

2 HISTORIOGRAPHY

Towards an Understanding of History and Historical Method

by Jeannie Sim

History is an important component of the theoretical framework for the 'Contested Terrains' project. Reviewing the traditional forms of theory used in investigating and writing histories revealed another form of contest: between orthodox historiography and the influences from cultural and literary theories. Other tensions were uncovered, about the ways history is used in design disciplines (such as art, architecture and landscape architecture) and in scientific disciplines (such as ecology and environmental studies). The link between geography and history remains dynamic – one that has direct relevance to studies of cultural landscapes. From this overview of history and historical method, the variety of theories from different disciplines is again exposed, which are all helpful in seeking an understanding of cultural landscapes through time. The goal of this review was to explore a wide selection of the relevant history theories, and to avoid denying their existence.

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Introduction

The writing of history, the historiography of the process, was a vital component of establishing a theoretical framework for this project.¹ Just as practitioners in cultural conservation are beginning to recognise that cultural significance is more complex than just identifying tangible, physical evidence, historians are currently engaged in a broadening of interests within in their field. Understanding the stories of different classes (not just the elite), different genders (not just men), different races (not just the Anglo-Celtic) and other themes, have become the stuff of history in the late 20th century. Adopting a broad vision and field of interest was a key objective for this research.

Looking at the business of producing histories, there are tensions abounding. For a start, there are many different kinds of historians – some related to specific thematic areas (society, economics, politics, biography, or locality) and some are focused on particular professional disciplines (art, architecture, landscape, or environment). Most have particular viewpoints, which are enmeshed in their related theoretical framework. Some discipline-based historians are relatively untrained in traditional historiography and historical method, and use their design or scientific theories as the basis for their investigations. Some professional historians are so enmeshed in their traditional method, they have difficulty recognising any other way or even that they have a method at all. The reality of the 'workaday world' is that the writing of history is involved in most research and writing exercises: "Every speech, report, inquiry, or application begins with 'the background'; nothing, it is thought, can be understood apart from a knowledge of what went before."²

To help the researchers in the 'Contested Terrains' project, a review of the traditional and emerging techniques of investigating, interpreting and writing histories was needed. This overview is structured to reveal the variety of approaches and sample some of the work from relevant disciplines.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

While other fields have theoretical frameworks, historians have devised a word that describes both what they do and how they do it: historiography.

Central to an understanding of history-as-account (the writing of changes through time) is historiography. History-as-account should not be confused with history-as-event, which is the actual changes occurring over time. There is an essential relationship between historical method and historiography which is clearly expressed in the definition of the latter in the Macquarie Dictionary:

1. the writing of history, esp. as based on the critical examination and evaluation of material taken from primary sources.
2. The study of the development of historical method."³

The key phrase here is 'critical examination and evaluation': without this component on the process, history is mere story telling. There is an ancient precedent in historiography that was explained by Tom Griffith, the former Head of Classics at Marlborough College. Introducing a new edition of the Histories by Herodotus, he wrote:

Herodotus was the first Western historian, and in his respect for evidence he remains a model of what a historian ought to be. He first presents us with the evidence, and then tells us what

¹ Much of this section is derived from: Sim, JCR (1999), "Chapter 3 A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Landscapes", in "Designed Landscapes in Queensland, 1859-1939: experimentation – adaptation – innovation", unpublished PhD thesis, QUT, Brisbane.

² Barzun, Jacques and Henry F. Graff (1985), The Modern Researcher, 5th edition, Fort Worth, USA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, pg. 43.

³ The Macquarie Dictionary (1997), 3rd ed., pg. 1015.

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conclusions he draws from it. So if we do not accept his conclusions, we still have the evidence. Thucydides, by contrast, gives us only his conclusions – take them or leave them. If we distrust his conclusions, as we occasionally have good reason to do, we have no idea what the evidence was on which those conclusions were based. So while Thucydides may perhaps have had the better analytical intelligence, Herodotus was more modern – and to us more useful – in his handling of evidence.⁴

However, there were other sources used for guidance in refining an understanding of historical method. Two recent works on historiography by Michael Stanford and Keith Windschuttle proved most helpful.

Stanford supplied a simple interpretation of the term 'history' in this description: "three presuppositions are all we need for a definition of history. Provided that reality, interpretation of remains, and time are involved, we have history."⁵ Windschuttle provided a more expansive explanation that included this historical background:

History is an intellectual discipline that is more than 2400 years old. It ranks with philosophy and mathematics as among the most profound and enduring contributions that ancient Greece made, not only to European civilisation, but to the human species as a whole ... For most of the past 2400 years, the essence of history has continued to be that it should try to tell the truth, to describe as best possible what really happened.⁶

Changes in the approaches to research within other fields in recent decades have not gone unnoticed among historians. Philosophy has been a long-time companion to history – the basic attitudes and explanations of the philosophers have been colouring the work of historians since writing began. At times the two fields have been inextricably linked, as with the writings of Karl Marx or Bertrand Russell. However, the use of these philosophical and theoretical ideas should be at the discretion of the historian, not a matter of other disciplines inflicting and insisting on universal agreement.

Another text for student historians indicates that good research techniques are based on six key "virtues": Accuracy, love of order, logic, honesty, self-awareness and imagination.⁷ These virtues apply to all parts of the process: the search for evidence; the analysis of that evidence; and, the final writing stage.

THEORY AND HISTORY

Keith Windschuttle wrote *The Killing of History* specifically to counter the insurgence of 'fashionable' theories into the good practice of traditional historical method. His interpretation of these events were thus:

In the 1990s, the newly dominant theorists within the humanities and social sciences assert that it is impossible to tell the truth about the past or to use history to produce knowledge in any objective sense at all. They claim we can only see the past through the perspective of our own culture and, hence, what we see in history are our own interests and concerns reflected back at us. The central point upon which history was founded no longer holds: there is no fundamental distinction any more between history and myth.⁸

⁴ Griffith, Tom (1996), "Introduction," in Herodotus *Histories*, translated by George Rawlinson. Ware, Herts. UK: Wordsworth Editions Ltd. pp. ix-x. Rawlinson's translation was first published in 1858, with extensive footnotes. The Everyman edition of 1910 removed these footnotes (editor E.H. Blakeney) and this is a reprint of this 1910 edition with minor adjustments. Herodotus was an Ancient Greek historian who lived c480-c425 BCE.

⁵ Stanford, Michael (1994), *A Companion to the Study of History*. Oxford UK: Blackwell. pg. 112

⁶ Windschuttle, Keith (1994), *The Killing of History: How a discipline is being murdered by literary critics and social theorists*. Sydney: Macleay. pg. 1

⁷ Barzun, Jacques and Henry F. Graff (1985), *The Modern Researcher*, 5th edition, Fort Worth, USA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, pp. 44-47. The value of this text is valid for all kinds of researcher, from scientist to historian. It includes both theoretical discussion in the principles and methods of research, and detailed advice on specific techniques of writing, speaking and publishing.

⁸ Windschuttle, Keith (1994), *The Killing of History*. Sydney: Macleay. pg. 2

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Needless to say, Windschuttle did not agree with this proposition about truth and history. While historical accounts may not be the 'whole truth,' they do help explain and inform, and they do have value for society and they do make cultural contributions in themselves. What is missing in this analysis by Windschuttle is the recognition of 'myth' as a valuable tool for understanding meaning attached to place – a vital component in assessing cultural significance and also interpreting historical meanings.

Theory is the basis of all scientific and social science disciplines. The paradigms of understanding and explanation are in a constant state of flux as knowledge increases. It is debatable whether the 'whole truth' is within the realm of normal human understanding. The argument that Windschuttle and Stanford put forward is that while theoretical paradigms are appropriate for various disciplines, they are not universally appropriate, or indeed healthy for history. Stanford said simply: "it is an abuse of history to subordinate it to a theory, however brilliant."⁹

To balance and/or expand this traditional historical method, the other approaches and theories were explored in the Contested Terrains project. The building up of layers of different interpretations and insights was a key objective. Consequently, the second report in this series contains a rich mixture of traditional historical accounts as well as phenomenological approaches.

Since traditional historian Keith Windschuttle has expressed such misgivings about the use of theory to investigate and write histories, it is worth pausing here and reviewing what theory really means. The word 'theory' has six variations of meaning in the Macquarie Dictionary, but only a few are relevant here:

1. a coherent group of general propositions used as principles of explanation for a class of phenomena: Newton's theory of gravitation.
2. A proposed explanation whose status is still conjectural, in contrast to well-established propositions that are regarded as reporting matters of actual fact...
5. A particular conception or view of something to be done or of the method of doing it; a system of rules or principles.¹⁰

Windschuttle believed there are essential differences between history and theory areas, which he observed was mostly about a lack of theory in historiography:

The structure of most histories is narrative and the explanations usually made by historians are inductive. That is, historical explanations are based on the movement of events over time and their conclusions come from the evidence the historian finds during research into the subject. This is the opposite of a theoretical approach in which large-scale generalisations about human society or human conduct are taken as given before either research or writing starts.¹¹

It would seem Windschuttle's interpretation of theory, is at odds with the various forms revealed even within a standard dictionary. Of particular threat in the circumstances that Windschuttle mentions here were the theories of literary criticism and cultural studies, with the methods devolved from philosophers of various persuasions, such as deconstructionists, poststructuralists and so on. Scientific methods have been incorporated, at least in broad outline, into historical method for some time, according to Windschuttle. He observed three aspects that were common to most of the theories threatening history in the late 20th century. The first aspect was a rejection of history based on the principles of scientific method (developed from the Enlightenment onwards) that included "observation and inductive argument". The second aspect was a "relativist view of the concepts of truth and knowledge. Most deny that we can know anything with certainty, and believe that different cultures create their own truths." The third aspect common to most of these theories was a denial of human ability "to gain any direct contact with or access to reality. Instead, they support a form of

⁹ Stanford, Michael (1994), A Companion to the Study of History. Oxford UK: Blackwell. pg. 43

¹⁰ The Macquarie Dictionary (1997), 3rd ed., pg. 2195.

¹¹ Windschuttle, Keith (1994), The Killing of History. Sydney: Macleay. pg. 19

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linguistic idealism that holds that we are locked within a closed system of language and culture, which refers not beyond our minds to an outside world but only inwardly to itself."¹²

One reaction to this interpretation, the idea of being "locked within a closed system" without any connection to the "outside world" was distinctly a case of closeted academics in need of a garden. By gardening, even the most esoteric philosopher can partake of nature: the dynamic world of changing seasons and living matter amid the timelessness of the Earth. Secondly, scholars in landscape architecture, architecture, geography and the social sciences have been augmenting such empirical information with qualitative and quantitative studies about the plethora of meanings attributed to place, to gardens and to landscape. It would seem literary critics need to read more. Windschuttle considered any one of the three aspects against history "would be enough to kill off the discipline, as it has been practised, for good "rather than make it richer, as such theorists maintain. He offered this considered analysis of history and theory:

The first [aspect] undermines the methodology of historical research; the second destroys the distinction between history and fiction; the third means not only that it is impossible to access the past but that we have no proper grounds for believing that a past independent of ourselves ever took place.¹³

While in some agreement with Windschuttle's arguments was acknowledged among members of the Contested Terrains research team, other approaches were considered. It was resolved that new ways of looking at the world and reaching towards understanding are always worthwhile pursuits as they can broaden outlooks, to become more inclusive, more just and more relevant. However, misapplication of these 'new ways' can also do harm, akin to 'throwing out the baby with the bath water.' Throwing away sensible, proven and appropriate methods of writing history should be avoided at all costs. In general agreement with Windschuttle, Stanford's authoritative and comprehensive work on historiography included this crisp distinction between good and bad history:

three cardinal sins to be avoided at all costs: (1) subordinating history to any non-historical theory or ideology, whether it be religious, economic, philosophical, sociological or political; (2) neglecting breadth (i.e. failing to take all considerations into account) and failing to do justice to all concerned; (3) ignoring or suppressing evidence.¹⁴

This warning about essential errors found in 'bad history' was noted during the research of Queensland's cultural landscapes. Stanford's version of "a good history book" remains as a role model and guide for writing and historical method. He wrote:

First it is a good book if it is true. Is it a reliable record or reconstruction of some part of the past? Second, we judge it good if it succeeds in conveying this to its readers. Third, it may be good if it can be judged as a work of art in its own right. In brief, is it true? is it clear? is it fine (as in 'fine arts')?¹⁵

The compilation of papers contained within the second Contested Terrains publication contains many different approaches to writing and interpreting history. As a useful resource, it worked admirably for this project.

Evidence and History

Michael Stanford's comprehensive publication on historiography was found to be the most helpful primer for sound historical method. His descriptions of interpreting evidence and establishing its reliability, and his explanation of causation (change and the limits of

¹² Windschuttle, Keith (1994), pg. 36

¹³ Windschuttle, Keith (1994), pg. 36.

¹⁴ Stanford, Michael (1994), pp. 46-47

¹⁵ Stanford, Michael (1994), pg. 81

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explanation) were particularly illuminating, and should be recommended reading for anyone undertaking historical studies in any field.¹⁶

Another source of information about evidence and the nature of investigating history was provided by Northern Territory historian David Carment who provided some insight about traditional approaches to writing history. He wrote that local and regional histories were usually based on written documentary evidence and perhaps some oral sources of information. However, he suggested there might be more other ways of writing histories, which result in more comprehensive and accurate results:

The *Annales* school of French historians placed emphasis over forty years ago on the need to observe and explain landscapes as a means of explaining the past.¹⁷

Thus, physical landscapes can provide evidence of historical events and activities, and even ideas and attitudes. Of particular interest, are his comparative observations about Aboriginal attitudes to land:

For the Aborigines the land provided the focus of religion while for Europeans an ideology of exploiting one of Australia's last frontiers [i.e. Central Australia] was preached with almost religious fervour.¹⁸

Carment recommends a combination of traditional "meticulous documentary research" and "field observation". The latter could be also be called the research of material evidence, which is typical archaeological and anthropological technique. This approach is also recommended by Oliver Rackham and reported latter in this paper.

Site-specific works by conservation practitioners (who usually combine these sources) "demonstrate that a study of the landscape is necessary for a full appreciation of historical forces which had an impact on Central Australia."¹⁹ The same conclusion can be reached for any district, anywhere.

Different Kinds of Histories

Some other ways of describing landscapes in history were investigated, in which were found the guiding principles of good history (truth, clarity and fine writing) as universal concepts. A sampling of ideas and sources from three major discipline groups were examined: environmental history; design histories (art and architecture), and garden or landscape history. The latter area contains work by geographers as well as garden historians and landscape architects.

Environmental Histories

Of particular pertinence here were the works of environmental history, which supplied both examples of historical research method and useful content (which helped to explain the development and changes wrought on the Australian landscape).

Recent investigations by anthropologists in 'reading the landscape' also proved enlightening. Christopher Tilley wrote *A Phenomenology of Landscape* in which he investigated "pre-historical landscapes" by combining insights from "phenomenological approach in philosophy, cultural anthropology, and human geography and recent interpretative work in archaeology."²⁰ Similarly, Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon's *The Anthropology of*

¹⁶ See Stanford, Michael (1994), Refer to Chapter 6 "History as Relic," (about evidence), pp. 133-166; and Chapter 8 "History as Sequence," (about causation and change), pp. 193-228.

¹⁷ Carment, David (1991), *History and the Landscape in Central Australia: A Study of the Material Evidence of European Culture and Settlement*, Darwin: ANU, Northern Australia Research Unit, pg. viii.

¹⁸ Carment, David (1991), pg. x.

¹⁹ Carment, David (1991), pg. xi.

²⁰ Tilley, Christopher (1994), *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*, Oxford/Providence, USA: Berg, pg. 1. His discussion of space, place and perception were among several references on landscape and meanings that I have only begun to investigate and thus have played only a limited role in this thesis.

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Landscape addresses landscape as place in time and incorporates several theories from the disciplines mentioned by Tilley above, and adds the work of art historians.²¹

Environmental history provided several useful works, including those by Richard Grove, Tom Griffiths, Steven Dovers and Kevin Frawley. The Internet discussion group "American Society for Environmental History (H-ASEH List)" also provided a continuous source of critical reviews of latest publications in this field and bibliographies on various themes.²² Richard Grove's investigations into the origins of environmentalism and its relationship to colonial expansion provided several insights that are reported in the later in this thesis.²³ Grove's research method was marked by the use of primary sources and an avoidance of previous misunderstandings and mis-readings of the origins of environmentalism and the age of environmental degradation. Tom Griffiths also combined several outlooks to write his award-winning history of the antiquarian imagination in Australia:

In recent decades, academic recognition of material culture studies, and oral, social, local and family histories, has opened the way for a rapprochement between amateur and professional, and a rediscovery of the material, archaeological side of our history.²⁴

'Natural history' is a term that was used frequently in the 19th century, not always in a purely scientific sense. The whole 'story' or description of nature includes adequate attention to changes over time, namely the 'history' of the subject. The landscape (natural countryside) and antiquarian endeavours were considered by Griffiths as sharing several common interests, including aesthetics: "Nature and history were inextricable categories: they provided puzzling objects for cabinets of curiosities, they both demanded scholarly story-telling, imaginative history-making."²⁵ The Australian context of Griffith's book provided some particularly helpful interpretations about the previous uses and ways of writing history related to landscape. The presence of Aboriginal culture on the land is at the core of these stories, about which he said:

In 1968, the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner called the white Australian habit of denying the violence of the frontier 'the Great Australian Silence'. The Great Australian Silence, I want to suggest, was often 'white noise': it sometimes consisted of an obscuring and overlaying din of history-making. But the denial was frequently self-conscious, for it was part of a genuine attempt by white Australians to foster possession of the land and was sometimes accompanied by respect for pre-existing Aboriginal associations.²⁶

Thus, history writing can be seen in a wider role – not just describing and interpreting events but actually influencing the settlement and development process, and the application of meaning to landscape.

Through their history-making, Europeans sought to take hold of the land emotionally and spiritually, and they could not help but deny, displace and sometimes accommodate Aboriginal perceptions of place. They were feeling their way towards the realisation that becoming Australian would, in some senses, mean becoming 'Aboriginal'.²⁷

These ideas about attitudes to Nature are addressed further in chapter 5 concerning the influences on landscape design found in the Queensland garden literature.

²¹ Hirsch, Eric and Michael O'Hanlon, eds. (1995), *The Anthropology of Landscape*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pg. 8. Both Hirsch and O'Hanlon's and Tilley's works were not directly used in my research but remain as important indicators for further investigations in understanding Queensland designed landscapes.

²² Email address: <H-ASEH@h-net.msu.edu>

²³ Grove, Richard H. (1996), *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁴ Griffiths, Tom (1996), *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pg. 2

²⁵ Griffiths, Tom (1996), pg. 3

²⁶ Griffiths, Tom (1996), p. 13

²⁷ Griffiths, Tom (1996), pp. 5-6

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Other examples from the field of environmental history were found in Stephen Dovers' compilation. Included in this work was the essay by Kevin Frawley that encapsulated several important visions of nature and settlement that were of direct relevance to this research which are discussed in chapter 5.²⁸ Information on research approaches was provided by Stephen Dovers himself in the introduction to that compilation, where he outlined four principles that comprise the enterprise of environmental history: "explaining the landscape, explaining complexity, explaining contexts, and culpability and relevance."²⁹ For each of these principles, Dovers offered detailed explanations that are reported here briefly. He wrote, "the basic task of environmental history is explaining the landscape through its history, to explain how we got where we are. The landscapes we now inhabit cannot be explained simply by their present structure and functioning."³⁰ A similar explanation can be applied to 'garden' or designed landscape history. Dover's second principle was "explaining complexity": "Natural systems and human systems and the landscapes they together shape are complex, dynamic and heterogeneous in both time and space ... Environmental history seeks to explain the interactions between the two through time."³¹ Understanding of the environment cannot be achieved without such an historical context: the environment is change, and change requires time to happen. Designed landscapes are similarly enmeshed in time and space. Dovers also added a further layer of complexity:

Environmental history is an eclectic enterprise ... any inquiry will typically use *multiple sources and methodological approaches*: scientific analysis, primary and secondary historical materials, oral sources, personal observation and so on. [It includes also] ... *the essential role of the non-specialist*.³²

Again, this eclectic character should be part of the repertoire of the historian of designed landscapes, especially when the complexity of meanings and uses are the major research targets. The third principle was about explaining contexts,

Environmental history seeks to establish what happened in the landscape. The when and what of change is important, so is the *who* and *how*. This entails the identification of the players in the process of change (individuals, groups, institutions) and the factors (technologies, resource endowments, public policies, social or environmental perturbations), and their interaction over time.³³

These are standard historical research targets that may be new to environmental scientists, but even there, they search for causal and influential factors in scientific method. The essential differences between historic and scientific methods are where and how research is undertaken. Dovers also noted the importance of recognising the wide scope of possible influences when he wrote:

The contexts are not confined to this continent. In the history of Australia, both human and natural, there are important global links. They may be political, social and economic links ... [or] ecological [links].³⁴

The research has revealed in part the extent of 'global' communication during the 19th and early 20th centuries especially concerning design ideas and new technology which were shared among the furthestmost parts of the British Empire (which would place Queensland

²⁸ Frawley, Kevin (1994), "Evolving Visions: environmental management and nature conservation in Australia," In Dovers, Stephen ed. (1994), *Australian Environmental History: Essays and Cases*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press. pp. 55-78.

²⁹ Dovers, Stephen (1994), "Introduction" In *Australian Environmental History*. Melbourne: OUP, pg. 9

³⁰ Dovers, Stephen (1994), pg. 10. Dovers' emphasis included here. This approach to combining present day descriptions and comprehension with historical understanding was a favourite theme of historian Neil Postman too, who maintained that no subject should be taught in schools without some historical background to provide the necessary context for the theories and knowledge of today and to identify that these ideas change over time, even in pure science. Postman, Neil (1993), *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books. pp. 189-191.

³¹ Dovers, Stephen (1994), pg. 10.

³² Dovers, Stephen (1994), pg. 12.

³³ Dovers, Stephen (1994), pp. 12-13.

³⁴ Dovers, Stephen (1994), 13

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high on a ranked list of remoteness). The beginnings of the links between source and receiver of design ideas and scientific breakthroughs are revealed here.

The fourth principle noted by Dovers was "culpability and relevance" which took into account the way "Our society is at present attempting to address environmental problems in all sorts of ways."³⁵ Whereas a landscape or garden historian may search for authors of landscape, especially the clever and artistic people who made beneficial contributions to the cultural landscape, environmental historians have a tendency to target people to blame for errors and mismanagement of the land. Dovers said:

Blame can always be apportioned, but it is more helpful if causes are identified and the context explained. Besides, given that the plea of ignorance becomes less admissible as time passes and knowledge accumulates, the finger of blame can be more sharply pointed at the present than the past.³⁶

Moreover, identifying 'blame' can help with both retributions and repair. Identifying culpability can be seen as helpful in ongoing management which allows the appropriate ratio of conservation and development, all under that almost ubiquitous 'sustainable' umbrella. It is not difficult to apply Dovers' four principles of environmental history to writing about designed landscapes or cultural landscapes in history. Indeed, the interrelatedness of these three areas is beyond question; all are part of the landscape and concerned with human interactions with land and nature.

Design Histories

Writing about the history of design (in its various forms from architecture to industrial products) is not the same as writing about the history of art, although at least one art historian, E.H. Gombrich, would disagree. Unlike art, design shares a motivation with crafts: the usefulness of the product. All three areas of creativity (art, design and craft) can be concerned with artistic intentions, be they noble and enlightening, cute and whimsical, or crass and demeaning. Only art must have this artistic germ at the centre of its creation, the other creative endeavours can exist without being artistic.

Several professional institutes pertaining to historians involved in architecture were uncovered in the later stages of this research of historiography. Although each group publishes respected journals, only limited investigations of these sources were carried out. The three principal groups were: Society for Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ); Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) from USA which publishes Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians (JSAH); and, Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain which publishes Architectural History.

So far, from the preliminary investigations undertaken, two authorities in particular, presented key evaluations of historic method that were directly applicable here. These art historians were E.H. Gombrich and Joan Kerr.

"Art History and the Social Sciences" was the title of The Romanes Lecture for 1973 that Sir Ernst Gombrich delivered at the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, and this paper was later reworked and published.³⁷ This paper provided further evidence of historians fighting the tide of theory from the social sciences, couched with the usual wit and elegance of Gombrich. He wrote:

I must disclaim any wish to join in the slanging match that is going on in the academic world about the barbarous jargon of sociology or the irrelevance of the humanities. I am a peace-loving person, and I shall be quite content to lead you gently to the conclusion that all the social

³⁵ Dovers, Stephen (1994), "Introduction" In Australian Environmental History, Melbourne: OUP, pg. 14

³⁶ Dovers, Stephen (1994), pg. 15

³⁷ Gombrich, E.H. (1979), "Art History and the Social Sciences," In Ideals and Idols: Essays on values in history and in art. Oxford: Phaidon. pp. 123-166.

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sciences from economics to psychology should be ready to serve as handmaidens of Art History.³⁸

For Gombrich, art history appears to include architectural history. He wrote also of the practice of art history and its foundation in sound historical method, and many of these ideas coincided with those of the social historians such as Stanford and Windschuttle:

This is the basic skill of art history: the ability to assign a date, place, and if possible, a name on the evidence of style. I know of no art historian who is not aware of the fact that this skill could not be practiced in splendid isolation. The historian of art must be an historian, for without the ability also to assess the historical evidence, inscriptions, documents, chronicles, and other primary sources the geographical and chronological distribution of styles could never have been mapped out in the first place.³⁹

Gombrich's insistence on stylistic categories being the foundation of understanding architectural design is a typical approach of his time. It could be argued that more recent writers are concerned with other components as well: meaning, context and so on. However, his description of the basic curiosity and motivation of an historian is what matched the present research pursuits:

we cannot and need not put any theoretical limits to the historian's curiosity. I speak of curiosity because I do not think this is a question of method. Method is concerned with theory, not with motivation.⁴⁰

Searching for information and the linkages that lead from one source to the next is the essential heart of historical research. It is investigative research, exploring the sources and seeing what results. Leading that research with a preset goal (or thesis) is often fraught with difficulties, especially when it is structured by an unsuitable theoretical framework.

As recently as 1984, historian Joan Kerr referred to the condition of professional architectural historians in Australia at the inaugural meeting in Adelaide of what was then called the Australasian Society of Architectural Historians. A published paper derived from this talk remains a valuable reference for specialist historians of any sort.⁴¹

Kerr's basic premise was that practising architects do not make objective historians, partly because they themselves are caught up in the reigning design theories and aesthetics and partly because they are not trained in historical method. Her words appear equally appropriate for practising landscape architects or any other designer or artist who attempts to write a history of their field. For those whose inclinations are more graphic than literary (i.e. designers), Kerr summarised her observations as eight points thus:

1. Architects put creativity before context.
2. They borrow theoretical models from overseas because they do not realize that Australia is not the same.
3. They believe that what you see is all there is.
4. They think facts are better than theory.
5. They add up the parts and think they have a whole.
6. They think it is worthwhile and possible to recreate originals untouched by time.
7. They prefer to isolate a moment rather than understand a process.
8. They think that good and bad should not be interchangeable but eternally valid.⁴²

These points were discussed in Stanford's historiography and are the basic mistakes in historical method, what he would call 'bad history.' Kerr spoke also, of values and their influence on the historian and the resultant history as product:

³⁸ Gombrich, E.H. (1979), pg. 132. Gombrich's capitalisation included here.

³⁹ Gombrich, E.H. (1979), pg. 133

⁴⁰ Gombrich, E.H. (1979), pg. 133.

⁴¹ Kerr, Joan (1984), "Why Architects Should Not Write Architectural History," *Transition*, 4 (1), Oct 1984. pp. 26-28.

⁴² Kerr, Joan (1984), pg. 28.

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Of course, every historian creates a new edifice out of fragments of the past and shapes them into some sort of hierarchy by his or her selection and emphasis ... Value need not be assigned according to current taste; no hierarchy has to place the present at the top of the pyramid. And, above all, the theoretical values behind such selections and omissions need not be imported [from overseas sources].⁴³

As mentioned in this extract, the distinctiveness of the Australian design scene was another point that was relevant to the Queensland study. Design styles were not only taken from Britain (or North America) and recreated in Australia; adaptations occurred and sometimes whole new approaches developed. The resultant mixture is what makes Australia's architectural and designed landscape character, and together impact on the broader cultural landscape. Another point that Kerr raised related to searches of published sources and concerned the writing of history and its influence on design. She wrote: "Our architecture makes our history, but the reverse is equally true."⁴⁴ This highlights the long-standing relationship between creativity and description. Explaining contemporary and historical events and creating are twin companions that comprise the whole system of human creation of places and things. The papers of both Gombrich and Kerr expose the need for sound historical method to guide research and data analysis in art/architectural history. Thus, their advice applies to other design fields, including landscape architecture.

Garden

History

or

Designed Landscape History

For the moment, designed landscapes (parks, gardens, townscapes, etc) are the issue at hand. Further evidence of the contrasting and synonymous meanings of the two terms 'garden' and 'landscape', is demonstrated in the ways their histories have been approached and written. At first glance, the use of the terms could be credited to national customs: 'garden history' being favoured in Britain and Australia, and 'landscape history' being preferred in the USA, to signify the same field of study. After more detailed investigation of relevant sources, writers and their language, a curious mixture was found within many countries of simultaneous usage of these terms, sometimes becoming synonymous in meaning.

Even the leading authorities in this area employ a mixture of usage as the following examples illustrate. The Garden History Society in Britain is interested in "garden and landscape design."⁴⁵ At the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies within the University of York, there is a Centre for Historic Parks and Gardens and a Masters course in "Conservation (landscape)." In the USA, the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection (part of Harvard University) runs "Studies in Landscape Architecture" programs, the purpose of which is: "to promote research in landscape architecture, garden design, and garden culture in its broader sense."⁴⁶ There is another example of dual use here. Well known American designer Beatrix Jones Farrand designed the gardens of Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC and is described as a 'landscape architect' on the Landscape Studies web-page, and a 'landscape gardener' on the homepage of the whole organisation.⁴⁷ Just when there seems to be agreement, some parallel use of the terms 'garden' and 'landscape' appears. Reference to authoritative writers in this field provided some evidence of mixed messages about the similarities and differences between 'garden history' and 'landscape history,' but overall 'garden history' was revealed as the preferred term. An examination of a selection of forty-one authors from Australia, Britain and the USA revealed:

27 publications used 'garden history' in preference to 'landscape history'

8 publications used 'landscape history' in preference to 'garden history'

⁴³ Kerr, Joan (1984), pg. 27.

⁴⁴ Kerr, Joan (1984), pg. 28.

⁴⁵ Batey, Mavis (1986), "Garden History Society," In *OCG*, pg. 212

⁴⁶ Dumbarton Oaks Studies in Landscape Architecture URL: <http://www.doaks.org/gardenproghist.html> (accessed by < j.sim@qut.edu.au > on 16 Oct. 1997).

⁴⁷ Dumbarton Oaks Internet site URL: <http://www.doaks.org/index.html> (accessed by < j.sim@qut.edu.au > on 16.10.1997).

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6 publications used either a mixture of terms or other terms, e.g. countryside.

When the countries of publication origin were added into this analysis, all three preferred the 'garden history' term, even though among supporters of 'landscape history' five were from the USA.⁴⁸ All authors selected were describing designed landscapes over a wide area (the world or a whole country) and within a wide time frame (somewhere between pre-history and the present-day). Several of these sources provide examples of the preferred use of terms and are reported here.

English landscape architect Christopher Tunnard used the terms 'landscape design' and 'landscape architect', and placed them within an historical context in his semi-historical work of 1938, *Gardens in the Modern Landscape*.⁴⁹ In this important and influential book, Tunnard tended to use the term 'garden and landscape design' as one entity. However, in the closing paragraphs, he stated "The eighteenth century brought the landscape into garden planning; the twentieth century must bring the garden into the landscape."⁵⁰ This reveals a distinction between the two terms, but not a clear definition of that difference. Almost forty years later, Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe introduced even broader issues of landscape, planning and urban design into their authoritative historical study, *The Landscape of Man*, still the standard reference in many landscape architectural schools and professional institutes. They stated,

The world is moving into a phase when landscape design may well be recognized as the most comprehensive of the arts. Man [*sic*] creates around him an environment that is a projection into nature of his abstract ideas. It is only in the present century that the collective landscape has emerged as a social necessity. We are promoting a landscape art on a scale never conceived of in history.⁵¹

The description of cultural and natural context in the Jellicoes' publication is significant in examining the use and intention of the terms chosen. Their historical studies of national regions are arranged under these contextual and thematic headings: Environment, Social History, Philosophy, Expression, Architecture and Landscape. The Jellicoes' 'holistic' approach was a distinctive break away from traditional 'garden history' approaches that concentrated on design form and aesthetic theory.

An extensive search revealed no definitive book on the historiography – meaning the process of researching and writing history – specifically related to garden or landscape history. One attempt was located, the result of the thirteenth Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium in 1989. The papers from this colloquium were reworked and subsequently published with John Dixon Hunt as editor. He explained about this work in the foreword: "the general topic of garden history itself – its methods, its approaches, and the issues it addresses – that is our theme."⁵² The papers discussed a wide range of topics, each centered on specific gardens as case studies. Many authors raised the issue of expanding the writing of history, from a basic 'who and what' (form) approach towards including matters of 'why and how' (meaning and use). This inclination indicates a growing reliance on traditional historical method as opposed to the old ways of design practitioners writing history, about which Joan Kerr made such apt comments. Hunt concluded that:

the essential emphasis of the volume [was] the need for a contextual approach to the study of gardens, drawing upon a variety of materials and disciplines which will unlock the resources of many branches of human art and culture from literature, painting, and architecture to religion, class, politics, and land use.⁵³

⁴⁸ The tabulation of this examination of preference appears in Appendix B ~ Historiographical Reviews.

⁴⁹ Jellicoe, G. A. (1986), "Tunnard, Christopher (1910-1979)," In *OCG*, pg. 568.

⁵⁰ Tunnard, Christopher (1938), *Gardens in the Modern Landscape*. London: Architectural Press. pg. 166

⁵¹ Jellicoe, G. and S. Jellicoe (1975), *The Landscape of Man: Shaping the environment from prehistory to the present day*. London: Thames and Hudson. Dust jacket, back page: extracted and edited from the Introduction, pg. 7.

⁵² Hunt, John Dixon ed. (1992), "Introduction," *Garden History: Issues, Approaches, Methods*, *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture*, 13. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Pub'n Service. pg. 1

⁵³ Hunt, John Dixon ed. (1992), pg. 3

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Though not a comprehensive treatise on historiography, this work is a large step in that direction. One of the participants in the thirteenth Colloquium at Dumbarton Oaks was Tom Williamson.⁵⁴ His paper introduced many of the topics about broadening the focus of garden historians that were later included in his monograph Politics and Landscape. Both of his works contained many key insights into the traditional practices of garden and landscape historians:

The stories told by garden historians have, traditionally, focused not only on the great designers who forged that main lines of stylistic development but also on the 'key sites' where new ideas were first put into practice ... It is only in the last few decades that historians have begun to examine a wider range of landscapes, including those created by the mass of the local gentry.⁵⁵

Williamson criticised traditional approaches to writing garden history, which "denied even the most basic information about them" and listed some questions usually ignored:

How large is the landscape under discussion? How much did it cost to create, or maintain? Is it the first design on the site, and if not, which (if any) elements were adapted from earlier layouts? How much was contributed by the working landscape, which existed before the garden was created? Is the landscape surrounded by open heathland, unenclosed open-field, arable land, or enclosed land? All this information is indispensable for any understanding of a designed landscape.⁵⁶

In summary to these observations Williamson wrote: "The history of designed landscape, in other words, cannot be divorced from the wider history of society." Within this last sentence are two key ideas: that landscape history should have social context and that this implies the application of sound historical method. Williamson extended his critical descriptions of contemporary garden historiography thus:

Two clear and striking things have, however, emerged from the spate of recent studies. The first is that the 'key sites' which loom so large in the literature are often a poor guide to the gardens created by the majority of landowners. These places were often described *ad nauseam* precisely because they were innovative and unusual: almost by definition, different from ordinary gardens, idiosyncratic or even odd creations.⁵⁷

The key to success in writing 'good' landscape history, according to Williamson, is to ensure a healthy mix of elite, exemplar gardens and ordinary, representative gardens as a complete range. Williamson's second point was about the importance of the owner in the creative process:

Many landowners, of course, designed their own grounds ... Many of the most famous and most visited eighteenth-century gardens were designed by such enthusiastic amateurs. But even when professional designers were employed it is a mistake to believe that their place were simply adopted wholesale by the client. In practice, most designs seem to have developed through a series of compromises; and the final decision about what was or was not to be implemented lay, naturally enough, with the landowner.⁵⁸

Another outlook on the current nature of landscape history was found in the recent paper by American academic Robert B. Riley. Although this paper was directed towards the teaching of history in landscape architectural schools, useful comparisons can be made between the writing of history and its use in instruction. Riley wrote of several observations that have been noted here already: the need to be clear about the differences between the dichotomies of "high" (elite, professionally designed) and "ordinary" landscapes and "designed and non-designed"; the essential relationship between change and landscape ("Change is the essence, but change is not even."); and the "need to study the local and the distinctive as well as the

⁵⁴ Williamson, Tom (1992) "Garden History and Systematic Survey," In Garden History: Issues, Approaches, Methods, edited by John Dixon Hunt, *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture, 13*. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Publication Service. pp. 59-78.

⁵⁵ Williamson, Tom (1995), Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England. Baltimore, Maryland, USA: John Hopkins University Press. pp. 4-5

⁵⁶ Williamson, Tom (1992), pp. 59-78. pg. 60.

⁵⁷ Williamson, Tom (1995), pg. 6

⁵⁸ Williamson, Tom (1995), Polite Landscapes. Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press. pg. 7

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universal and the dominating."⁵⁹ Riley offered examples of changing the way history is traditionally taught:

We should reject the chimera of renaissance, gender-free, captain of the design team and speculate upon how history could support more focused roles for a landscape architect. Three roles come to mind: the landscape architect as a *form giver*, as a *professional* embedded in a society, and as an *intervener*, a manager of change upon the land. These roles lead to a history of form, to a social history, and to a history of landscape change.⁶⁰

These ideas also offer alternatives to the way landscape history could be written. As Riley noted for the teaching of these "three alternative directions", not one of these ways should be presented as 'bad' history, with unscholarly generalisations and speculations. While this approach to history expands and concentrates the focus of study, one writer contributed this observation: "The recent increase in research has made garden history both more interesting and more problematic. It seems at times as if the more we find out, the less we know."⁶¹ Perhaps the illustration of the expanding boundaries of knowledge is a better description: the more humanity learns, the longer (or wider in a three dimensional sense) are the boundaries. Much has been learnt along the way.

Another aspect of landscape history is the history of urban development. Lewis Mumford was one of the early writers in this field.⁶² More recently, works by urban design historians such as Spiro Kostof have extended the concept of landscape design yet again.⁶³ While the research methods of these writers were not explored further here, their broad scope can be applied to both 'designed landscapes' and 'cultural landscapes'.

Landscape History in Geography and Ecology

The recent works of ecological historian Oliver Rackham and the older works of geographer W.G. Hoskins describing the British countryside were very rewarding.⁶⁴

Rackham's basic approach was to combine investigations of material evidence (including 'historical ecology') and documentary research applied to rural landscapes. In outlining his approach he also critiqued traditional historical method:

Unfortunately, many historians confine themselves to the written word, or worse still, to the literary word; they are reluctant to put on their boots and to see what the land itself, and the things that grow on it, have to say. At best this shortens perspectives and over-emphasises the achievement of people who have much to say about themselves. At worst it manufactures false conclusions.⁶⁵

Rackham also observed a very important matter about the extent of human purposefulness and changes on the land.

In reality the countryside records human default as well as design, and much of it has a life of its own independent of human activity ... With many features, such as ponds and hedges, it is still not possible to say where Nature stops and human activity begins.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Riley, Robert B. (1995) "What History Should We Teach and Why?," *Landscape Journal* 14 (2), pp. 220-225. pg. 222.

⁶⁰ Riley, Robert B. (1995) "What History Should We Teach and Why?," *Landscape Journal* 14 (2), pg. 222.

⁶¹ Williamson, Tom (1995), *Polite Landscapes*. Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press. pg. 5

⁶² Mumford, Lewis (1991), *The City in History: its transformations, and its prospects*. (first published in 1961). Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.

⁶³ Kostof, Spiro (1991), *The City Shaped*. London: Thames and Hudson; and, Kostof, Spiro (1992), *The City Assembled: The elements of urban form through history*. London: Thames and Hudson.

⁶⁴ Rackham, Oliver (1990), *Trees and Woodland in the British Landscape*, revised edition (first edition published in 1976), London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.; and, Rackham, Oliver (1995), *The History of the Countryside*. 2nd edition (first published in 1986). London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. Hoskins, W. G. (1988), *The Making of the English Landscape*. London: Penguin (first published in 1955).

⁶⁵ Rackham, Oliver (1995), pg. 6.

⁶⁶ Rackham, Oliver (1995), pg. xiii

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Rackham's components of the British countryside (from the list of contents) reflect wide range of both created and natural entities.⁶⁷ Of particular relevance for those interested in conservation, Rackham described four kinds of loss of historic countryside:

There is the loss of beauty, especially that exquisite beauty of the small and complex and unexpected ... There is the loss of freedom, of highways and open spaces, which results in the English attitude to landownership ... There is the loss of historic vegetation and wildlife, most of which once lost is gone for ever ... In this book I am especially concerned about the loss of meaning. The landscape is a record of our roots and the growth of civilization.⁶⁸

Thus, another modern historian recognises the importance of meaning and values to the understanding of humanity and our history.

Apart for Rackham's insights into historical methods, he also provided a link between history and conservation. Arguments in favour of destroying historic countryside include these three 'myths' or fallacious arguments, which he listed as:

- (1) that the landscape is not really historic (e.g. hedges were only planted in the late 18th century)
- (2) that change is necessary (to suit changing agricultural or forestry purposes, etc. which may already have changed so that change on the land is no longer required)
- (3) that the countryside has always been changing.⁶⁹

Apart from the false logic in the first two points, Rackham's thorough findings revealed there was more stability than change until very recent times. Debate about what constitutes historic continue to be made by those not involved in conservation or investigating history. What is 'historic' will never be quantifiable and generally applicable – each place, each item is unique. Rackham's 'myths' are equally familiar within the Queensland conservation – for both the falsely separated natural and cultural arenas.

Rackham's combined approach of using site surveys and documentary evidence was not possible for this research, but this remains an important role model for further detailed investigations of the cultural and natural landscapes of Queensland. Perhaps one day, a "Making of the Queensland Landscape" will be published, using the combined talents of environmental historians, garden historians, geographers and other interested scholars.

The final example of writing landscape history concerns arguably, the most important landscape history written in recent time: the study of England by W.G. Hoskins, first published in 1955. In the recent revised edition of his classic work, archaeologist Christopher Taylor provided additional commentary and introductions to the older work, which he placed in its own historical context thus:

The Making of the English Landscape is one of the greatest history books ever written. It is great because it established landscape history as a new and proper branch of historical study. It is great because it is written in a language that is easy to understand and a pleasure to read. It is great because it has inspired two, and perhaps now more generations of historians, archaeologists, geographers and botanists to follow the master's footsteps and to explore the mysteries of our country's landscape. But its greatest achievement only matched perhaps by the works of Macaulay and Trevelyan, is that it reached out to, and profoundly affected, hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who would otherwise have never thought about the past.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ The contents list was: "Regions [as the first layer of classification] ; Animals & plants: extinctions and new arrivals ; Woodland ; Wood-pasture – Wooded commons, parks and wooded forests ; Plantations ; Fields ; Hedges and field-walls ; Trees of hedgerow and farmland; Elms ; Highways ; Heathland ; Moorland ; Grassland ; Ponds, dells and pits ; Marshes, fens, rivers and the sea". [source: Rackham, Oliver (1995), The History of the Countryside. 2nd edition. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, pg. v.]

⁶⁸ Rackham, Oliver (1995), pp. 25-6.

⁶⁹ Rackham, Oliver (1995), pg..26.

⁷⁰ Hoskins, W. G. and Christopher Taylor (1992), The Making of the English Landscape. London: Hodder and Stoughton. pg. 7; Thomas Babington Macaulay, baron (1800-1859) wrote The History of England. George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876-1962) wrote History of England and English Social History.

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Once again, sound historical method is cited as the necessary foundation to the writing of landscape history. Hoskins' publication had a broad focus on the landscape, encompassing the whole urban and rural spectrum, and sought to describe all human interventions on the land, from pre-history onwards. Hoskins and Oliver Rackham's studies of the countryside of England are role models for histories of natural and cultural landscapes, and were drawing together a preliminary historical overview of cultural landscapes in Queensland.

In Conclusion

For millennia, humans have written poems, essays, novels, treatises and histories about created and imagined gardens and landscapes. Artists have drawn, painted and otherwise rendered their interpretations, perceptions and conceptions of gardens and landscapes. Musicians have been influenced by nature, natural processes and human manipulation of these elements, creating works that remind us or evoke these things in other places, at other times. Sculptors and architects design objects that are set within these landscapes and variously engage in descriptive or interpretative exercises concerning nature as part of their design process. In recent times, still photography and cinematography, video and computers, have added to the opportunities for the audiovisual representation of landscape. All these renderings contribute to the experience of landscape and its description. It is a case of the world of the mind and physical reality combining as one interactive conglomeration. Scholars pursuing an understanding of the character of landscape in our present age have come to realise that including all the parts to the complexity is necessary to achieve a comprehensive analysis.

A number of significant observations about the philosophy and the practice of history research have been made in this chapter. One outstanding factor was the recognition of the typically small amount of discussion among practising historians as to their theoretical framework, particularly if they follow the traditional historiographical path. For developing areas of scholarship, such as conservation and cultural landscape, the need to have strong foundations necessitates a critical understanding of theories and practice.