercolor drawings, perspective view along the path from E to the south and distant hills before, with the paling fence, and after, with the cattle below the oak and elm canopy; Public domain image from the Red Book of Brandsbury, Middlesex, 1789.

The mathematical harmonies that Newton found in nature and in music fascinated Repton and instigated his own experiments. The use of color, he argued, must not be directed by “the effect of chance and fancy but guided by certain general laws of nature” (Repton, 1907, p. 218). He experimented with registering light through a prism on a white paper fastened against a black cloth and systematically observed the change of light across the day (Repton, 1907, pp. 245–247; Repton, 1982, pp. 49–51). He recorded the succession of color from the neutral tints of brown and gray prior to sunrise to the rainbow colors in full sun and noted the aerial perspective and color and light variations between distant and near objects and before and after sunrise (see Figure 2). Unlike Newton’s pure optics, however, Repton was also concerned with how color relate to perception and affect the spectator. For example, he argued that the contrast of dark
green woods and light green lawn does not satisfy the eye and requires more variety of colors. He thus called to add objects, such as rocks, water, a bench, a gravel road, and cattle, the latter of which added off-white highlights and animation to the scene (Repton 1794, p. 39).

Figure 2. Humphry Repton, recording of tint scales from experiments with prism and early morning light before and after sunrise, aquatint, page spread; Public domain image from Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, 1816, The Getty Research Center, open access.

Repton also used color to manipulate perception and produce spatial illusion and even deception through camouflage, as did other landscape gardeners at the time. To realize picturesque scenes, the landscape gardener refashioned and “improved” the land through topographic and planting alterations using a variety of camouflage tactics to disguise the change, thus presenting the artificial as natural. The capacity of color to disguise and deceive was integral to this cosmetic procedure. Natural materials of earth, plants, and water were the artist’s “paint” in the gardener’s hand, elements used to control perception and stimulate emotion. Repton quoted Edmond Burke’s dictum, “A true artist should put a generous deceit on spectators,” and explained the concepts of the concealment of boundary, situation, and utility in Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening (1794), his first book (as cited in Daniels, 1994, p. ix). In Theory and Practice (1803),
Repton elaborated on these concepts, approving of masking "undesirable" elements, such as fences and utilitarian objects but disapproving of faking architectural elements and facades, for example, by painting a brick wall to look like stucco. The first act of landscape camouflage concerned the integrity of the natural image and therefore was a legitimate disguise; it was equated with "functional and essential color." The second act, concerned artifacts and was therefore a sham; it was equated with "decorative and superfluous color" (Repton, 1907, p. 187).

To attain perfect color effects in his publications, Repton used the new aquatint technique, which coincided with the rise of the highly illustrated picturesque villa book genre. For his plates, he used a two-step process: an initial engraved print with neutral brown and gray tints that were then glazed over by hand with rainbow watercolors (Repton, 1982, pp. 51–52; Archer, 1985, p. 712). The development of aquatint, a tonal method devised primarily to reproduce the flat washes of watercolor and could render tones and delicate gradations from light to shade, enabled the portrayal of varied textures and shadings, especially in the landscape part of the composition (Lambert, 1987, p. 77; Prideaux, 1909).

Repton considered landscape gardening "a happy medium between nature and art" and therefore a vocation that was subject to judgments beyond art principles derived from paintings. He noted several distinctions between the two arts, including the fixed color in painting versus the changing color in nature due to light, reflection, time and season (Repton, 1907, pp. 53–54). In the final years of his practice (1800s), Repton grew increasingly impatient with the aesthetic authority of erudite gentlemen, such as Uvedale Price and the like, and turned permissive of both design styles and color palettes. He diverged from picturesque forms and golden hues and permitted geometric compositions and "fresh" color to enter the garden. This shift hinged in part on the growing class of suburban cottage owner and Repton's urge to appeal to mainstream taste.

3.2 Blinding Polychrome: J. C. Loudon and the Victorian Garden

Repton's successor, J. C. Loudon, who shaped landscape discourse and practice in Regency and early Victorian England, continued this trend and completely overturned the picturesque color canon. Between 1811 and 1843, Loudon published a dozen magazines and encyclopedias and over 30 books on villa, country cottage, landscape gardening, and horticulture. His training in horticulture, botany, chemistry, and agriculture drew him closer to the science of horticulture and botany and distanced him further from Price's lofty aesthetic theories as well as Repton's artistic sensibilities. Loudon's publications delineated his scientific standards and concern for botanical species palette expansion and horticultural practicality. As early as 1803, when Loudon first arrived in London, he was struck by the gloomy appearance of the public squares and attributed this to their limited evergreen tree palette. He then published an article in The Literary Journal, where he suggested banishing yews and firs and mixing evergreens with deciduous trees, especially ornamental trees such as Oriental and Occidental plane trees, sycamore, and almond (J. C. Loudon, 1980, p. 12).

In targeting the growing amateur gardeners and horticulturists and suburban audience, Loudon promoted highly adaptable garden layouts and varied color palettes. Among the wide range of garden styles that he privileged were the formal garden (itself an import from Italy via France); the informal, or English landscape garden (18th-century picturesque); and, his most known, gardensesque style garden. The latter was a radical departure from the informal and closer to the formal garden, a garden loaded with flower "beddings" filled with color (see Figure 3). Loudon promoted color in the flower garden in two forms: the flower bed, in which flower color entered as distinct and bright-colored patterns, and the "flower border," an elongated, rectangular edge flower bed juxtaposed with turf, the object of which was "to display a gay assemblage of colors during the season of flowers, without much regard to variety of form or diversity of character in these flowers, or the plants that produce them" (J. C. Loudon 1982, pp. 136, 137, 160; J. C. Loudon, pp. 1825, p. 798).
Loudon’s garden theory advanced an alternative position in the successive nature versus art debate. For him, a garden was a human expression and thus should display its artefactual rather than natural state. He wrote that “any creation, to be recognized as a work of art, must be such as can never be mistaken for a work of nature” (J. C. Loudon, 1982, p. 137). For Loudon, garden equaled art, but it was now inspired by the popular taste of the horticulturalist rather than the aesthetic of the painter and the aestheteic who interprets it. The shift from picturesque to “gardenesque,” or romantic eclecticism, in which the garden was to be distinctly artefactual and ornamental and the work of the gardener trumped that of nature, became a popular Victorian outlook. It introduced a stark shift from green and golden autumn shades to blinding...
polychrome. Small, bright, and distinct color-saturated beds of elaborate shapes popped up everywhere, with the favorite bedding subjects of geraniums, calceolarias, and lobelias representing the most vivid tones of the three primaries. The best color arrangement was a bed of compound color next to a bed of simple color which was not contained in it. Purple flowers should have yellow next to them; orange should be contrasted with blue; and green, relieved by red.

The polychromatic appetite in gardening paralleled the growing dominance of science and the systematization of color as well as new developments in chemistry and industrial color production. Garden design, in turn, went through a process of rationalization and popularization. Methodic color scales, like those of the chemist Michel Eugene Chevreul, assisted in the collection and selection of flower color. Color theory became one of the head gardener's job requirements (Tunnard, 1938, p. 39).

Another reason contributed to the shift from the disinterest in color in the early 1800s to the Victorian obsession for lavish, ornamental coloration. The shift was partially inspired and enabled by the influx of colorful plant introductions into England from Mexico, the Low Countries, and the American colonies (Taylor, 1980). The lack of color native flower varieties in England was replaced by a wealth of foreign flower species. The Royal Horticulture Society, founded in 1804, began promoting flower collections and endorsing the new trend. New botanical journals displayed meticulously drawn and hand-colored engravings that portrayed botanical distinctions with accuracy. Many of Loudon's books, however, were colorless, displaying wood engraving and lithographs as a means to produce cost-effective and affordable publication (Archer, 1985, p. 510).

The 18th-century Victorian appetite for bright colors prompted a new debate on exotic versus native plants, a corollary of the artefactual versus natural garden pair. It culminated late that century in the battle between two English gardening schools—the “Wild Garden” with its avid proponents William Robinson and Gertrude Jekyll, and the “Formal Garden” or “Architectural Garden” with its advocate Sir Reginald Blomfield. The first promoted natural color harmonies and gradations; the second, distinct color masses.

3.3 Natural Color Harmony: William Robinson and the Wild Garden

By the late 18th-century, a growing wave of naturalism and empirical tendencies rivaled the Victorian trend. The economic depression between the 1870s and 1890s also contributed to the need to shift from highly intensive gardenesque annual flower beds to low maintenance perennial flowers, hardy plants, and herbaceous gardens. Furthermore, the fad was undercut by the campaign to abolish the import of foreign plants and decorative flower beds by the horticulturalist and journalist William Robinson and his publications of The Wild Garden (1870) and The English Flower Garden (1883). Joined by the gardener and writer Gertrude Jekyll, the two launched a battle against exotics plant imports, laying out the opposition of indigenous or native versus exotics. As avid gardeners, they called for careful observation of the growth of the garden and provision for the needs of the plants. Philosophically and aesthetically, both were influenced by the ideas of art critic John Ruskin, who espoused the ornamental function of color. Ruskin insisted that art should imitate nature’s color and that any color arrangements of varied materials should be decorative rather than structural, in other words, that color should be independent of form (Ruskin, 1889, pp. 126–27). He argued that color should appear as in nature in “simple masses” or “zones” as in the rainbow, clouds, marble, and shells. Ruskin based his theory on a close study of nature’s biological tints and, providing the example of the Zebra’s stripes among others, he claimed that in nature, plant and animal colors never follow form, which is arranged entirely on a different system. As he put it, “[in nature] all arrangements of color, for its own sake, in graceful forms, are barbarous” (Ruskin, 1889, p.129). For Ruskin, then, plant color had an inherently decorative quality, which rarely coincided with form.

Robinson (1900), whose writing career spanned from 1869 to 1910, promoted the “knowledge of the life of a garden” and the fitness of plants to site conditions. He maintained that whereas “the artist gives us the fair image: the gardener is the trustee of a world of fair living things, to be kept with care and knowledge in necessary subordination to the conditions of his work” (pp. 5, 7). For Robinson, art, which meant “the power to see and give form to beautiful things,” implied a complete fidelity to nature. Accordingly, the “true” garden artist knew the local conditions and plant communities, arranged plants in their “natural grouping,” and ensured their health and optimal natural form and growth. Robinson laid out the dichotomy of showy and glary color (i.e., ugly) versus true and delicate color (i.e., beautiful and harmonious), and considered not only the colors of flowers, but also those of leaves, stems, birds, clouds, and air (Robinson, 1900, p. 280). Using the term true to imply rightfulness, he turned to nature as his model, indeed, bestowing upon nature the role of colorist:
Nature is a good colourist, and if we trust to her guidance we never find wrong colour in wood, meadow, or on mountain. Laws have been laid down by chemists and decorators about colours which artists laugh at, and to consider them is a waste of time. (Robinson, 1900, p. 280)

Whereas Repton, too, relegated to nature the role of colorist, the two figures entertained different notions of nature and natural colors. Clearly, this divergence suggests that nature and its colors are in the eye of the beholder.

Ridiculing scientific attempts to systematize color scales, Robinson called on the gardener instead to study the color palette of the flowers themselves and recommended the use of color for the effect of Harmony, rather than Contrast, and of Breadth of Mass and Intergrouping. He prescribed color arrangements for different seasons, replacing the bright colors of Victorian bedding patterns, or what he called the decorative style of design, with a plant grouping version whose color would drift and mix as in the wild (see Figure 4). Large effects and proper sequences of harmonies were his own subjective preferences:

There should be large effects, each well studied and well placed, varying in different portions of the garden scheme ... Many people have not given any attention to colour-harmony, or have not by nature the gift of perceiving it. Let them learn it by observing some natural examples of happily related colouring, taking separate families of plants whose members are variously coloured. Some of the best to study would be American Azaleas, Wallflowers, German and Spanish Iris, Alpine Auriculas, Polyanthus, and Alstroemerias (Robinson, 1900, pp. 281–82).

Figure 4. William Robinson, A Primrose Garden in Surrey, engraving based on photograph; Public domain image from The English Flower Garden, 1883.

More instructions followed. The plants whose flowers were related in color, for instance the family of reds and oranges, were to be grouped together to follow each other through seasons of blooming. The effect of the color mass was "to be large enough to have a certain dignity, but never so large as to be wearisome," and the color breadth in the masses was also needed "to counteract the effect of foreshortening when the border is seen from end to end" (Robinson, 1900, p. 282).

Robinson illustrated his ideas in The English Flower Garden with black-and-white engravings mostly in perspective. Many of the engravings were based on photographs. Photographic printing at the time was
still costly, though Robinson may well have preferred the old-fashioned grainy textured quality of the engraving, which suited the colorful drifts and gradations of the wild.

3.4 **Pointillism: Gertrude Jekyll and the Impressionist Garden**

Gertrude Jekyll, a gardener and prolific writer whose 60-year gardening career began in 1870, shared Robinson’s garden design principles, but she used a different lens and style. She was the first to make color schemes the primary concern of the garden, her unique contribution to garden design. In her books, *Colour in the Flower Garden* (1908) and *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden* (1908), Jekyll defended her narrow focus by arguing that form and proportions are important but had already been treated by others, whereas color was neglected (Wood, 2006, p. 67). She experimented with color groupings and meticulously recorded the results in her own garden at Munstead Wood, which gradually evolved over the 59 years she lived there.

Jekyll differed from Robinson in that she repeatedly referred to gardens as “living pictures.” She considered the work of a painter to be a model to the gardener, and referred to colors as paint pigments in the garden, and the earth as canvas. She considered herself a person of refined aesthetics and called for a cultivated taste, especially for gardeners, whom, as she claimed, did not possess good taste. Albeit, she was neither an artist herself, nor did she qualify as an artist in Ruskin’s eyes. As is evident in the incident described below, for Ruskin, a painter and a gardener clearly saw color differently:

Jekyll once recalled that on one occasion Ruskin had asked her: “What is the colour of the grass over there?” to which she responded: “Green, of course.” “No, it’s not,” said Ruskin: “Were you to paint that grass, green is not the colour you would take from your watercolour box. It would be primrose yellow.” (Wood, 2006, p. 8)

Jekyll was a naturalist with a poetic bent and a moralistic tone, as this remark suggests: “No artificial planting can ever equal that of Nature, but one may learn from it the great lesson of the importance of moderation and reserve, of simplicity of intention, and directness of purpose” (Jekyll, 1904, p.156). Her references to art combined with her disregard for formal composition and affection for Impressionist painting landed her the title of “impressionist gardener” or “pointillist gardener,” at a time when Impressionism was fading (Wood, 2006, pp. 68–73).

Jekyll was also inspired by Chevreul’s principles of color harmony and explanations for various optical peculiarities for her herbaceous flower borders (the same source that informed the late 19th century Impressionist artists and, alternately, Jekyll’s own predecessor, Loudon). Accordingly, Jekyll used a greater variety of earthy color mixes and gradations in her color flower border schemes. In her writing, Jekyll used rich vocabulary of color descriptors to articulate desired pictorial and optical effects and avoided scientific color chart naming (Jekyll 1904, p. 80). And as the following statement indicates, she was far from rational and highly subjective and judgmental when it came to the principles of harmony and beauty:

I do not know whether it is by individual preference, or in obedience to some colour-law that I can instinctively feel but cannot pretend even to understand, and much less to explain, but in practice I always find more satisfaction and facility in treating the warm colours (reds and yellows) in graduated harmonies, culminating into gorgeousness, and the cool ones in contrasts; especially in the case of blue. (Jekyll, 1904, p. 206)

Although Jekyll designed with color in mind and had a great affection for watercolor drawings, the few illustrations in her books are colorless, and the vast majority are in plan-view. The plans show simple outlines of rectangular-shaped beds, filled with a patchwork of planting blobs including botanical plant labels, ready to be executed by a gardener (see Figure 5). Although the color lithograph technique was perfected at the turn-of-the-century, black-and-white photography became the prime vehicle for the representation and dissemination of her new ideas in landscape design, replacing perspective drawings. Photographic presentation came close to the spectator’s point of view, exuded an apparent objectivity, and brought realism in garden representation to a new height (Lipstadt, 1988, p. 28). The mechanical fidelity of photographic reproductions that was popularized in print media was in line with Jekyll’s empirical sentiments.
According to modern English landscape architect Christopher Tunnard, the camera lens and photographic frame may have had a role in shaping Jekyll’s approach to garden design, to seeing the garden as “living pictures.” The camera, an apparatus that recorded the effects of light, also, led to the development of impressionism in art. Tunnard recounts the reproduction in painting by judicious combinations of the light reflecting pigments of painters, such as Sargent, who used hundreds of different shades that were found to be necessary for successful imitation of the camera’s vision (Tunnard, 1938, p. 37). Tunnard considered this approach to be detrimental to the perception of formal composition, which he deemed to be the most important element of the modern garden. Yet, he added that these same pointillist experiments in color “enabled constructional painters like Cézanne and original romantic painters like Van Gogh to assume the significant positions they hold in the history of modern art” (Tunnard, 1938, p. 37). Turning to Jekyll, Tunnard
slighted impressionism in the garden and planting design that appears to have 'happened' rather than to have been artificially planned.

Modern developments in the late 19th-century art world—the work of Cezanne being a harbinger to modernism—to which Tunnard alluded, were paralleled in landscape and garden design. The final decade of the century brought about another turn in garden design theory by the architect Sir Reginald Blomfield. Blomfield restored the architect’s involvement in garden design, a longtime practice that had been disrupted since the age of Brown and Repton, and that primarily favored form over color and formal over natural composition. Blomfield introduced a new voice to the color debate that sided with the Beaux-Arts revivalist tradition and at the same time served as a precursor to the color ideas of the modern landscape that would emerge in the early 20th-century.

3.5 Plain Color Mass: Sir Reginald Blomfield and the Beaux-Arts Garden

In the 1890s, Sir Reginald Blomfield countered the call for the wild garden with his seminal publication, *The Formal Garden in England* (1892). The clash between Robinson and Jekyll and Blomfield was the clash between the formal garden and the informal garden, both of which deployed color as ornament, yet of a different kind.

Blomfield instigated a garden design shift from horticulture to architecture, arguing that the landscape gardener ignored the house and created a garden without any relationship to it. It was also a shift from pictorial to spatial design, where mass and form dominated, and color merely supported the formal composition. He countered Robinson’s call for landscape gardeners to act as painters on a colossal scale and improve the grounds “with the compositions of the old masters” (Blomfield, 1901, p. 6). Furthermore, he ridiculed Robinson’s call to landscape gardeners to become “painters in the spirit of nature” and with the “privilege to make ever-changing pictures out of nature’s own material—sky and trees, water and flowers and grass” (Blomfield, 1901, p. 7). Blomfield also bluntly opposed the picturesque act of deception that conceals human-made elements, including paths and fences, so as to create an undisturbed natural scene (Blomfield, 1901, p. 5). He even rejected Loudon’s decorative gardenesque bedding-out patterns which had nothing to do with space:

In dealing with great spaces the landscape gardener seems to have little idea of mass. He is forever breaking up the outline with little knots of trees, and reducing the size of his grounds by peppering them all over with shrubs (Blomfield, 1901, p. 226).

Blomfield was keen to expose the gardeners’ ineptness in the art and design world, which to him resided in the extreme opposite of nature. He argued that garden as a word and an idea is integral to the notion of enclosed space with clear boundaries, as opposed to unenclosed fields and woods:

The long yew - hedge is clipped and shorn because we want its firm boundary lines and *the plain mass* [emphasis added] of its colour; … and the flower border on either side is planted with every kind of delightful flower, so that the refinements of its colour may be enjoyed all through the summer (Blomfield, 1901, p. 233).

The context for Blomfield’s ideas was the turn-of-the-century budding of landscape architectural academic programs and professional institutions that emulated the canons of architecture schools and made the Rome Academy and its associated Beaux-Arts drawings their own model of practice. For Blomfield, the question of garden design was not one of horticulture at all, but one of design, and color was to be relegated to a secondary position:

The horticulturist and the gardener are indispensable, but they should work under control, and they stand in the same relation to the designer as the artist's colourman does to the painter, or perhaps it would be fairer to say, as the builder and his workmen stand to the architect. The two ought to work together. (Blomfield, 1901, p. 20)

Blomfield’s polemical text was interspersed with a few contemporary and mostly historical formal garden illustrations from the Renaissance, Baroque, and Medieval periods in perspective and bird-eye view.
The traditional wood engraving and lithograph techniques suited his retrospective tendency and the return to formality (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Sir Reginald Blomfield, Engravings, The Fishpond, Wrest, Bedfordshire (top); The old garden at Brickwall, Sussex (bottom). Public domain image from *The Formal Garden*, 1892.

The emphasis on spatial design and on linking the garden and the house became key principles of modern 20th-century garden design. Color, in turn, emerged from its subordinate position to form and its role in service of the “mass,” in Blomfield’s scheme, gained its primacy once more as a partner to the creation of space and formal composition in the twentieth century modern garden.

Blomfield’s critical writing, for the first time in garden theory, took to task his predecessors’ negligence, or casual definition, of the word *nature*. Instead, he argued, they preferred to “use the word in half a dozen different senses,” adding:
The axiom on which the system rests is this—Whatever nature does is right; therefore let us go and copy her. Let us obliterate the marks of man's handiwork (and particularly any suspicion of that bad man, the architect), and though we shall manipulate the face of nature with the greatest freedom, we shall be careful to make people believe that we have not manipulated it at all. (Blomfield, 1901, p. 4)

Blomfield’s contention corroborates a central point in this essay – that the arguments concerning color have often misused the nature-art concepts or used them carelessly. Thus, seemingly similar words were muddled, meaning different things at different times, and often implying opposing ideas and vice versa. As such, for Repton, artful meant imitation of the masters’ painting and the erasure of human intervention to achieve an ostensibly natural scene, using natural color as camouflage to deceive the eye. Conversely, for J. C. Loudon, artful, meant the display of human presence as distinct from the natural landscape using bright color as contrast. For Robinson and Jekyll, artful meant fidelity to the natural condition, whereas for Blomfield, it meant severance from the natural condition. Likewise, the idea of deferring to nature the role of colorist was advocated by both Repton and Robinson toward very different ends and color schemes. Whatever artful and natural meant, the debate on color has continued to reflect landscape designers’ insistence on the false dichotomy between the concepts of art and nature. Each of the color outlooks that pervade the 18th- and 19th century English discourse and practice projected its color ideas on both nature and art.

Many landscape architects are still using the color green, for instance, to signify nature at the time that art and architecture eschewed the notion of color as signifier and replaced it with color as affect. Aided and reinvigorated by new technologies, color and artificial light have invaded the urban landscape through floor surfaces and free-skinned building facades. The practice seen in experimental garden festivals over the past two decades and urban works by West 8, Claude Cormier, and Perta Blaise, to name a few, suggest increased interest in color design by practicing landscape architects. Yet, the voice of landscape architecture is missing in the renewed discourse on color and atmosphere in contemporary architectural and urbanism. New titles in architecture and urbanism validate this interest and the need for theoretical studies that could shed light on these novel practices as well as place them historical perspective.

Finally, recently there has been increased interest in sensorial and haptic perception in landscape architecture and there is a growing body of research, though not yet books, on soundscape and fragrance. Although it is understood that human experience relies on the interdependency of the senses, this work heralds an approach that isolates sensorial and perceptual color intake in order to not only to reveal core landscape concepts and debates in our discipline, but also to uncover new design possibilities. This historiography prefigures the experiential possibilities that design with color can offer, new ways in which designers can transform color for altered perception and intense experiences.

4 REFERENCES


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MEDIA STATEMENT

COLOR(FUL) PREDICAMENTS IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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In this paper, I examine the history of ideas, themes, and debates about color in landscape architecture in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. I use five successive theories that are configured around color as a lens for understanding several general discursive themes that are still active today, such as natural versus artificial, native versus exotic, and sensation versus concept. I show that color propensities in landscape architecture have historically been linked to disciplinary attitudes to the opposite concepts of nature and art as well as to contemporaneous discourses in art and architecture and to printing technology.