

Armstrong, H. (2004) 'Gardens of Hope' in Proceedings, *Browned off: Old Gardens in a New World*, AGHS 25th Annual National Conference, Sydney, October 14-17, pp 79-86.

Gardens of Hope

Hope: To look forward to with desire and more or less confidence
Hope (archaic): To trust or rely.

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Preamble

For garden historians, hope is evident in many aspects of old gardens. Gardens have always been places for hopeful recreation and for the aesthetic enjoyment of plants. Gardens have also been places in which to experiment and to learn about nature. For many the garden has been a place to explore creativity, finding abstract ways to represent nature. And ultimately gardens are healing places where the act of cultivation brings about a sense of new life. In all these aspects, gardens embody hope.

Reflections of Hope in Australian Gardens

There are many definitions of 'hope' but for this conference, I would like to extend the concept of 'hope' to '*hope that one could start again*'.

The whole of Australia was seen as a Garden of Hope in the 18th century. By the 19th century gardens had retreated to more manageable private and public pleasure grounds, but still heavily invested with symbols of hope, often as avenues of majestic rainforest trees. By the 20th century, Gardens of Hope had shrunk to even smaller dimensions in the form of back gardens created by the many migrants who 'built the nation' from the 1950s on.

Although the 19th and 20th century colonists never really relinquished the concept of Australia as an Antipodean tropical Garden of Eden with plentiful water, their day to day existence told them that water was an unreliable commodity, either not present or arriving in such deluges that it ran in torrents to the ocean taking precious soil with it. Australia was not an Emerald Isle, deeply green from constant ground-soaking, misty rain. It was a 'harsh brown land', a 'sunburnt country'.

The longing for water resulted in large dams and the turning of rivers inwards while symbols of a tropical paradise, the rainforest trees, fringed all the streets in rural towns and the main thoroughfares in large cities. Although the species may differ, this continues today.

'Hope' as the Macquarie Dictionary suggests is '*desire accompanied by expectation*'.

The philosopher, Alphonso Lingis however, suggests that '*Hope arises in a break with the past*' (Lingis, 2002 :23) – there is a kind of letting go of the past. If 'hope' implies letting go and new beginnings, what were the 18th century settler/occupiers sailing away from? The Industrial Revolution had wrecked havoc on the social fabric of the countryside and cities in Britain and Europe as well as hideous environmental degradation. At this time, Australia was a 'Garden of Hope' to the 18th century intellectuals. It was a political hope – a hope that a better world could be set up and that it could endure.

The reality, of course, was very different, but hope is not easily relinquished. Utopian hope changed to a new form - the optimism of 19th century geographer/botanical/scientists. Their activities resulted in intriguing Gardens of Hope in the form of Acclimatisation Gardens where a variety of hopeful gestures were undertaken as experiments with new and old plants in this strange dry (browned off) land.

It was not until the 20th century that some of the hopeful experiments changed into environmentally devastating weed invasions.

By the mid 20th century, 'hope' took on another role – hope as a form of healing and recovering one's life as a migrant in a new land. At this time, Gardens of Hope were evident as little gestures – productive gardens behind suburban cottages - recreating a lost past. This also continues today with recently arriving refugees from places like Somalia, Sudan or Afghanistan.

In parallel with these timid gestures, in the 21st century, Gardens of Hope have assumed global dimensions in keeping with the scale of problems that hopefulness seeks to address.

I am suggesting that today Gardens of Hope have taken three forms, gardens which are re-creating and husbanding lost environments such as The Eden Project in Cornwall and the emerging Starseed Project in Byron Bay, the gardens sustaining genetic diversity and viability associated with the Seed Savers organisation, and gardens which use art and metaphor to arouse community awareness of the hopeful gestures one can make to improve our damaged environment or delight in the riches that still remain. These are the Garden Festivals, in particular the annual garden installations at Chaumont-sur-Loire in France.

Conversations about Hope

There have been a plethora of books about Hope recently, possibly stimulated by the turn of the millennium or a desire to challenge the nihilism embedded in Post-Modern thinking in the late 20th century.

Hope as Warp and Weft of Everyday Lives

As stated earlier, 'hope' is defined by the Macquarie Dictionary as '*desire accompanied by expectation*'. However, the anthropologist, Michael Taussig, considers 'hope' to be part of the warp and weft of everyday life, ever present and ubiquitous and so crucially important that it is like the very air we breathe, (Taussig, 2002:43). If this is so, how do we reconcile the cynicism about possible futures that is also just as pervasive? To garden one must have hope and belief in a future because one must wait for plants to grow and bear fruit, evident in the tentative attempts to garden by the Somali refugees in Brisbane. There is a delay between 'desire' and 'fulfilment'.

For Mary Zournazi, the author of '*Hope: new philosophies of change*'(2002), '*hope is built on belief and faith, and the trust that there is a life worth living in uncertain times*' (Zournazi,2002:16). She engages in conversation with a number of leading thinkers about 'Hope' in 21st Century. In these conversations there is a simple willingness to face one's fears and still go on – being heroes in everyday life – where undertaking ordinary things in our daily lives inspires us to have faith and trust in the world. Again, the simple act of gardening epitomises this. However the gardens I am suggesting here are new Gardens of Hope, often prompted by a sense of environmental alarm. So hope today is more than simple optimism.

Hope as Joyful Revolt

The French feminist and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva, calls 'hope' a '*Joyful Revolt*'. She suggests that that if there is to be any hope in a world where such damage to the psychic space has occurred, evident in the ever more aggressive world around us, it resides in what she calls '*care*' (Kristeva, 2002:65).

'Care' of the earth is what has underpinned the Eden Project, the Seed Savers, and the Starseed Gardens. Kristeva also suggests that 'belonging' is a way to stave off the anxiety generated by current crises. In this, I would argue there is a strong form of belonging for the many migrants in Australia in the act of gardening, tilling the soil, planting seed, and nurturing emerging plants. Belonging through gardening takes on unusual forms. The Pacific Islander community in Brisbane belong through their community plantations on borrowed land (at the moment, spare hospital

land). They work collectively to grow yams and bananas which they share amongst themselves and the wider community.

But most interesting of all is Kristeva's suggestion that 'hope' lies in a sort of '*joyfulness*' which is something we need to cultivate both through memory and through the best possible relationship with our environment. (Kristeva,2002:75)

Michael Taussig also explores hope as joy. He considers there is a relationship between being intellectual and being pessimistic, however, he sees that people can hold both 'hope' and 'disbelief' at the same time. He suggests that there is a level of complexity in people where '*hope and lack of hope are a dynamic mix*' (Taussig,2002:47). Taussig talks about '*re-enchantment and awakening*' (Taussig,2002:54) and he suggests that rather than maintaining a cynical distance we should be re-awakened and re-encharmed by connecting myth with reality and in this process hope has a role to play.

Clearly something is happening when the Art Gallery of NSW continually fills its lectures on Philosophy. Why are so many people of all ages spending money to sit inside a packed lecture theatre on a Saturday to listen to the great philosophers making sense of the world? This is not cynical behaviour, it is yet another example of a willingness to be re-awakened and re-encharmed by myth and reality.

So let us accept and let go of the mistakes of the past and present, the 'browned off' gardens in the New World, and look at what these new gardens are saying.

Places of Experimentation: Gardens of Hope

The Gardens of Hope I am speaking about are established in new places where there is invariably a sense of experimentation involved. This is palpably evident in the writings about the Eden Project and has been equally evident throughout Australian garden history. Commonly when creating new gardens, the key is to understand sense of place, usually understood by developing close familiarity with a place, by knowing its secrets. With Gardens of Hope there is a certain lack of knowledge – an experiment. As with the concept of hope, if one knew all there is to know, then why would one need to hope?

Garden Festivals as Gardens of Hope

Equally, Gardens of Hope exhibit a kind of 'joyful revolt', epitomised by Garden Festivals which were always seen as places of hope. Originally used as ways to rehabilitate war-damaged urban areas before becoming new places in which to work and live, later they became ways to mask the sad ghosts of the Industrial Era. Today they battle with the new 'Garden shows' in the media which promise instant gardens in the latest ubiquitous style, spread to any area of the world where there is a TV set.

There is great value in the ephemerality of these Garden Festivals as they can be sites for experimentation and cultural comment. Jane Amidon (2001), the author of *Radical Landscapes*, comments that the success of Garden Festivals lies in their providing a new understanding of 'garden' as a vehicle for contemporary investigations.

In a similar vein, John Dixon-Hunt (2000), talks about three forms of nature that can be embodied in the garden. *First Nature* is nature as Wilderness - the territory of the Gods; nature that embodies primal spirits – the sublime – the awesome. *Second Nature* is cultivated land. We live largely in a world of second nature. Second nature gardens are cultivated gardens of flowers, vegetables, orchards and vines.

Third nature is nature as art. These gardens distil the essence of nature. They are abstract and intense – going from mimesis to representations of nature in a similar way to the way that poetry focuses writing. They have qualities of compactness and concentration.

Gardens which engage us at a deep level *embody all three natures* and to allow a form of *conversation* between the three to occur. In these conversations, artists are particularly powerful in evoking icons and symbols of the wider world.

New Gardens of Hope: Chaumont-sur-Loire

The garden festival at Chaumont-sur-Loire seeks to explore this wider world by celebrating national difference, creativity and originality.

Art Gardens Affirming Local Identity

The gardens particularly affirm local identity. It was this very transporting and re-creating local identity which epitomised unselfconscious Gardens of Hope – the migrant gardens - in the 20th and now 21st century in Australia. At Chaumont, gardens are not unselfconscious acts. They are deliberate explorations, commonly in abstract form and often playful, to represent evocative elements that make up local identity and sense of place, such as '*Bipergorria*' (Red Pepper, 2000) which evokes the powdered spice made from hot Esperelle peppers near Bayonne in a garden that uses Basque colours of red, white and green (Jones,2003:21).

Gardens to Sustain Skills

Gardens of hope have not only recreated local identity, they have also been characterised by skills and inventions, particularly in the unfamiliar environment of Australia.

Keeping skills alive is a major theme of the Garden Festival at Chaumont-sur-Loire. The gardens are expected to demonstrate existing skills associated with different countries, albeit used innovatively for artistic purposes. The organisers of Chaumont-sur-Loire's Garden festival seek to husband endangered gardening crafts, running courses on old and new gardening technologies.

Chaumont-sur-Loire is the brainchild of Jean-Paul Pigeat, a journalist writing about environmental problems and architectural heritage. The festival, which began in 1992, is an annual event. Each year a theme is announced and garden designers submit proposals. Associated with the festival is a year-round teaching and research institution, The International Conservatoire of Parks, Gardens and Landscape.

Gardens of Political Hope

Chaumont-sur-Loire has enabled the exploration of hope in many ways, politically, environmentally, and culturally. *Walls of Palestine* (2000-2002) by Bruno Marmiorli, Walid Azmeal-Humouze, Patrick Genty, Veronica Alcacer is an example of political hope. This work builds on a hopeful gesture by the French Mission 2000 project called 'Terraces of the Nativity' in Palestine. The project was constructed in Palestine in 1999 and opened by Yassar Arafat when 'hopes were high' (Jones,2003:32). But subsequent events have prevented further developments which were to include founding a landscape school in Jericho and a second project in Nazareth.

As a further act of hope, the '*Walls of Palestine*' garden was installed in Chaumont in 2000. The design team created a condensed landscape of great beauty, so much so that the exhibition was maintained for the 2002 Festival as a plea for peace in this troubled part of the world. Using gardens as such gestures of hope are of great importance and one would hope this will continue.

Environmental Gardens of Hope

Environmental Gestures of Hope are common in contemporary art installations. *The Garden for a Hungry Spirit* (1999) by Jean-Luc Dannyrolles, France, looks at the important issue of maintaining old seed types and how to resist uniform seed production, considered to be so dangerous environmentally. In this installation, heirloom vegetables are grown, using the links with the international seed-savers movement. – a group which is outlawed by the stringent European Union restrictions. This small band of producers combat the uniform seed production, imposed by the select multinationals. *Le Potager d'un Curieux* is an attempt to make an ideal garden – a humorous, sentimental, colourful, aromatic, and flavoursome garden. Dannyrolles, the designer,

has written a manifesto to go with the garden acclaiming a future where *'Art, Science and Religion, Spirit and Matter will overcome separations between continents and disciplines in the gardens of tomorrow'* (Jones,2003:53). This surely ranks as a Garden of Hope!

Another garden acting as environmental commentary suggests that in contrast to the environmental artists of the 1960s, who were looking at decay and erosion, many artists today explore plant growth. The installation, *'Does Mint Lie?'*(2000) by the Land-I team (Mario Antonini, Roberto Capecci and Raffaella Sini, Italy) explores what lies in store for us in the new millennium, using the 'void', the 'raft', 'smoke' and 'nature'. The garden explores the complexity and shadows of our contemporary world and nature's capacity for survival. The metaphor suggests humans float on an uncertain platform, 'the raft'. The 'void' is represented as a round pool containing floating pieces of black charcoal which keeps the water pure, but also heralds the ominous threat of black tides. 'Smoke' is represented as undulating cushions of twisted wire netting, some covered with steel wool to achieve an opacity, the smoke also representing light and shade. As summer progresses, a prolific growth of mint pushes through the smoke. The garden asks can we believe in nature's promise of a future? Hope is symbolised by the mint's *'inexorable growth'* (Jones,2003:83)

Gardens Celebrating Knowledge

Nature's Code (2000) by pep Studio, Berlin (Katharina Schütze, Uwe Müller, Jürgen Stellway) is a cultural exploration of different types of knowledge. It explores traditional garden knowledge using plants and the new plant knowledge that is digital and coded, symbolised by a screen of laser discs. The ground plane slopes irregularly and consists of curved garden beds. This is juxtaposed against a suspended tight, regular, grid of digital knowledge, 4500 CDs screwed together in pairs for equal brilliance on both sides which reflect mainly blues and white flowers. The artists saw the interaction of the work with people viewing it, reflected in the discs, is central to the meaning of the work. They state *'humans represent the species that can choose to protect, eliminate, or change plant life. Natural or digital, the modulations of the future is ours to determine.'* (Jones,2003:86)

A garden which is less trusting about human wisdom is the installation by Adriaan Gueze of the Netherlands, *Bricks, Bones and Pumpkins* (2000). This garden comments on Mad Cow Disease and what we are doing to nature. Bones from cows and broken garden pots are juxtaposed against 'fat, healthy 'pumpkins, using plant growth as a symbol for optimism (Jones,2003:124).

This brief overview of what is happening in the Chaumont-sur-Loire Garden Festival shows that there is a message of hope for many of our damaged places and that we can turn the tide of environmental damage and genetic homogenisation. And just in case we fail, there is always the 21st century Noah's Ark – the Eden Project.

Gardens of Hope: the Eden Project

In the Eden Project, skills and inventions are evident everywhere. The Eden project is a high-tech working place ensuring that there are representatives of our biomes available to us in perpetuity.

The Eden Project is the largest conservatory that the world has seen – a great green cathedral. The founder, Tom Smit, states that *'the truly special thing about Eden is not what you see, although that is awesome enough; it is the spirit that brought so many ordinary people together'*. He states *'That was the real reason for hope. If we could do this, what could happen if even more people were harnessed together?'* (Smit,2001:1).

The project consists of three conservatories containing the plants of the key climatic zones of the world, showing both wild and productive flora. The idea for recreating the biomes of the world came to Smit when he was working on the restoration of the Lost Gardens of Heligan (Smit,1997). Smit was struck by the evidence of the commitment of the gardeners, not the gentry, but the work of ordinary men and women. In the process of uncovering their work in the

productive gardens of this great estate, he decided that gardens were not so much about ownership as about stewardship.

The Gardens of Heligan have become the focus of research into old varieties of fruit, vegetables and the cut flowers grown in 19th century productive gardens. Smit was particularly interested in challenging the management of historic gardens as *'history in aspic'* which he declared was *'tantamount to fear of the future'* (Smit,2001:21). Smit claims that one of the great challenges facing the conservation of heritage gardens is the need to balance the conservation of the past with an evaluation of the spirit which brought them into being. He argues that the *'conservation of old vegetable varieties should not be seen merely as a quaint rural hobby.'*(Smit,2001:22) He is particularly alarmed that a few large corporations supply an ever-narrowing range of crops. He is adamant that we need stewardship of the gene bank of productive plants. As Smit says, *'what began as a discussion about garden restoration philosophy turned into an issue with global ramifications'* (Smit,2001:23).

Another impetus was the devastation wrecked upon old gardens in Britain by the hurricanes of 1987 and 1990. Garden heritage experts and environmental conservationists began to work together to establish plant gene banks. This, says Smit, meant that heritage agencies could look into the future as well as the past.

Plant conservationists had been pointing out for some time that the sources of many plants in the great Gardens of Europe were being decimated, for example, the temperate rainforests of South America where indiscriminate clearing of old forests for paper companies was resulting in the loss of millions of hectares of forest. It was clear that replanting was not enough and that it was essential to implement conservation programs in similar climates in order to create a wide gene-bank for the future. As Smit points out, it is ironic that Britain, one of the early exploitative plant-hunters should now harbour a gene-bank that is larger than the countries of origin (Smit,2001:33).

The Eden Project is intended to represent and interpret climate zones which have experienced the maximum human impact thus providing a canvas to explore a wide range of issues. *'The intention was to both inform and entertain the public about human dependence on plants and in doing so, create a predisposition to effect or support positive changes in the ways we live'* (Smit,2001:129). He clearly believed that an optimistic, hopeful outlook was the best starting point for engaging the interest of the widest possible audience.

As Smit says, *'The plants at Eden are a metaphor for working with the grain of nature. They provide symbolic ties of common use that link all cultures as well as illustrating the scope of possible futures to us all.'*(Smit,2001:174) Messages about people and plants in the 21st century are woven into the fabric of the project and reinforce Taussig's notion that hope lies in surrendering cynicism and instead allowing oneself to be re-enchanted.

Seed Savers : Gardeners for the Future.

The Eden Project is one example of how to conserve the biomes of the world, but there are also gardeners around the world who belong to Seed Saver Organisations. These gardeners grow plants from special old seeds, harvesting the seed for on-going propagation, thus ensuring the seed viability.

The 'Seed-Savers Network for Australia and New Zealand', established by Jude and Michel Fanton in Byron Bay in 1987, is one such organisation. For a small joining fee, members of this exchange send in details of the soil, altitude, and climate of their garden, details of their level of expertise as a gardener. As a seed saver, members are sent heirloom or rare seeds to propagate. Each member of this exchange uses their garden as an incubator or acclimatisation garden where seeds are germinated and after flowering, new seeds are collected and returned to the Network. These gardeners echo Zournazi's idea that hope lies in the heroes who carry out simple gestures of hope and stewardship in their everyday lives.

Seed Savers in Australia have been assisting a growing number of community-based organizations in Asia, Europe, the Pacific and Latin America. In 2003, Seed Savers supported fifty local seed groups and established new networks in Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Cuba, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, the Solomon's, and Vanuatu.

Other local heroes are the migrant gardeners in Australia who are conserving important plant varieties from their homelands. In their gardening practice, they continue to allow plants to go to seed so that there will always be original seed for the next crop. Over the many decades of migration, seeds of plants seen as quite precious to particular groups find their way into migrant gardens. Hungarians brought the thick-walled paprika, Greeks brought the red okra, Fijian Indians have brought their 'Neme' tree, and Pacific Islanders grow their yams and sweet potato. These gardeners distribute their harvests among their communities thus ensuring that cultural expressions through the act of gardening are sustained.

Hope as New Age Dreaming

The final garden I will describe is still a dream. A small group of people are establishing a futuristic garden called Starseed on the rolling hills behind Byron Bay. The name of the project is an analogy of a possible seed that could carry all that is good about the Earth and which, upon germination, could transform the surrounds into a kind of paradise.

To quote one of the founders, '*If we were to condense all the natural and cultural wisdom of past, present and future into a capsule that could "terraform" a new planet, we would have what we call a Starseed.*' (Schreiber, pers.com.31/7/04)

He suggests that *Starseed Gardens* could be the place where the prototype could be developed and he hopes that the finished gardens would be a model for the future. He states '*Like the plaque Carl Sagan designed and sent into space via satellite, this 'SEED' would be able to unpack into living systems.*' He believes

A Starseed contains the intellectual property to grow an abundant garden supplying food, medicine, fuel, building material and spiritual sustenance to cultures. This Knowledge Garden will link a myriad of pools of online information into a comprehensive data base. The gardens themselves will mirror how humans fit into nature as an integral part rather than a dominating perverse force that twists the DNA of species to maximise greed and profit. Plants are the true alchemists, turning sunlight into matter and with a co-creative partnership with the GARDEN it is possible to create a paradise for all!

(email: Schreiber to Armstrong, 31/7/04)

This might sound like a typical Byron Bay flight of fancy, but it is gradually emerging as a real garden. They hope to achieve a combination of natural simplicity and high tech interactive gardens that showcase the artists, healers, gardeners, teachers, and craftspeople making up the unusual Byron Bay community.

Conclusion

So what are these gardens saying? I am suggesting that all these gestures are full of hope in a number of ways. First, they endorse Alphonso Lingis' notion of hope arising with a break from the past, either a break with a past homeland or a break with an environmentally damaging past. They are also gestures that say one can start again, either start again in a new land or start again in a more environmentally sustainable way.

So how does this link with Australian garden history and the realities of the Australian environment? I am suggesting that Australia has a long history of gardens of hope. First, the Botanic Gardens nurtured the plants that were emblematic of a longed for Garden of Eden – a denial of the dry environment. Similarly, hope was invested in the new plants found in Australia, first for the nurserymen in Britain and later for the gardens in Australia, eventually becoming emblems of the new nation.

By the 20th century, hope emerges in the gardens made by the new migrants seeking to grow food and recreate landscapes of their home countries and this continues as simple heroic gestures in their daily lives.

By the 21st century, new gardens of hope have emerged that reflect what is happening to this 'browned off' land and other environments around the world. The new gardens are manifest in a number of ways; the artists' gardens telling powerful stories through metaphors, the huge biome gardens, replicating our now fragile environment and acting as a gene-bank for the future, as well as the countless thousands of seed saver gardens that are acting as cradles to maintain the viability of seeds, and lastly there are the strange futuristic gardens that seek to combine Zen and other forms of spirituality with plant knowledge to form 'starseeds' to rejuvenate tired, abused lands.

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