

Improving Urban Greenways Using James Rose's Theories of Integration

Claudia Stoll
Smith College, Landscape Studies

Introduction

After an insightful discussion with my peers regarding the theories of landscape urbanism, we concluded that many of the concepts are not new, but were perhaps extrapolated from landscape design principles well known to us. Throughout the discussion, I could not help but think back on my previous research about the mid-century modern landscape architect, James Rose, who's rebellious designs and intriguing publications spoke to larger concepts than purely form and design, unapologetically. His theories, although laced with humor and sarcasm, have many relevant applications in designing urban parks in cities today. *His theories on the integration of indoors and outdoors, people and nature, movement and stillness, and the recycling of old materials to make new things can be applied to greenscapes in cities in order to create fully integrated, sustainable, and inhabitable spaces.*

Background/Literature Review

While the modernist movement was cascading throughout the design world, it was not doing so in the landscape architecture field, according to the sarcastic comment made by Rose, "a tree is a tree, and always will be a tree; therefore we can have no modern landscape design," (Rose, 1938, p. 640). Yet, it took rebel landscape designers such as Rose and his contemporaries to finally bring about "a new mentality we have derived from the effects of the industrial and economic revolutions," (Rose, 1938, p. 641). Note, this was not an aesthetic reaction. You will never find in any of Rose's literature that he fully embraced all modernist ideas, nor the structured form and mechanization thereof. His designs react to the site and the social movement within and around, rather than repeat stylistic tropes.

After getting kicked out of Harvard for refusing to comply with the Beaux-Arts style of the time ("Our grave is on axis in a Beaux Arts cemetery."), Rose continued to write articles with his contemporaries, Garrett Eckbo and Dan Kiley, which are now a hard find, located only in archival records (Rose, 1938, p. 640). In *Landscape Design in the Urban Environment*, Rose, Eckbo, and Kiley address "the recreation of the city, [which,] like its work and its life, remains essentially a social problem," (Rose, Kiley, & Eckbo, 1939, p. 77). They explain how to "achieve volumes of organized space in which people live and play, rather than stand and look," by defining the qualities necessary

for a greenspace, including integration of landscape and building, flexibility and adaptability (to time and site), multi-usability, new technology and mechanization, and public/social use (Rose, Kiley, & Eckbo, 1939, p. 73-77). These revolutionary theories on urbanism coming from landscape architects before ideas such as landscape urbanism came to be will prove to be incredibly applicable, as I will later prove.

Branching off on his own, Rose went into the private design world, not willing to do public projects because of the enforced stylistic rules. He went to Okinawa, Japan during World War II, and was heavily influenced by Japanese culture, adopting Buddhism and many design principles from Japanese garden-making (although he was very vehement that he did not make Japanese gardens) (Cardasis, 1994). It was in this time that he created a model for his “Magnum Opus”, his Ridgewood residence, and soon after published many more books and articles. His residence will be often addressed; it is known “for its unique modern spatial language, its expression of an alternative approach to conventional post-war suburban residential development, and as the constantly changing laboratory of one of landscape architecture's most inventive minds,” (Schiltz, 2011).

Goals and objectives

After extensive research on Rose’s theories and works, I seek to compare his philosophies to modern day issues in green urbanism. While it may seem farfetched to some to apply a mid-century landscape architect’s theories to modern day issues, many modern concepts are actually a result of theories starting in this time. Post World War II, the industrial, economic, social, and artistic world was going through a revolution. Simple aesthetics were dismissed for utilitarian works, and the idea that artistic principles could be used to help maintain spatial organization prevailed (Cardasis, 1994). Rose took these ideas, but furthered them with integrative theories, that economic, social, and environmental issues were all connected and could all be addressed in the landscape. This idea is one of the main functions of landscape urbanism, addressing multiple arenas of influence through the landscape. In a time where social justice, environmental justice, and economic inequality are all important issues that can be addressed in the landscape, Rose’s theories have the potential to be incredibly vital, especially considering the time of turmoil, war, and inequality he had grown up in.

Methods

To prove Rose’s importance in modern greenway design, I will compare important aspects of his theories to modern-day urban parks and to his own

works. I will start by analysing his home, the Ridgewood Residence, and use it to explain some of his theories found in his books and articles. The main theories I will be analysing are his theories of sustainability (i.e. working with the given site, reusing materials), flexibility and reflection of the local community (i.e. constant change in the landscape to reflect social needs), and integration (outdoors/indoors, work/play, natural/unnatural, private/public). After analysing these theories, I will show how they have been directly used to inspire sustainable, integrated works in the James Rose Center for Landscape Architectural Research and Design's competition, "Suburbia Transformed." While these direct examples are helpful, they do not show how Rose's theories could influence the urban landscape, and so I will continue by showing aspects of his theories represented in current, well known urban greenspaces. While they are not direct correlations, they will exemplify aspects of Rose's theories that could be highly influential, and I will analyse what it would look like to have all of Rose's theories applied to the urban landscape.

Results

Rose's Residence: Theories Actualized

Rose's residence flies in the face of the suburban cookie-cutter home. Built in a classic suburban neighbourhood in Ridgewood, New Jersey, Rose's house intentionally pricks at the notions of private, separate spaces lacking individuality, and instead he creates a kind of small village, comprising of three separate "houses" in a beautiful and complex garden, "the spaces flowing easily from one to another, divided for privacy and for convenience ... flexible and varied ... integrated with the site in a design that seemed to grow, to mature, and to renew itself as all living things do," (Rose, 1987, p. 11) (Figure 1).

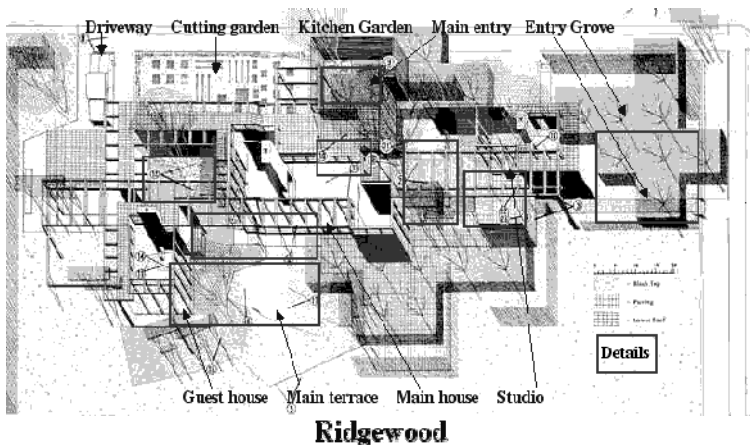


Figure 1. Ridgewood Residence

When building this landscape, Rose “often recycle[ed] raw materials found on site and incorporate[ed] natural features like rock outcroppings and trees as part of a designed, flexible, irregular, asymmetrical spatial geometry,” (Rose, 1990, p. 15). This method lays out a philosophy of sustainability that became a central element of the “Suburbia Transformed” competition, which “explore[s] the aesthetics of landscape experience in the age of sustainability,” (Schiltz, 2011). Sustainability is an important trend in greenspace design, because it allows for less waste, especially in the building process, and a continuing renewal of resources and solving of environmental issues.

Another theory of Rose’s that is found in this landscape is that of flexibility and reflection. Rose purposefully designed his home through improvisation, reacting to the site conditions and allowing for the different spaces to have the flexibility to change and grow (Cardasis, 1994). This theory is incredibly important when it comes to urban design, because the city is a place of constant change and movement, and therefore the greenways should reflect that, able to change and grow based on the needs of those who use them, otherwise they become unused and valueless with time, or simply memorabilia. They must also respond to site conditions, which crosses over with the idea of sustainability, because a park placed on a piece of land without any comprehension of the site has a far greater chance of failing (whether due to flooding, failing plants, lack of sunlight, etc.), and therefore becomes useless and often dangerous to its users.

A summary of perhaps his most important theory, that of integration, can have a variety of influences on the urban landscape, and can be seen in a variety of ways in his home turned research center. Integration comes in a variety of forms, the easiest to detect in his property are the literal ones. Most notable in this landscape is the integration of indoors and outdoors, a constant flow between structures that allows for a reflection of oneness with nature. Rose describes it as “neither landscape nor architecture but both; neither indoors, nor outdoors, but both,” (Rose, 1987, p. 96). This can be seen in Figure 2, where a tree literally is growing through the building structure, while the structure of the building is extending into the garden in the form of a terrace.

This physical representation can be a metaphor for many of the other types of integration that Rose believed in, including that of natural and unnatural (one cannot pretend that “nature” is untouched by man, instead the integration of man-made and natural are ideal) and public and private (some gathering spaces for groups, some for quiet contemplation). This can be used in greenspaces to create a park that is an integral part of the community, so connected to it literally and metaphorically through varied uses, that it will continue to serve multiple important purposes.



Figure 2. Ridgewood Residence, tree growing through house

Inspired By James Rose

Hosted by the James Rose Center for Landscape Architectural Research and Design, multiple competitions have been held titled “Suburbia Transformed.” These competitions “through a juried competition ... assemble contemporary projects achieving the goal of exploring green technologies within the context of the aesthetics of human landscape experience on small residential sites,” (Schiltz, 2011). Because these projects are directly inspired by Rose’s work and philosophies, we can analyze the influence he has today. These landscapes, however, are not urban greenspaces, so while I will analyze certain elements to show his influence, I will explain further the influence on the urban landscape in the next section. An element that is mentioned on the webpage is the use of native plants, which represents integration with the natural site, as well as sustainability in supporting native growth. Another element is permeable walkways/driveways that allow for rain water infiltration and use “drainage as undulating garden art,” as shown in the “The Carriage House Garden” designed by Joseph S.R. Volpe (Figure 3) (Schiltz, 2011).



Figure 3. The Carriage House Garden by Joseph Volpe, drainage art

Many of these gardens were designed using recycled materials, reflecting once again Rose's theory of sustainability by using materials already available and reducing waste. In "Water Treatment Facility as Neighborhood Asset," the Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates create plantings that "not only change with the seasons, but anticipate a slow and ongoing transformation of plant species and sizes," reflecting Rose's adamant theory of flexibility, that a garden must be constantly changing to reflect the needs of the environment and the social needs surrounding it (Schiltz, 2011).

Rose's theories are not without current influence. As seen by these projects directly inspired by his works, Rose's theories are still applicable today in ways that can have a huge influence in their sustainability and social uses.

Urban Greenways: Applied Theories

Although Rose's theories rarely were applied to urban greenspaces, many of them relate to or expand on current issues such as sustainability and social justice. As far as sustainability, Rose used recycled materials for many of his gardens, and this practice can be seen in "Invasion Verde" in Lima. This pop-up park installation uses recycled tires as planters, plastic as sculptural pieces, and grasses and native plants as seats, hills, and various plantings (Figure 4) (Meinhold, 2010). This park uses the implementation of recycled materials to create spurts of color and various seating and play objects for people of all ages, demonstrating not only the ability to use recycled materials for art and play, but also Rose's belief in the integration of purpose. It can be used to simply walk through and enjoy, sit and rest, or stay and play, each of these purposes catering to people of all ages and social classes. It also doesn't attempt to appear entirely natural or entirely manmade, but integrates these two ideas by exentuating the pre-existing pathways and paving patterns with hills of green grass, guiding people through the space. It also is lit up at night, which coheres with Rose's use of lighting in order to make a space inhabitable at all times of the day, night, or season. Perhaps the most obvious theory shown in this work is that of flexibility. This is a temporary installation, which means that it can be removed at any time when its service is no longer needed, and many of the pieces are movable, allowing for flexibility in space. This project represents how many of Rose's theories can be successfully implemented in an urban greenspace.



Figure 4. “Invasion Verde” in Lima

Discussion

By comparing Rose’s theories to his own works, those of inspired projects, and to current urban greenways, it becomes apparent that his theories can be applied in a variety of contexts. His theories prioritize social interactions (either with the landscape or with other people) and environmental sustainability, both of which are incredibly important when designing modern day parks, especially in cities where social inequalities are magnified and environmental problems become most dangerous. People desire an escape from the industrial/commercial world, especially when working and driving most of the day, and parks can provide this in a way that the city itself can’t. Greenspaces have the potential to be places of solace and socialization, of work and play, but without integration and thought, many parks fail to provide this. Using Rose’s theories, we can create sites that are aesthetically beautiful, spatially sound, and flexible to the dynamics of the surrounding world. Without spatial integration, we risk greenspaces that become abandoned or used for wrongful purposes. Without social integration with the surrounding community, we risk creating more social inequality and crime. Without consideration for the environment, we risk contributing to the rising pollution and destruction of our world. By implementing Rose’s theories, we can provide urban communities with greenspaces that are environmentally, socially, and economically beneficial.

Conclusion

Greenspaces in urban communities have great potential to contribute to positive social integration and environmental justice, but without recognizing the way that design can contribute to various aspects of the community, they can fail just as easily. Rose's theories on spatial landscape design have never been applied to urban parks, yet they have the potential to provide insight into the complicated ways that the landscape influences a community. By using his theories of integration, flexibility, recycling, and social awareness, greenspaces can be designed in a way that can have a long-lasting positive influence.

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