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The Landscape of Things

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Figure 1. Fluid landscapes: the Öxará River intercepting the Thingvellir Fissure Swarm. Credit: Michal Hubert (www.mikedrago.cz) reproduced with permission.

Introduction: losing things

Spanning the diverging tectonic plates of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, Iceland is stretching apart at a rate of approximately 2.5 centimetres per year. This process of crustal stretching is vividly expressed in the swarms of geological fissures that bisect the island.[1]   Amidst this dynamic landscape, Iceland's parliamentary assembly was held annually for almost a thousand years. Meaning *assembly field* or *meeting valley*, Thingvellir (*Tingvellir*, *Þingvellir*) drew Icelanders from across the island for a week to discuss matters of importance, legislate laws, dispense justice, and undertake cultural events and commerce.[2] The distinctive geological features of the setting supported these activities with an assortment of rocky enclosures for assembling and open meadows for camping (figure 1).[3]

Although Thingvellir is the most celebrated example on account of its dramatic setting, unusually large jurisdiction and close connection with present day Icelandic identity, landscape parliaments were actually commonplace throughout Viking territory.[4] As an outdoor venue for discussing important community matters, the Nordic *Ting* (*Þing,* thing) derives from the ancient Germanic proto-parliamentary *Ding*.[5] Pertaining to a general assembly or court of law in Old High German, *Dings* were typically sited in topographically prominent locations that often included megaliths, large trees, or springs.[6] As Heidegger notes, this semantic legacy is also retained in the English word *thing*, in the sense that a person 'knows [their] things'; that is*,* '[they] understand the matters' at hand.[7]

However, even as Thingvellir's parliament continued to flourish within the uniquely fluid landscape of Iceland, 'things' were undergoing profound realignments in Renaissance Europe. Whereas an absence of buildings once characterised their landscape mandate, *Ting* parliaments began to move undercover and eventually within fully enclosed buildings. Supported by the instrument of modern cartography, the shift from feudal commons to private landholdings drove the architecturalization of Things.[8]

As the landscape geographer Kenneth Olwig reveals, a revolutionary inversion occurred for both *landscape* and *things*. Where *things* once pertained to landscape-based community assemblies for discussing '*things*-that-*matter*', the assimilation of these forums into the buildings and cartographies of the centralized State dispossessed Things of their agency.[9] Without landscape agency, things in the modern sense became reified as physical objects, or '*things-as-matter*'.[10] Notwithstanding Heidegger's earlier semantic lesson, this is primarily how we conceive of *things* today; as all manner of inanimate objects that surround us but are so unexceptional that we don't bother to refer to them by name.[11] The rapidly pervading Internet of Things (hyper-connected networks of everyday devices) exemplifies the relegation of *things* in the digital age.

As the other component in Olwig's revolutionary inversion, *landscape* also underwent reification. Landscape constituted as a community established through the discussion of *things-that-matter* morphed into landscape as a spatial aggregation of material *things-as-matter*.[12] No longer defined from its communal core as a 'place', the reified landscape became defined more in terms of spatial boundaries for the containment of material things.[13] Fences, walls and framing of landscape through pictorial representation shaped this containment. As the focus of landscape shifted from substance to scenery, landscape became less a polity than a witness; a witness to the Thing, not the *thing* itself.

This legacy continues to complicate the use of *landscape* in wider landscape discourse. Particularly in English, landscape remains synonymous with scenery, representation and vision-power dynamics associated with the aesthetic filter of the Picturesque.[14] Efforts to clarify and retrieve landscape agency have identified the less scenic connotations of landscape in other European languages. The German *Landschaft,* Dutch *Landschap* and French *Paysage* all retain greater emphasis on territory and the working landscape than their English equivalent.[15]

These alternate formations of landscape have been applied to the recovery of agency in *landscape architecture*.[16] As is epitomized in Boston's Emerald Necklace, the project of recovering landscape architectural agency typically elevates historical and contemporary designed landscapes that are infrastructural in scale and scope.[17] Nevertheless, landscape architecture's historical origins—and indeed complicity—in the reification of landscape as physical matter continues to thwart the recovery of agency in the discipline.

Research aims and methods

Set within the context of the reification of things and the recovery of landscape, the article sketches a framework for repositioning *landscape-things* in the present day. Given the improbability of de-architecturalizing formal institutions of governance and returning to ancient landscape Things, the article draws on progressive concepts

from cross-disciplinary fields that loosely gather under the umbrella of *thing theory*. These concepts share the advancement of non-human agents within the context of the social and ecological challenges of the Anthropocene.

Despite direct relevance to contemporary landscape architectural theory and praxis, engagement with thing theory and non-human agency is very limited in the field.[18] The significance of this article resides in probing deeper into the topic and parsing ideas that hold potential for elaboration within a landscape architectural framework. To facilitate this aim, the article follows Simon Swaffield and Elen M. Deming's interpretive framework for discourse analysis.[19] This primarily deductive methodology places phenomena in context through iterative mediations between theoretical understandings and empirical observations.

Part 1. Landscape and the theory of things

Part 1 initiates an overview of landscape agency and the dissolution of the opposition between human agency and natural determinism. This discussion is extended into actor-networks as developed by Bruno Latour and hyperobjects as advanced by Timothy Morton. These two authors were chosen for their distinctive angles on the subject and explicit engagement with design and landscape subject matter. Towards the goal of re-envisioning the landscape-thing in the present day, concepts surveyed here are filtered through the lens of design praxis in part 2 of the article.

1. The landscape of agency

In noting the depletion of natural resources in ancient cities, Anne Whiston Spirn labelled humans 'geological agents' who have assumed a dominant and unbalanced role over nature.[20] This notion sits within the long established understanding of a human period within the Quaternary geological record that has recently been popularized as the Anthropocene.[21] In reaction to resource exploitation, the human geological agent also implies a moral responsibility for caring or

stewarding the land that permeates the canon of landscape architecture.[22]

In an influential rewiring of human agency, James Corner leveraged *landscape* agency in the recovery of landscape as a critical cultural practice. For Corner, landscape agency refers to the capacity for landscape to 'critically engage the metaphysical and political programs that operate in a given society'. In this way, landscape effectively undergoes a re-inversion from a compliant 'reflection of culture' to a dynamic 'instrument in the shaping of culture'.[23] Defining landscape agency in the reductively functional terms of 'how it works and what it does', process and performance are favoured over landscape traditions of aesthetics and form.[24] The creative potential of ecology and mapping are positioned as key design mechanisms for breaking free from the methodological determinism that is routinely attributed to McHargian approaches to environmental planning (figure 2).[25]

Whilst Corner's widely adopted agency of ecology and mapping has barely evolved in nearly two decades of landscape architectural theory, landscape agency remains a contested concept in broader landscape discourse in geography, archaeology, and anthropology. At one extreme, the natural landscape is positioned as a deterministic force shaping the development of human culture and society over time. Karl A. Wittfogel's hydraulic hypothesis, which prioritizes the role of complex irrigation systems in the rise of advanced civilizations in arid landscapes, typifies this approach.[26] At the other extreme, post-processual approaches re-emphasize the role of human agency in shaping the landscape. As is typified in Alfred Gell's theory on the agency of art, the actions of *things* gain significance only through their relation to the social agency of human interaction.[27]

As the pendulum swings back and forth between alternately emphasising society and nature, landscape agency remains captive to human exemptionalism as the engine of history.[28] Even Corner's framework for recovering landscape agency is not immune; although strategies such as indeterminacy, emergence, scaffoldings and
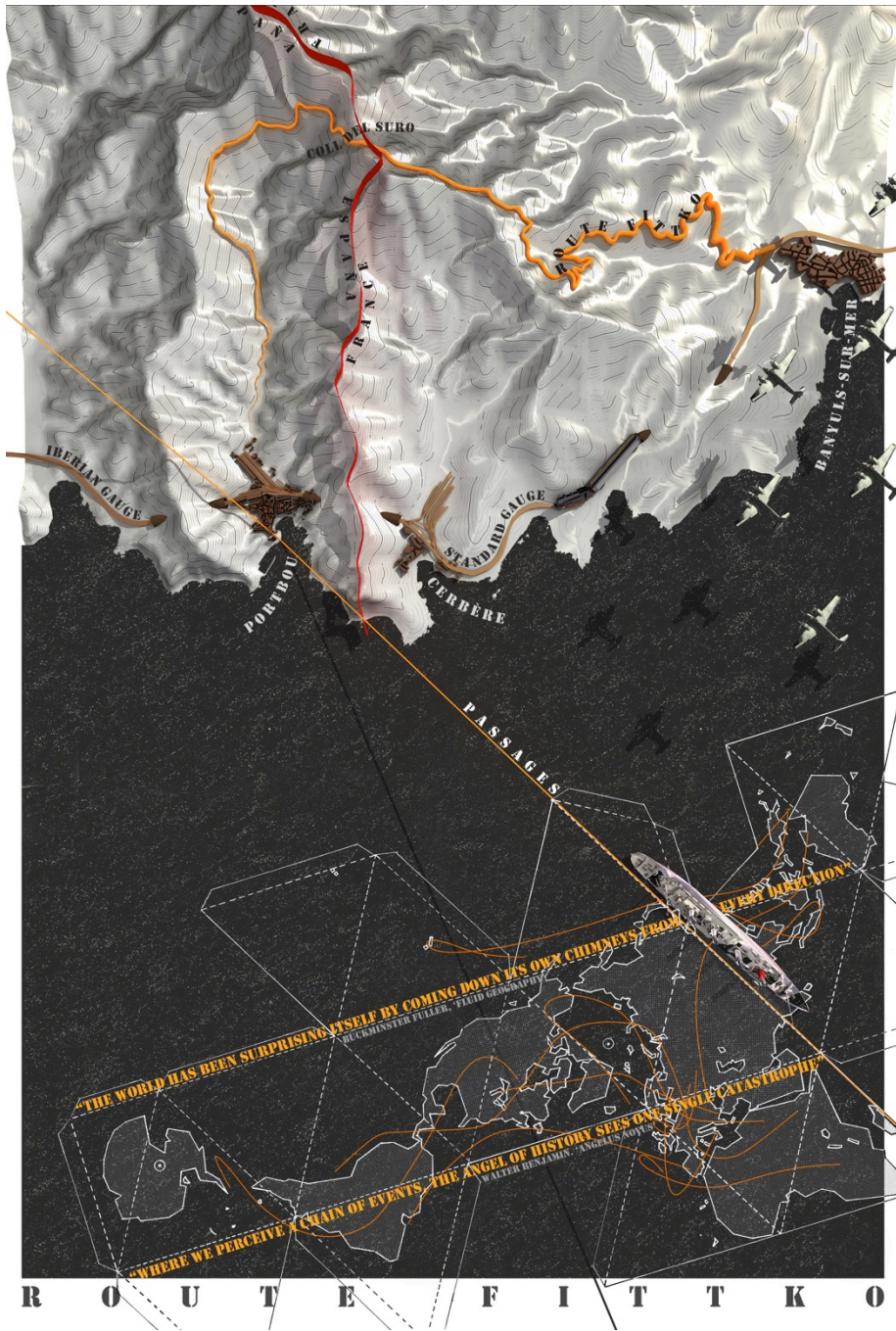
Figure 2. Creative mapping: mapping artwork situating Walter Benjamin's escape path over the Pyrenees within the context of the global geopolitics of WWII. Credit: image by Karl Kullmann.

creative mapping claim to diminish the master-planner's control, ultimately it falls to an external human designer to pull the levers of selectivity that set these processes in motion.[29] And although the lever pulling designer may be understood more as an alchemist who unleashes experiments in the landscape than as a steward's guiding hand, they nevertheless shape these experiments over time.

Reflecting the hybridization of nature and culture in the Anthropocene,[30] *object/thing* focussed approaches expand the capacity for agency beyond humans and the landscapes that they intentionally or unintentionally create. As is elaborated in the following two sections, these approaches enrich landscape agency beyond the static interpretations that predominate in landscape architecture.

2. The landscape of actor-networks

Using the framework of actor-network theory as a starting point, Latour extends agency from humans to non-humans.[31] Set within the existential environmental challenges of the present epoch, Latour vastly expands the pool of potential actants to include objects as active participants in events. By emphasizing their interconnections, humans and non-humans are thus positioned symmetrically, with actions arising from their shared endeavours. No longer constituted as external entities awaiting human discovery, objects are as empowered to instigate actions as their human counterparts (figure 3).[32]

For Latour, actor-networks share several attributes. First, they differ from conventional hard networks in the sense that unlike electricity or road systems, actor-networks may have no clearly established routes or strategically situated nodes. Second, actor-networks differ from social networks, in the sense that associations between human and non-human entities become recognizable as

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Figure 3. Actor-networks: artwork evoking symmetrical agency between human and non-human actors. Credit: image by Karl Kullmann.

social only in the fleeting moments that they are shuffled together. Third, in contrast to universal top-down laws, actor-network relations emerge from unconnected local events and do not attempt to fill in all of the empty space in between. And fourth, actor-networks dissolve scalar discrepancies, in the sense that one network is never larger than another, only longer or more intensely connected.[33]

Actor-network concepts inform Latour's proposal for an object-oriented politics that extends beyond humans and encompasses the many issues to which they are connected. Typically overlooked as *'matters-of-fact'* that are incidental to political forums, objects are recast as *'matters-of-concern'* that are as important as the actual topics that are up for discussion.[34] In Latour's words, these objects are far more 'interesting, variegated, uncertain, complicated, far reaching, heterogeneous, risky, historical, local, material and networky' than politics and philosophy allows for.[35] Following Heidegger, objects are thus assembled as *gatherings*—or *things*—that draw issues together, resulting in a *parliament of things*.

In support of a parliament of things, Latour observes that ancient Things comprised not only people but also were thick with other *thing*s, ranging from garments to structures, cities, and complex technologies to facilitate gathering. Nevertheless, Latour concedes that we cannot simply return to old Things because the 'shape' of contemporary assemblies has changed.[36] Although the historical transposition of political gatherings from landscape into buildings initiated this shape-shift, designing larger and more elaborate architectural domes under which to assemble is not the answer. Not only are our political horizons too limited to address the global scope of the Anthropocene, but so is the very notion of political assembly through representation.

For Latour the issue lies with the ambiguity of the multiple meanings of *representation*. In one sense, representation refers to the political and legal representation that gathers legitimated people around matters of concern. In another sense, representation refers to the technology of representation that aims for accurate portrayal of matters. And in a third sense, representation refers to the artistic representation that creatively interprets matters. Latour zeroes in on this third form, noting that the history of painting and other artistic modes focuses on an aesthetic of *matters-of-fact (objects)* at the expense of an aesthetic of *matters-of-concern (things)*. To redress this imbalance Latour asks, 'how to represent, and through which medium', the shape of 'sites where people meet to discuss their matters of concern?'[37]

With regards to the challenge of representing the ambiguous and controversial nature of *matters-of-concern*, Latour cites the limitations of existing instruments of visualization. Throughout centuries of innovation in visualization techniques and technologies (spanning from perspectival projection to CAD), we have mastered the drawing of *objects*. However, we remain unable to satisfactorily draw things; to '*draw together*, simulate, materialize, approximate, or fully model to scale, what a thing in all of its complexity, is'.[38] Latour connects *drawing together* to its etymological cognate *design*. If *design* is *drawing together*, and if (following Heidegger) *things* are *gatherings*,

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Latour reasons that *things* are created through *collaborative design*. To design collaboratively is always to *re*design in the sense that some issue or problem always exists first. Arriving at a similar position to the design theorist Tony Fry, Latour asserts that there is therefore much to redesign in the age of ecological crisis.[39]

3. The landscape of hyperobjects

Working from the parallel field of object-oriented ontology, Morton massively shifts scales.[40] Whereas Latour expands the pool of actants to encompass assemblages of many objects, Morton expands the size of the objects themselves; *hyperobjects* are 'things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans'.[41] In a crucial distinction from Latour, hyperobjects are not just large assemblages of other objects/things, but are large objects in their own right. As the examples of global warming, nuclear radiation and non-biodegradable Styrofoam illustrate, the scope of hyperobjects is so vast and enduring that they defy human scales of perception. Moreover, whereas Latour constructs a symmetrical relationship between human and nonhuman agents, Morton uses asymmetry to denote the yawning gulf between our comprehension of hyperobjects (such as climate change) and our limited ability to rationally address them.[42]

In addition to asymmetry and massive distribution in space and time, hyperobjects share several other attributes. First, Morton describes hyperobjects as *viscous*, in the sense that they stick to other entities that encounter them and cannot be shaken off or excluded. Second, hyperobjects are *squishy*, in the sense that they shape-shift around us and taper off into the distance. Morton attributes a sense of uncanniness to this squishiness, as found in the slow realization that the water or air that we conveniently ignore exists all around us; that we are immersed—and exist—within a hyperobject. Third, hyperobjects are *nonlocal*, in the sense that it is only possible to perceive portions of them from a given place at a given time. And fourth, hyperobjects are non-anthropocentric, in the sense they that are not contingent on human actualization. In Morton's words, hyperobjects are as 'hyper relative to worms, lemons, and ultraviolet rays' as they are to humans.[43]

Like actor-networks, the massive immediacy of hyperobjects eliminates physical distance. With everything proximate to everything else, there is no outside from which humans can safely observe. In a Heideggerian salvo at the satellite's panoptic gaze, Morton observes that we 'find ourselves embedded in earthly reality, not circling above it in geostationary orbit'.[44] Since they are too massive and too close to neatly fit into a frame, hyperobjects disrupt the legacy of pictorially representing this earthly reality. Essentially arriving at a conclusion that has long been established within landscape discourse, Morton critiques the subjective and distanced perspective that the framed view bestows upon landscape.[45] To achieve a truly ecological outlook, an immersive 'zero-person perspective' must replace the anthropocentric distance of our first-person perspectives of landscape.[46]

Morton draws cues for creating these zero-landscapes from well-established concepts in landscape architecture, architecture, and eco-philosophy. Since they cannot be avoided or un-thought, hyperobjects must be accounted for through designing for mega-timescales that extend well beyond our own sense of temporality. Moreover, hyperobjects render obsolete landscape traditions of the picturesque that conceal the artifice of culture under a veil of naturalness. To this end, Morton cites postmodern and deconstructivist architecture's revealing of underlying structures and processes (characteristics that were also assimilated into landscape urbanism) as surprisingly prophetic of design in the new ecological age. However, whereas postmodernism's destabilization of text elevates design as artifice and co-opts nature as artificial, designing with hyperobjects necessitates re-examining the profound immersion of humans within the ecosphere.[47]

Part 2. Landscape and the design of things

The theories of things overviewed above suggest a web of threads that intersect with core concerns, ethics, and motivations in landscape architecture. Part 2 of the article draws these threads into a collection of overlapping motifs that serve as starting points for re-envisioning landscape-things in the present day. Given the experimental nature of this objective, each motif prioritises the elaboration of conceptual approaches over the presentation of real-world case studies.

Motif 1. The shape of things

Whereas Morton confers hyperobjects with viscous and squishy forms, Latour defers to designers to find and represent the 'shape' of thing-assemblies in the Anthropocene.[48] Of all the design disciplines, this challenge resonates particularly strongly with landscape architecture, since scape is etymologically linked to shape.[49] The agency of the shape of the land is demonstrated at Thingvellir, where *divisive* matters of concern were discussed in a literally *dividing* landscape. And although the thing-shapes that the Mid-Atlantic Ridge creates are unique to Iceland, elsewhere in the Viking world Tings also inhabited distinctively scoured shapes of post-glacial landscapes. Both geomorphologies are well suited to incubating Thing assemblies within irregular inflections and folds and making centralized government more difficult. In the same manner that Heidegger's *jug-thing* gathers fluid matter,[50] the inflections of the landscape-thing may be described as gathering fluid matters-of-concern.

In place of permanent sites, re-envisioning contemporary assemblages as inflections implies more agile and ambulatory situations for landscape-things. These situations are potentially more conducive to adapting to the various matters-of-concern that arise and dissipate over time. For example, the humans and things that assemble around the issue of climate change are quite distinct from those that gather around the issue of community safety. Nevertheless, the task of finding, designing, and representing the

Figure 4. The shape of things: artwork evoking the topographic thickness of things. Credit: Laura Moriarty, Subduction into Trench, 2009. Photo: Richard Edelman, reproduced with permission.

shape of inflected landscape-things is complicated by the tendency for things to stick to other things. Just as ancient Thing parliaments were thick with material things, so too are landscapes of all kinds; as Edward Casey notes, 'upon scrutiny … even the most barren wasteland displays a considerable variety of things'.[51] Although this thickened topography of intertwined *things-as-matter* enriches the overall experience of landscape, it also potentially conceals the underlying *things-that-matter*.

A significant sticking point in revealing underlying *things-that-matter* is the medium of topography itself. By definition *topo-graphy* describes not only landform, but also includes all physical features on the earth's *topos* (place). As planetary urbanism accelerates, the *topos* becomes increasingly cluttered with things-as-matter in the form of buildings, facilities, infrastructures, and so forth. To be certain, new terrain

imaging technologies (such as aerial LiDAR) can capture this landscape of things-as-matter as a continuous point-cloud surface. However, although this high-fidelity landscape image is useful, it ultimately fuses *things* together and conceals the underlying land-shape.

Substituting topography with *orography* potentially circumvents the issue of being unable to see the woods for the trees, or the *thing* for the *things* (figure 4). Orography, which refers specifically to the shape of the land (and excludes all the other features of the *topos*), suggests a more incisive representational method for deciphering the underlying structures of the terrain.

Motif 2. The scale of things

Morton defines hyperobjects as beyond a human sense of scale in that they are so massively distributed that we can only perceive portions in any given time and place. Similarly, Latour defines actor-networks as dissolving scalar discrepancies, in the sense that one network is never larger than another. Both notions challenge etymologically received conventions of scale as distinct rungs on a ladder. Cartesian mapping perpetuates the differences in value attributed to various rungs on this ladder, whereby broad scales trade-off detail for abstraction and fine scales sacrifice wider patterns in the landscape for detailed qualities.[52]

With its geographically diverse scope and its symbiotic dependency on maps and plans, landscape architecture is also beholden to the scale-ladder. In theory and practice this manifests as an obstructive schism between regional planning and site design, cities and wilderness, and between gardens and landscape, each of which involves distinct methods and cultures.[53] Similar to the continuing quest for an ecological aesthetic, discourse in landscape architecture has long sought to integrate these various scales of operation.[54] Although mapping is widely articulated as a key mechanism through which to achieve this integration, it remains largely calibrated to the scale and scope of the satellite's eye.

Figure 5. The scale of things: Renaissance chorographic survey of a region illustrating plastic scaling. Credit: Leonhard Zubler, 1607, Creative Commons License 2016, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Library.

Even as the satellite *oversees* the landscape from orbit, it *overlooks* the intricate interlacings of actor-networks and the immersive massiveness of hyperobjects. To extend Latour's initial critique with regards to the limitations of representational technologies, the ability to zoom in and out with impunity in Google Earth, GIS or CAD does not fundamentally disrupt scale, but simply adds incremental rungs to the ladder. Scale is rather more plastic in the sense that it stretches in deference to the perceiver and is distorted by the influence that *things* exert over time and space.[55] Cartesian mapping poorly accommodates this elasticity, with amplification in one part necessarily offset with compression or erasure elsewhere in the matrix.

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Novel mapping or modelling techniques that accommodate plasticity potentially draw from the archaic mapping practice of *chorography*. The remit of chorography is the local topos, where the characterization of landscape elements is prioritized over Cartesian precision.[56] In contrast to the universal and remote structure of Cartesian space, chorographic space follows a variable internal system. Although not quite fulfilling Morton's call for a zero-person representation of landscape, chorography places the mapper within the field of survey, and often within the map itself (figure 5).[57]

Although assembling multiple bespoke chorographic maps into a stable and coherent cartographic system proved historically problematic, contemporary digital technologies and techniques circumvent this deficiency. Digital photogrammetry offers the capacity to stretch and stitch large volumes of spatial imagery, whilst the rapidly developing field of drone mapping recalibrates the scope of aerial imaging.[58] Just as the satellite's geostationary orbit came to symbolize the technological apotheosis of Cartesian-cartography, the drone's immersed and wandering eye potentially symbolizes thing-chorography. Instead of zooming in and out through frictionless Cartesian space, a chorography of things stretches and sticks to the myriad things that coagulate around matters-of-concern.

Motif 3. The type of things

Latour observes that Things are no longer limited to conventional parliaments but extend to many other hybrid assemblages so that supermarkets, financial markets, hospitals, and computer networks become forums for matters-of-concern.[59] Hybrid assemblages are also relevant to landscape architecture, in the sense that by virtue of its complex and ambiguous nature, landscape rarely acts unilaterally; landscape is typically alloyed with other *things*. The often-invoked synthesis of landscape and infrastructure is one such assemblage that hybridizes the performance aspects of the working landscape with the cultural landscape of urbanism. No longer conceived as a self-contained island in an urban sea, the position and performance of a local park is revealed through the infrastructural hybrid as one aspect of a vaster ecological hyperobject.
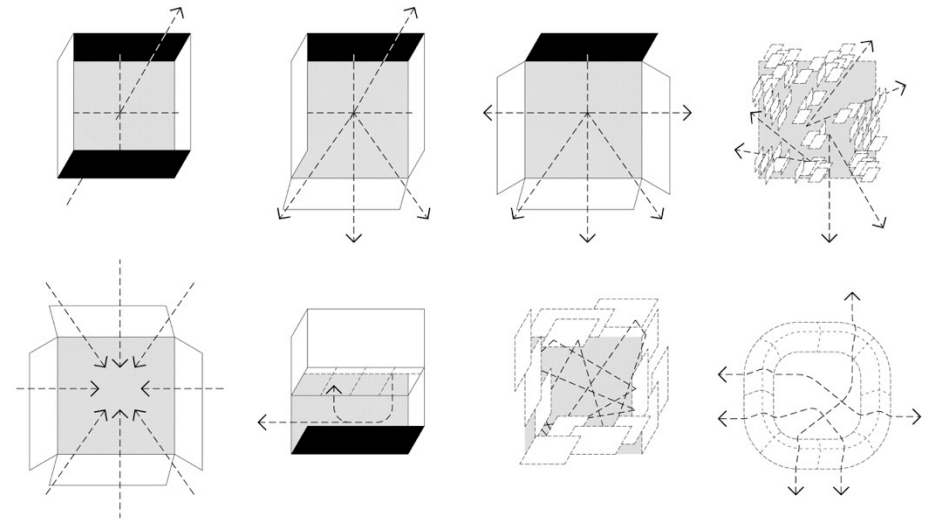

Figure 6. The type of things: historical typology of the garden frame presented as an example of a landscape element that is primed for hybridization with other landscape types. Credit: image by Karl Kullmann.

Notwithstanding the premise and promise of hybridization, designed landscapes generally revert to type. From gardens to pocket parks, to neighbourhood parks, piazzas, streetscapes, urban parks, large parks, linear parks, regional parks, national parks, sports fields, wetlands, rehabilitation sites and conservation reserves, each type carries a distinctive set of metrics. Scale, location, functionality, materiality and accessibility all articulate a preconditioned bandwidth of appropriate behaviour in various landscapes. And although conforming to type maximises the legibility, performance, maintenance and accountability of the landscape, it constrains the capacity of landscape to stretch into shapes that gather matters-of-concern together.

With the dissolution of well-defined distinctions between culture/nature, garden/wilderness, and city/country in the Anthropocene, elements from a variety of landscape types are primed for re-composition into novel hybrid assemblages. For example, the garden frame is relevant to reimagining the pattern of land enclosure

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and architectural enclosure that led to the reification of thing-assemblies in the first place. Drawing on centuries of development, the garden frame uses vegetation, landform and constructed elements to articulate a semi-permeable threshold that finely balances openness and containment (figure 6).[60] An excess of openness leaves the landscape-thing vulnerable to dissipation into the background noise of myriad other things, while an excess of containment risks suffocating the landscape-thing through limitations placed on access and participation.[61]

Borrowed from the garden, the semi-permeable threshold is potentially hybridized with the highly contested public realm of the street. Overlaid onto the conventional roles as an access and utilities corridor, the street is still occasionally a setting for community participation, in the sense that people who are gathered around a matter-of-concern 'take to the streets'. The tactically inserted semi-permeable threshold potentially helps focus protest movements, which in the US experience often ends up drifting through the street grid, before dissipating onto a nearby freeway.

As is evidenced in the unpredictability of biological hybridization, a hybrid-type may also fail to germinate into a landscape-thing. Nevertheless, even if not a *thing* per se, a hybrid-type is likely to morph into *something*, in the sense that both landscape and human actors are remarkably adept at adapting and adopting sites and subcultures in unforeseen ways.[62]

Motif 4. The participation of things

If design is drawing together, and things are gatherings, Latour reasons that things are created through collaborative design. And although the value of collaborative design has long been established within landscape architecture, the stakeholders are typically human. In Latour's version of collaboration, all agents—human and nonhuman—shape the process, even if they are not always apparent, included or willing.[63] Similar to Morton's democracy of coexistence, Latour frames collaborative design as a collective experiment held in a public

laboratory, with no set protocol, control group, or designated overseer.[64]

Collaborative design and collective experiments appear quite distinct from Corner's lever-pulling designer who instigates ecological experiments in the landscape. Nonetheless, the sociologist Matthius Gross identifies some commonalities.[65] When Latour asks 'how might collectives consisting of humans and non-humans be formed so that their interaction can be understood as experimental,' Gross argues that ecological design has been doing exactly this for decades. For Gross, ecological design comprises real world experimental design founded on continual renegotiation amongst heterogeneous actors, including 'nature'. Moreover, everyone is empowered to participate as active co-designers and co-researchers, with anyone—not just a scientist/designer—able to kick-start a targeted ecological design intervention with an 'observation'.[66]

While there is considerable merit to positioning ecological design as a collective experiment, two issues remain unclear. First, although the divide between professional and amateur humans is dissolved, the means by which non-human actors are actually empowered within this arrangement is uncertain. Letting non-humans speak invokes a form of animism, whereby animals, plants, rocks, wind or indeed Styrofoam express life forces, and hence agency, independent of human enablement. And second, the process by which the designer (landscape architect) participates within this collective experiment is ambiguous. When all actors are granted equal status, it follows that the role and skills of the designer are ultimately no more substantial than the point of view of a lemon or a worm.

Drawing allegorically on the historical association between landscape architecture and gardening potentially illuminates the role of the landscape architect within these collective experiments.[67] In one of the most immersive acts a human can undertake in their environment, a gardener digs, cultivates, gathers, propagates, grafts, shapes, amplifies and rearranges *things* in a garden. The gardener may have an overarching vision in their mind's eye, but they continually amend

and adapt as the garden reveals its agency over time. In essence, the gardener negotiates between ecologies of things; not only the things that are self-evident within the territory of the garden itself (such as plants, worms and paths), but also less immediate things that encompass vaster, even planetary, scales (such as climate change, pesticides or genetic modification).

Taking the gardener as inspiration, the immersed designer potentially facilitates collective experiments in three interwoven capacities: as part participant, part experimenter and part steward (figure 7). Just as a gardener participates in both the cultivation and experience of the garden, the landscape architect both *influences* and is *impacted* by the ecological and social processes that shape a particular issue or project. This collective immersion is clear in situations where landscape architects work within their local communities on issues of social or environmental justice, and where they may continue to participate in a landscape long after it's construction phase is completed.[68] However, it is also evident in the globalized nature of the field, wherein landscape architects undertake projects and issues across borders and continents. With *things* increasingly less likely to remain insulated from each other in the Anthropocene, it follows that even when located an ocean away, the participating landscape architect is likely to be influenced in some way by the issues surrounding a project site.

In the role of experimenter, the landscape architect balances participation with the need to step back from the 'public laboratory' and let processes take their course. As potentially the most complicated of the three roles to navigate ethically, setting design levers in motion and letting processes take their course may not necessarily enjoy the immediate endorsement of all (human and non-human) actants, and may sometimes result in a failed process. Just as the gardener's experiments in the garden (or even absence from the garden) may lead either to unexpected cultivars or, alternatively, to the wilding of the garden, failed experimentation in landscape-based processes can be productive in certain situations.

Figure 7. The participation of things: artwork evoking the immersed designer as gardener. Credit: Mark Tansey, Robbe-Grillet Cleansing Every Object in Sight, 1981, Oil on canvas with crayon, 182.9 x 183.4 cm, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Warren Brandt, © 2017 Mark Tansey, DIGITAL IMAGE © 2017, The Museum of Modern Art/Scala, Florence.

Finally, in the role of steward, the landscape architect is neither ignorant of nor indifferent to the potential outcomes that the levers of design may set in motion. Just as the gardener participates and experiments in the garden whilst simultaneously shepherding the garden through seasons and other less cyclical events, landscape architecture draws on a long human tradition of stewarding the land. Re-elevating stewardship acknowledges the deeply held concern for

both human and non-human things that forms a foundation of the landscape architect's raison d'être. In the role of steward, the landscape architect is well positioned with to advocate for an ecological imperative for collective experiments in the Anthropocene.

Conclusion: finding things

Just as the meaning of *thing* morphed from a landscape-based assembly in Old Norse to events or objects to which we are indifferent in modern English, the position of *landscape* devolved from an active agent in cultural practice to a by-product of Modernity. Re-envisioning the contemporary *landscape-thing* is therefore relevant to recovery of agency in landscape architecture. Although at times inconsistent or ambiguous, thing theory provides a constructive context for reshaping landscape-things.

For landscape architecture, the implications of thinking through *things* embolden two movements already well underway in the field. First, despite its historical reification into *things-as-matter*, landscape remains inherently political in the sense that it continues to matter. Rather than conceiving landscape as an unchanging stable ground that outlasts the whims of political movements, landscape is potentially as dynamic as any other *thing*. Second, in a reversal of the process of spatial enclosure that drove the reification of things and landscape, boundaries are to be transgressed. Although landscape architects may not be able to dismantle the many physical divisions and barriers that define the modern landscape, they are adept at crossing boundaries between disciplines, communities, bioregions and even nation states.

Clearly, even as these types of boundaries are overcome, gatherings to discuss matters of concern will not be returning out *en masse* to the windswept landscapes of ancient sites. Nor can contemporary forums be contrived to assume this role, as the clichéd local amphitheatre that sits as an empty monument to community gatherings illustrates. In the same way that politics and gatherings have dispersed, contemporary landscape-things are unlikely to be embodied in fixed specifically designated sites. Instead, landscape-thingness is found in

moments amongst the folds of landform, in unexpected hybrid landscape types and across elastic scales and timeframes.

As it transcends a designated site, the agency of the landscape-thing is not necessarily derived from discussing matters in the historical sense of a political or legal gathering. Rather, it becomes a catalyst for perceiving and participating in landscape. Across all of its scales, types and representations, and inclusive of all of its actors, participation in landscape melts distance between humans and the environmental and social matters-of-concern in the Anthropocene. Nevertheless, even as landscape-things gather humans and non-humans together, ultimately things are about *us*. Our most pressing matter-of-concern—the future of our planet—is not trivial.

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Notes

[1] Agust Gudmundsson, 'Tectonics of the Thingvellir Fissure Swarm, SW Iceland', *Journal of Structural Geology* 9/1 (1987), 61–69.

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31 As initially developed primarily by Latour, Michel Callon and John Law in the 1980s, actor-network theory (ANT) remained more of a disparate and complex set of principles than a coherent agreed theoretical framework. Although later noting the

problematic nature of the term, concepts from ANT continue to permeate Latour's philosophy. Rather than applying an ANT framework directly to landscape architecture, this article draws from Latour's philosophy. See: Bruno Latour, 'On Recalling ANT, in: John Law and John Hassard (eds.), *Actor Network Theory and After* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 15–25.

32 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

33 Bruno Latour, 'On Actor-Network Theory', *Soziale Welt* 47 (1996), 369–381.

34 Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public', in: Latour and Weibel, *Making Things Public,* op. cit. (note 6), 4–31: 9, added emphases.

35 Ibid., 11.

36 Ibid., 13.

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39 Tony Fry, *Remakings: Ecology, Design, Philosophy* (NSW Australia: Envirobook, 1994).

40 As per actor-network theory, object-oriented ontology affirms nonhuman objects as actants that shift in and out of assemblages, with or without humans. The two frameworks diverge in their treatment of objects, with the former emphasising their everydayness and latter emphasising the uncanniness of things. Andrew Cole, 'The Call of Things', *Minnesota Review* 80 (2013), 106–118.

41 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1. Timothy Morton, *Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

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45 A significant subsection of landscape architectural discourse examines the legacy of the picturesque and the quest for an ecological aesthetic. See: Louise A. Mozingo, 'The Aesthetics of Ecological Design: Seeing Science as Culture', *Landscape Journal* 16/1 (1997), 46–59.

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49 *Scape* derives from the Dutch suffix *schap*, which like the German suffix *schaft* means *shape*. Casey, *Representing Place,* op. cit. (note 15).

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52 *Ladder* and *scale* share the same Latin route *scala*. Kenneth R. Olwig, 'The Earth is Not a Globe', *Landscape Research* 36/4 (2011), 401–415.

53 See: C. Timothy Baird and Bonj Szczygiel 'Sociology of Professions', *Landscape Review* 12/1 (2007), 3–25. Simon Swaffield, 'Social Change and the Profession of Landscape Architecture in the Twenty-First Century', *Landscape Journal* 21/1 (2002), 183–189.

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55 See: El Hadi Jazairy, 'Towards a Plastic Conception of Scale', *New Geographies* 4 (2011), 1.

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58 See: Jörg Rekittke, Philip Paar, Ervine Lin and Yazid Ninsalam, 'Digital Reconnaissance', *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 8/1 (2013), 74–81. Karl Kullmann, 'The Drone's Eye: Applications and Implications for Landscape Architecture', *Landscape Research* (2018), In Press.

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[66] Ibid., 69.

[67] The historical connection between landscape architecture and garden design differs in US and European contexts. Whereas the English term *landscape architect* can be traced back to the mid nineteenth century in the US, in several Nordic languages and in German the term is a relatively recent substitution for *garden architect*.

[68] In the US in particular, landscape architects are often heavily involved with their local communities.