

Landscape, Power and Biopolitics

A Foucauldian Analysis of Freshkills Park, New York City

Charles Philip Hutchinson

A thesis submitted for a Doctorate of Philosophy in Environmental
Design at the University of Canberra.

October 2015

Abstract

This thesis examines the value and role of landscape in the contemporary city. It examines the research question by exploring parks in New York City with a particular focus on a case study of Freshkills Park. Since 1996, Freshkills Park has been developed over the site of the world's largest landfill: capped and sealed beneath the Park. The research has documented the process prior to decommissioning the landfill and considers the political, cultural and social aspects associated with the process to close the landfill and create the Park.

The methodology to examine Freshkills Park adopts and adapts Michel Foucault's concepts of power-knowledge, discourse and governance to interrogate the role and value of landscape in New York City from the time of Central Park's creation through to the present day. The research argues that a discourse on parks in New York City emerged during the nineteenth century, but changed over time, thus presenting continuities and discontinuities in that discourse up to the late twentieth century. Freshkills Park is a product of that shifting discourse and was designed accordingly.

This thesis found that the enormous financial and opportunity cost incurred in closing the landfill and creating a park, demonstrates the value that New York City places in parks. The Park can be considered as central to the proper functioning of the city as a social and economic entity in part because parks are connected to mechanisms of disciplinary power and biopolitics. That is, landscape within a city provides a location where biopolitics is revealed and where practices of self-discipline are evident. In Foucault's terms, parks are a necessary component of the administration of the conditions of life, and necessary for the production of a docile and productive population.

Entering the twenty-first-century, there were a number of events and contingencies specific to Freshkills Park and Fresh Kills landfill that changed the nature of the Park. Specifically Freshkills Park has come to represent the threats to New York in the twenty-first-century such as climate change, excessive waste production, even terrorism. Using Freshkills Park to remind citizens of these issues is considered in terms of the tactics of biopolitics. In this case, biopolitics has been extended beyond

the scope envisaged by Foucault, and has become associated with the administration of the biosphere. Freshkills Park has altered the discourse on parks, broadening and changing the value of parks in the city, and the value of landscape.

Freshkills Parks through its connection with biopolitics demonstrates how parks can be understood to exist within and contribute to systems of neoliberal governance.

Through understanding a connection between landscape and processes of power and biopolitics, new constructs of the role and value of landscape in the contemporary city emerge. Landscape can be understood as intimately connected with political and economic spheres, and centrally located within systems of power and knowledge, biopolitics and governance.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Scott Heyes, Dr Andrew Mackenzie and Dr Jordan Williams. In particular, Dr Heyes and Dr Mackenzie provided fantastic support and guidance.

I would also like to thank all the interviewees, all of whom were generous with their time and input. It was a great privilege for me to be able to speak with them about Freshkills Park. I particularly appreciated that some interviewees, especially Adrian Benepe, arranged contact with other interviewees that were not known to me or that I had not been able to contact.

A heartfelt thanks goes to my wife, Tarsha who is generous and understanding beyond my comprehension and to my two beautiful daughters, Sarah and Sophie.

Finally I want to give a special thankyou to my friend Gareth, whose support, advice and confidence he showed in me was greatly appreciated.

This document was edited for spelling and grammar by Lyle Dunne.

Note:

This thesis includes extensive discussions of power relations and the administration of Freshkills Park. In no way should any statement be interpreted as criticism of any agency or interviewee.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | iii |
| Certificate of Authorship of Thesis..... | v |
| Acknowledgements | vi |
| Table of Contents | vii |
| Table of Figures | x |
| 1 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Background | 1 |
| 1.1.1 Description of the Thesis..... | 1 |
| 1.1.2 Description of the Research Problem..... | 1 |
| 1.1.3 Contribution to Field of Landscape Theory | 3 |
| 1.1.4 Positioning the Research | 3 |
| 1.2 Structure of the Research | 4 |
| 1.2.1 A Case Study Approach | 4 |
| 1.2.2 The Choice of Freshkills Park..... | 6 |
| 1.2.3 Applying the Methodology to the Case Study | 7 |
| 1.3 Structure of the Thesis..... | 7 |
| 1.3.1 Contribution to New Knowledge | 8 |
| 2 Literature Review..... | 9 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 9 |
| 2.2 Landscape and Power..... | 9 |
| 2.2.1 Historical Landscapes and Power | 9 |
| 2.2.2 Landscape and Power in the Contemporary City..... | 12 |
| 2.2.3 Conclusion..... | 15 |
| 2.3 Foucault – Power-Knowledge, Discourse and Governance..... | 16 |
| 2.3.1 Introduction | 16 |
| 2.3.2 The Work of Michel Foucault..... | 17 |
| 2.3.3 Governance..... | 22 |
| 2.3.4 Liberalism, Neoliberalism and Biopolitics..... | 28 |
| 2.3.5 Power, Biopolitics and Governance in Relation to Freshkills Park | 34 |
| 2.4 Discourses on the Environment..... | 35 |
| 2.4.1 Introduction | 35 |
| 2.4.2 Environmentality as Green Governmentality..... | 35 |
| 2.4.3 Ecology as a Discourse on Power | 36 |
| 2.4.4 Discourse Analysis and Environmental Policy | 37 |
| 2.4.5 Environmentality | 37 |
| 2.4.6 Conclusion..... | 38 |
| 2.5 America, the Frontier and Nature..... | 38 |
| 2.5.1 Introduction | 38 |
| 2.5.2 The Idea of Wilderness | 39 |
| 2.5.3 Wilderness and National Identity | 41 |
| 2.5.4 The Pristine Myth..... | 42 |
| 2.5.5 Wilderness and as an Antidote to Contemporary Life | 44 |
| 2.5.6 Wilderness, Nature and Public Parks | 45 |
| 2.6 Health and Nature..... | 45 |
| 2.6.1 Value of Natural Environments..... | 45 |
| 2.6.2 Recent Studies | 46 |
| 2.7 Conclusion..... | 47 |
| 3 Methodology and Theoretical Framework..... | 50 |

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 3.1 | Introduction | 50 |
| 3.2 | Defining Landscape..... | 50 |
| 3.3 | Applying the Work of Foucault to the Study of Landscape..... | 51 |
| 3.4 | Research Foundations..... | 52 |
| 3.4.1 | Epistemological and Ontological Foundations..... | 53 |
| 3.5 | Theoretical Perspective | 55 |
| 3.5.1 | Introduction | 55 |
| 3.5.2 | History of the Present | 55 |
| 3.5.3 | Archaeology | 56 |
| 3.5.4 | Genealogy..... | 60 |
| 3.5.5 | Discourse and Discursive Formations..... | 62 |
| 3.5.6 | Governance – Liberalism and Neoliberalism..... | 63 |
| 3.5.7 | Some Aspects of Caution in Using Foucauldian Principles..... | 66 |
| 3.6 | Researcher Stance..... | 67 |
| 3.7 | Research Design | 69 |
| 3.7.1 | Introduction | 69 |
| 3.7.2 | Archaeology, Genealogy and a Case Study Approach..... | 69 |
| 3.7.3 | Developing the Archive..... | 71 |
| 3.7.4 | Data Collection and Processing - Interviews | 75 |
| 3.7.5 | Ethics Approval for Interviews | 77 |
| 3.7.6 | Data Analysis | 77 |
| 3.7.7 | Relating the Results to the Research Problem..... | 79 |
| 3.8 | Conclusion..... | 79 |
| 4 | Freshkills Park – A Political and Design History | 81 |
| 4.1 | Introduction | 81 |
| 4.2 | The Emergence of a Park | 82 |
| 4.2.1 | The History of a Landfill..... | 85 |
| 4.2.2 | A Political Decision..... | 88 |
| 4.2.3 | Dynamics of Power of Staten Island Borough in New York City | 90 |
| 4.2.4 | The Decision to Create Freshkills Park..... | 92 |
| 4.2.5 | Conclusion..... | 95 |
| 4.3 | The Design of Freshkills Park | 95 |
| 4.3.1 | The Competition..... | 95 |
| 4.3.2 | The Winning Design – ‘Lifescape’ and Field Operations..... | 96 |
| 4.3.3 | Freshkills Park and Landscape Urbanism | 103 |
| 4.3.4 | Reaction to the Design | 104 |
| 4.4 | Changes to the Original Plan..... | 105 |
| 4.4.1 | Community Engagement..... | 106 |
| 4.4.2 | Staten Island Administration’s Influence on the Process..... | 106 |
| 4.5 | The Emergence of a Park from a Landfill | 111 |
| 5 | The Cost and Administration of Freshkills Park | 112 |
| 5.1 | Introduction | 112 |
| 5.2 | The Cost of Freshkills Park | 112 |
| 5.2.1 | Cost of Closing the Landfill | 113 |
| 5.2.2 | Cost of the Park | 114 |
| 5.2.3 | Expected Recurrent Expenditure of the Park | 117 |
| 5.2.4 | A Question of Value..... | 120 |
| 5.2.5 | Conclusion..... | 121 |
| 5.3 | Administrative Structures and Management Challenges | 121 |
| 5.3.1 | Administrative Structures..... | 122 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 5.3.2 | Management Challenges | 123 |
| 5.3.3 | Building Support for Freshkills Park | 131 |
| 5.3.4 | Funding Freshkills Park Under Neoliberal Governance | 133 |
| 5.4 | Conclusion: Freshkills Park as a Political Product..... | 134 |
| 6 | Freshkills Park and the Discourse on Parks in New York City | 137 |
| 6.1 | Introduction | 137 |
| 6.2 | The Role of Parks in New York City | 137 |
| 6.2.1 | Central Park..... | 137 |
| 6.2.2 | Role, Value and Uses of Parks in Contemporary New York City | 144 |
| 6.2.3 | Discourse on Parks and the Emergence of Freshkills Park..... | 149 |
| 6.2.4 | Biopolitics, Disciplinary Power and Central Park | 150 |
| 6.3 | The Aims, Goals, Imagery and Perceived Value of Freshkills Park..... | 153 |
| 6.3.1 | Introduction | 153 |
| 6.3.2 | Size of Freshkills Park..... | 154 |
| 6.3.3 | Recreation..... | 155 |
| 6.3.4 | Activating the Site | 161 |
| 6.3.5 | Ecology..... | 162 |
| 6.3.6 | Research | 166 |
| 6.3.7 | Renewable Energy Production | 167 |
| 6.3.8 | Changing the Vision: Competition to Management..... | 168 |
| 6.4 | The Perceived Value of Freshkills Park | 169 |
| 6.4.1 | Introduction | 169 |
| 6.4.2 | Transformational for Staten Island..... | 169 |
| 6.4.3 | Freshkills Park as a Symbol | 171 |
| 6.4.4 | Size and Uniqueness of the Park | 173 |
| 6.4.5 | Ecological Value of the Park..... | 174 |
| 6.4.6 | Interaction with Nature..... | 174 |
| 6.4.7 | Unknown Future Benefits | 175 |
| 6.4.8 | Limits to the Value of the Park | 175 |
| 6.4.9 | Developing Discourses – the Perceived Value of Freshkills Park | 176 |
| 6.5 | The Value of Aesthetics | 177 |
| 6.5.1 | The Aesthetic of Freshkills Park | 178 |
| 6.6 | The Discourses on Freshkills Park | 186 |
| 6.6.1 | Introduction | 186 |
| 6.6.2 | Freshkills Park’s Emergence within a Discourse on Parks | 186 |
| 6.7 | Conclusion..... | 189 |
| 7 | Freshkills Park: Power, Biopolitics and Governance..... | 191 |
| 7.1 | Introduction | 191 |
| 7.2 | Freshkills Park: Disciplinary Power and Biopolitics | 191 |
| 7.2.1 | The Biopolitics of Recreation at Freshkills Park | 193 |
| 7.3 | Expanding the Concepts of Biopolitics | 196 |
| 7.3.1 | Introduction | 196 |
| 7.3.2 | Biopolitics and Climate Change..... | 198 |
| 7.3.3 | Freshkills Park as a Symbol of a Waste Production..... | 200 |
| 7.3.4 | Biopolitics and Ecology | 202 |
| 7.3.5 | Wilderness and the Frontier | 203 |
| 7.3.6 | 9/11..... | 204 |
| 7.3.7 | Biopolitics, Threatening Processes and Freshkills Park..... | 205 |
| 7.3.8 | Freshkills Park and Neoliberal Governance Structures..... | 207 |
| 7.3.9 | Effectiveness of Neoliberal Systems and Park Management..... | 213 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 7.4 | Reflection on the Claims Made for Freshkills Park | 214 |
| 7.4.1 | Validity of Claims | 214 |
| 7.4.2 | Government’s Consciousness of Self..... | 215 |
| 7.5 | The Production of Freshkills Park..... | 216 |
| 8 | Conclusion..... | 220 |
| 8.1 | Introduction | 220 |
| 8.2 | The Discourses on Landscape | 220 |
| 8.3 | Freshkills Park as a Fourth Nature | 222 |
| 8.3.1 | Role of Aesthetics | 224 |
| 8.4 | Landscape, Power and Biopolitics | 225 |
| 8.5 | Rethinking the Role and Value of Landscape | 227 |
| 8.6 | Reflection on the research | 230 |
| 8.6.1 | Reflection on the Approach Taken..... | 230 |
| 8.6.2 | Implications of the Research | 230 |
| 8.6.3 | Possible Suggestions for Future Research..... | 230 |
| | Appendices | 233 |
| | Appendix 1 – Interviewees..... | 235 |
| | Appendix 2 – Typical Interview Questions..... | 239 |
| | Appendix 3 – Mind Maps from Interview Transcription Process..... | 240 |
| | Appendix 4 – Interviewee Informed Consent Form..... | 254 |
| | Appendix 5 – The Master Plan Process and Public Engagement | 255 |
| | References | 259 |

Table of Figures

| | | |
|-------------|---|-----|
| Figure 1.1 | – Staten Island in Relation to New York | 5 |
| Figure 1.2 | – Location of Freshkills Park..... | 5 |
| Figure 2.1 | – Vaux-le-Vicomte | 10 |
| Figure 2.2 | – Stourhead | 11 |
| Figure 2.3 | – Yosemite National Park..... | 39 |
| Figure 3.1 | – Discursive Formations Associated with Freshkills Park | 62 |
| Figure 3.2 | – Example Mind Map from Interview Process – Adrian Benepe..... | 76 |
| Figure 4.1 | – Location of Freshkills Park..... | 81 |
| Figure 4.2 | – Closure of Fresh Kills Landfill | 82 |
| Figure 4.3 | – View of Mound Covered by Plastic Membrane | 82 |
| Figure 4.4 | – Section of the Landfill | 83 |
| Figure 4.5 | – Freshkills Park from East Mound | 84 |
| Figure 4.6 | – Freshkills Park from South Mound..... | 84 |
| Figure 4.7 | – Plan for Fresh Kills | 86 |
| Figure 4.8 | – ‘Lifescape’ Draft Master Plan..... | 96 |
| Figure 4.9 | – Zones of Freshkills Park | 97 |
| Figure 4.10 | – Schmul Park..... | 98 |
| Figure 4.11 | – Owl Hollow..... | 99 |
| Figure 4.12 | – Circulation Plan for Freshkills Park..... | 100 |
| Figure 4.13 | – Implementation of ‘Lifescape’ | 102 |
| Figure 4.14 | – Freshkills Park as a Way to Alleviate Traffic Congestion..... | 109 |
| Figure 5.1 | – Total Cost of Refuse Collection in New York..... | 113 |
| Figure 5.2 | – Expectation of Return? | 120 |
| Figure 5.3 | – The Value Equation | 121 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 6.1 – Central Park | 139 |
| Figure 6.2 – The Great Lawn - Central Park..... | 142 |
| Figure 6.3 – Bryant Park | 145 |
| Figure 6.1 – Proposed 9/11 Memorial..... | 155 |
| Figure 6.5 – Kayaking at Freshkills Park..... | 156 |
| Figure 6.6 – Proposed Canoe Launch | 157 |
| Figure 6.7 – Horseback Riding at Freshkills Park | 158 |
| Figure 6.8 – Bike and Pedestrian Circulation Trails | 158 |
| Figure 6.9 – Mountain Bike Riding | 159 |
| Figure 6.10 – Kite Flying at Freshkills Park | 160 |
| Figure 6.11 – The Point..... | 161 |
| Figure 6.12 – Program Events..... | 162 |
| Figure 6.13 – “I Am Within” - Artistic Display at Freshkills Park | 162 |
| Figure 6.14 – Birdwatching..... | 165 |
| Figure 6.15 – Scientific Study and Education..... | 166 |
| Figure 6.16 – Methane Production at Freshkills Park..... | 167 |
| Figure 6.17 – Wind Farms at Freshkills Park | 168 |
| Figure 6.18 – Proposed View of Freshkills Park | 181 |
| Figure 6.19 – Freshkills Park Picturesque Imagery | 182 |
| Figure 6.20 – Woodland Trail..... | 183 |
| Figure 6.21 – South Mound | 183 |
| Figure 6.22 – Landfill Infrastructure and Mound | 184 |
| Figure 6.23 – Timeline of Freshkills Park | 188 |
| Figure 6.25 – Freshkills Park and a Landscape Discourse | 189 |
| Figure 7.1 – Kayaking at Freshkills Park..... | 193 |