

Land scape

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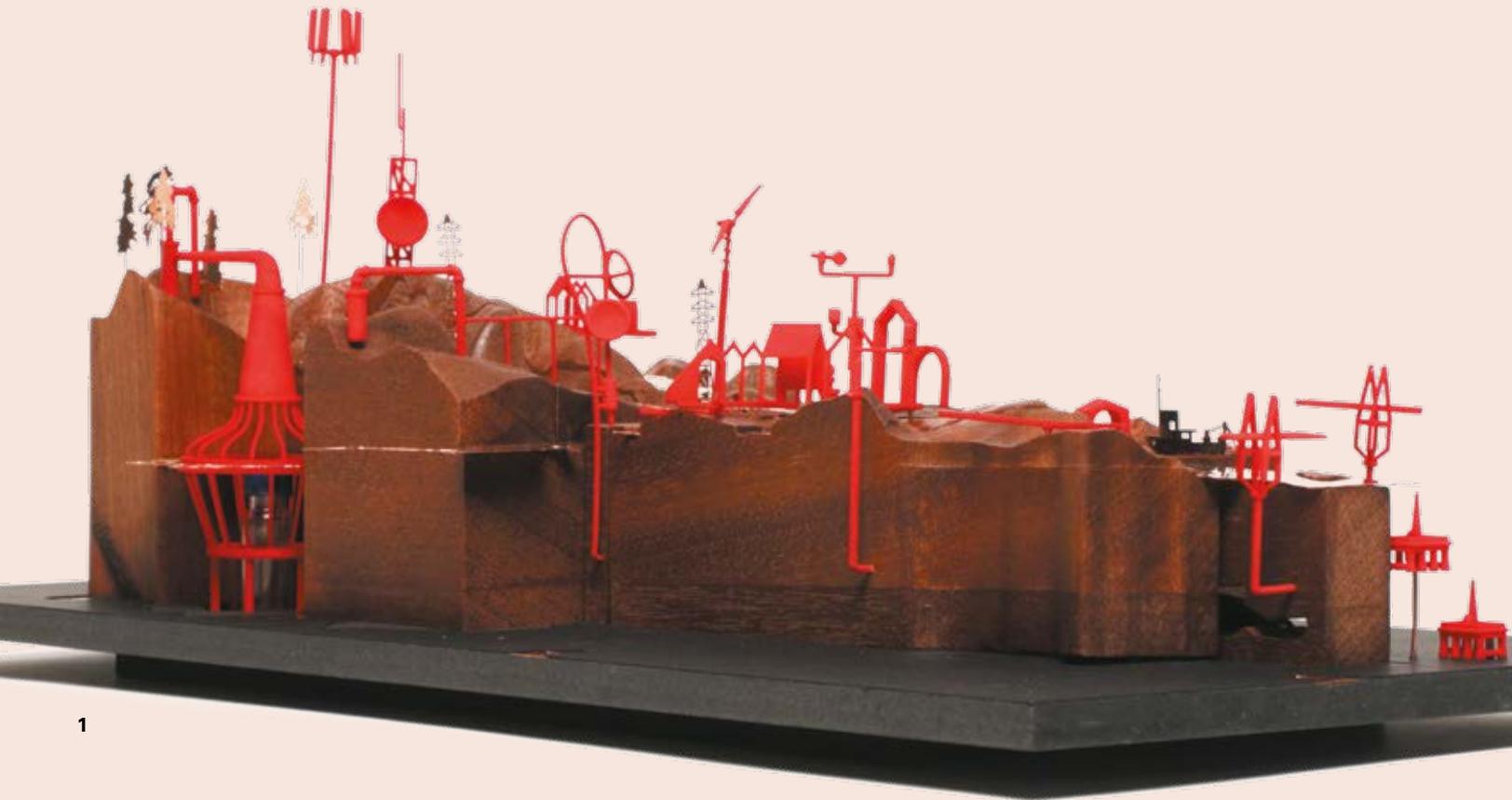
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**Bringing nature
into the city**

Place and health in the age of COVID-19

Manifesto for future relations of landscapes

Is there a way landscape architects can avoid the duality of nature and city through more inclusive definitions of landscape that reframe design within planetary contexts? Ed Wall opens up questions for designers seeking to ground their work in the wider, interconnected ecosystem and suggests some potentially useful references



1. Valley Project, Model 1 (2019).
© Ed Wall and Emma Colthurst / Project Studio

2. Valley Project, Drawing 7 (2019).
© Ed Wall / Project Studio



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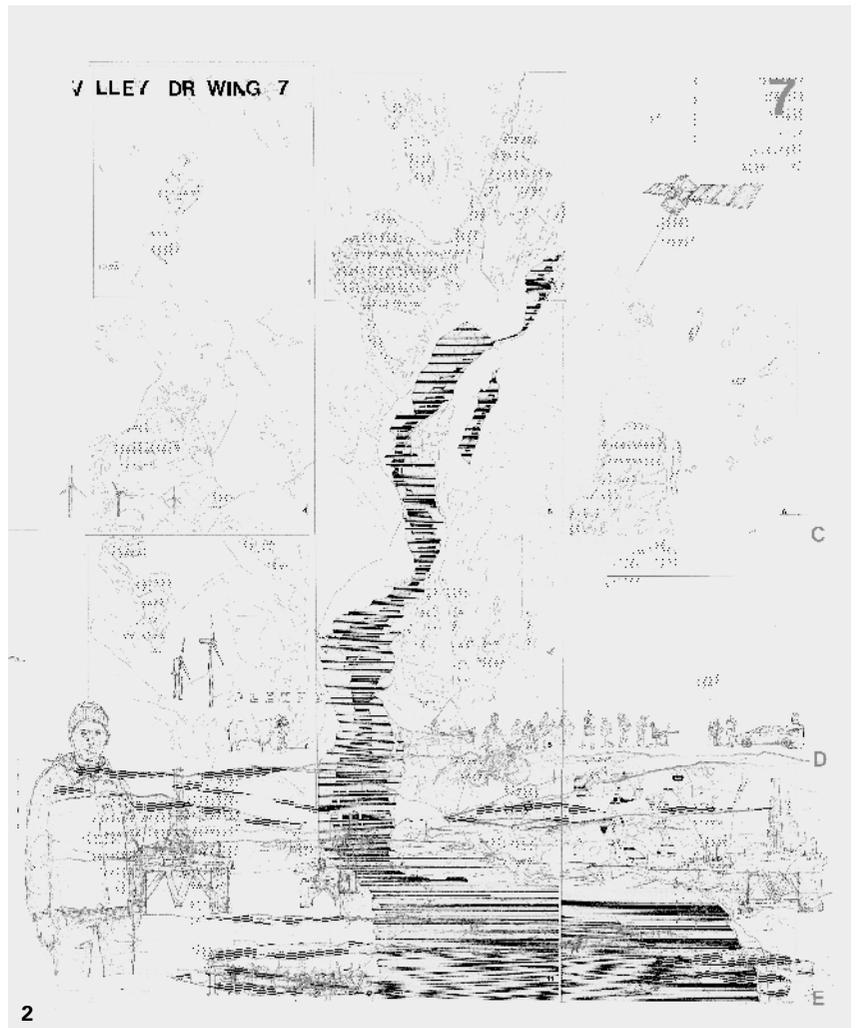
The valley section drawings by Patrick Geddes allow us to understand a world of relations, between people, the tools of their work and the places that they transform through their endeavours. These longitudinal sectional drawings, first published in 1909, also illustrate dynamics between mountains, woodlands, farmland, villages, cities and seas. Regarding the question of ‘bringing nature into the city’ or ‘making the city more natural’, Geddes’ regional approach counters a dualism that distances urban conditions of cities from landscapes considered more natural. It also has the potential to point to future relations of landscapes that could afford rights to all species, respect all entities and recognise the interconnectedness of all planetary conditions.

From the hills to the sea we can understand the landscapes of the valley section as worked in varying ways, through intensities of urbanisation, concentrations of populations and differing availability of resources. The concept of the valley section allows the extraction of minerals to be related to cities built from these materials and river waters to be considered as core urban infrastructures.

Looking closer we can read tensions between agricultural fields that feed growing populations: fields that are simultaneously under threat from the need to expand urban settlements.

Despite including landscapes that could be considered more urban and others accepted as more natural, it is impossible to separate society from nature in the valley section. Sparsely populated landscapes are urbanised through their relation to human actions, from tourism to farming and from transportation to industry. Villages, towns and cities – as well as suburbs, conurbations and less densely built environments – are situated and grounded by the bedrock on which they are constructed, in their watersheds that provide essential resources and within weather patterns that inform erosion, growth and decay.

Through studying Geddes’ valley section drawings, we can also begin



to understand relations between our contemporary societies and the worlds around us. Changing practices of work, new architectural forms, advanced agricultural technologies and planetary urbanisations could be understood in context with each other through updating, expanding and adapting the valley section. The impact of our work practices and daily lives on the evolving climate crises, changing storm patterns and biodiversity loss could also be drawn forth. And the uneven distributions of power that have resulted in massive ecological damage and social disadvantage could be illustrated in relation to concentrations of wealth and resources.

Writing in “In The Nature of Cities” (2005, p.xi) the late geographer Neil Smith claims: “When we eventually look back at the intellectual shibboleths of the high capitalist period – say the last three centuries – few ingrained

assumptions will look so wrongheaded or as globally destructive as the separation of society and nature.” By distancing ourselves from other species and entities, we deny the ecosystems of which we are all a part. To imagine nature as external to society (and to cities) has resulted in intensely commodified and destructively exploited landscapes. While recognising that this exploitation of nature did not begin with capitalism, Smith points out that “Capitalist societies externalize nature to an unprecedented extent (even if they internalize it in the commodity form).” (Ibid, p.xii)

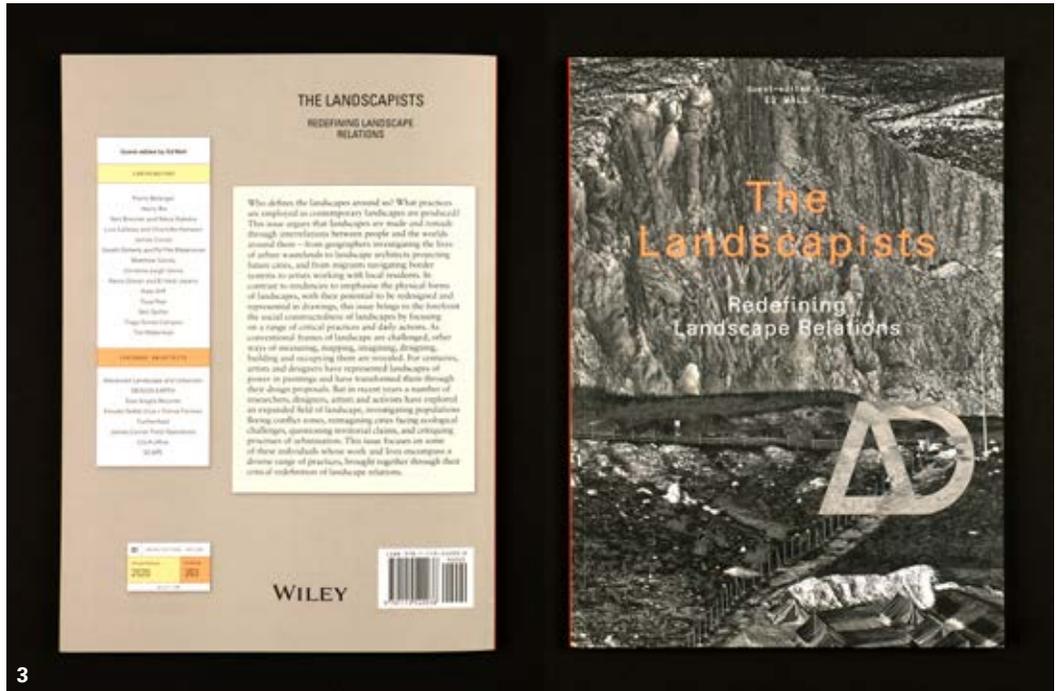
In *The Landscapists: Redefining Landscape Relations*, a recent issue of *Architectural Design* (AD/Wiley 2020), a grouping of architects, landscape architects, artists, geographers and scientists frame a discourse around the socially constructed form of landscape.

Rather than focusing on the projects undertaken, the articles emphasise practices of individuals and collectives: the way people engage in their work and their interactions with the worlds around them. Patrick Geddes' valley section is an important reference in this particular framing of landscape: it is adapted, stretched, dissected and reconfigured to explore contemporary challenges and future practices.

While the 1909 valley section emphasises a human perspective, a critical re-evaluation of Geddes' concept can raise questions of who is and who is not represented. Geddes' drawings privilege paid labour, traditionally undertaken by men, over domestic work that is unremunerated and less visible inside of private homes. It overlooks the work of economics, education and even leisure – all ways of working that have important landscape relations. Geddes' valley section also ignores less visible structures of power – such as political systems, land ownerships and employment contracts less easily represented in such drawings.

This distinctly anthropocentric world view also needs to be challenged. Where are the other animal species in the valley section? Is the work of agricultural animals accounted for? Are the ecological contributions of ancient forests recognised? How are these other lives related to human activities? Oyster beds employed for mitigating storm surges, as in the designs of Kate Orff's studio Scape, or the impact of methane from domesticated cattle, point to an entanglement of human and non-human processes, entities and species. The capacity of oceans to absorb carbon and winds to produce energy, bind us in complex systems of which we are only a part.

Rather than 'bringing nature into the city' or 'making the city more natural' a recognition of the nature of cities within larger planetary ecosystems should be at the core of landscape practices. Mapping the origins of building materials and their impact on the lives and environments of remote regions; calculating the true cost of designed landscapes and accepting the need to unmake



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places as well as opportunities to build them, should be central to landscape projects. Approaches to landscape that resist dualistic approaches, that deny prevailing tendencies to commodify and seek other ways of relating to the world are urgently required.

Landscape provides a means through which "the destructiveness of this deep-seated presumption of society separated from nature" as Smith describes "will become fully and tragically apparent." (2006, p.xi) Landscape, when defined as the relations between people and the worlds around them, allows the interactions between species, entities and conditions to be the way in which our cities and remote landscapes are understood, despite being socially constructed. The planetary dynamics that produce places of intense wonder, whether more or less designed, as well as sites of extraordinary destruction, must be first understood before new practices and projects can be imagined.

Landscapes embraced as a multiplicity of situated practices – that recognise humans as only a part of a wider ecosystem – have the potential to tell new stories that contrast with those still claiming a separation of nature and cities. Future landscapes that afford rights to all species, respect all entities and recognise

interconnectedness of all conditions could address many important issues. For example, the impact on and of humans on the climate crisis; gentrification of urban neighbourhoods; loss of biodiversity, and concentrations of wealth. We must constantly seek to redefine landscape relations. As the geographer Matthew Gandy explains in "Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City": "A broad and inclusive definition of landscape allows the urban experience to be explored in relation to changing conceptions of nature without separating the technical, political, and aesthetic dimensions of urban space." (2003, p.6)

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3. The Landscapists: Redefining Landscape Relations (Architectural Design/ Wiley 2020), cover image.
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