

the Garden in the Landscape Metropolis

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In this issue of SPOOL Landscape Metropolis #6, designerly and discursive work on gardens in the metropolitan landscape is explored. The focus is on the garden as a theatre of landscape in the metropolis, where the city-dweller can stand face to face with natural processes, the *longue durée* of evolution and natural growth, silence, and open skies, as the counterpart to the excess of the urban programme. This notion of the garden as a theatre, a stage on which landscape and growth are performed, is explored by taking a closer look, spotting those places that merit attention in the vast metropolitan territory. Consequently, this is how we invite our readers to read this issue of SPOOL – by giving attention to the particular, while establishing links between one particularity and another, and to the overarching whole.

We have sought to collect contributions that focus on specific projects, but they are never only about that particular object. The aim was to reveal how the singular garden relates to the direct context of the wider metropolitan landscape and to the larger disciplinary context of theoretical concepts and design approaches. These affinities offer the possibility to engage in a field of academic research that is positioned in the encounter between research and practice, between critical distance and engaged proximity to the design process and project.

However influential metropolitan conditions are on daily life, they remain abstract and intangible for most of us. In order to make them perceptible, bringing them to the scale of human perception is key: the proximity that allows us to see, hear, or touch what is happening around us. It is here that the garden plays a role. Its small size allows it to be introduced into the metropolitan domain, making space where there doesn't seem to be any, remaining apart from the hustle and bustle of urban life, and allowing for sensory perception.

A garden provides a place and a time to focus our attention. A garden, by nature a modest place, impacts the feelings individuals have for the environment they live in. Nowadays, this environment can no longer be qualified as urban or landscape. Over the course of the last century, city and landscape have merged into an urban-landscape system, characterised by multiple modes of organisation and dynamic socio-spatial processes. In the metropolitan landscape, the landscape interacts with the metropolitan condition, as a permanent underlying substructure, as physical open space system and as metabolic process. If we consider the garden first and foremost as a spatial entity with the capacity to reflect nature and landscape, it is a valuable component in the metropolitan context, addressing environmental and social issues.

How does the garden express one's relationship to the metropolitan landscape? Which gardens—traditionally places for pleasure, study, and contemplation of nature—give expression to the tension between the metropolitan programmes of production and business, as well as learning, travel, and living? Which places have been designed or could be designed to (re)connect the seemingly separate worlds of the metropolitan

condition and landscape territory? Whereas in the call we explicitly referred to place, space, and perception of the garden in its physical surroundings, what the collection of papers demonstrates is that the garden can indeed be a compositional and perceptual expression of the metropolitan landscape, but that dynamics and processes cannot be ignored. One cannot discuss the perception of the garden without considering the complex time dimensions of the natural processes and one cannot discuss the perception of the metropolitan landscape without considering the complex time dimensions of social and economic processes.

When reading about a garden one imagines how the garden would influence one's state of mind, both after entering and after leaving. As the gardens in this issue of Spool are places of seclusion within the metropolitan territory, we cannot but think about the garden, considering the location and the differences of atmosphere, spatiality and cultivation between the inside and the outside. What is the garden's imprint seen in the light of this dichotomy? What is the imprint of these research papers on us, the editors, and therefore the first readers? The reflection on the relationship between the individual garden and the metropolitan landscape has led us to distinguish three types of contributions.

Case study papers

A first series of contributions in this issue are academic papers that take specific cases as an entry point for an argument on the role of the garden in the metropolitan condition. These cases range from existing gardens that have adopted a new role when the context changed under the influence of metropolitan conditions, to reflections on designs that successfully operate within a metropolitan context.

Sitong Luo studies the gardens on the roof of a concrete bunker in Saint-Nazaire, initiated by the landscape architect and gardener Gilles Clément. The paper reveals that an initial design intervention can lay the ground for increasing diversity and resilience over time. This is even more so a motive to look for wildness within the urban environment that we think is under our control.

Adrian Hawker uses the study of a garden as a lens to read the historic changes in society and land use. In the island city of Valletta the interplay of the logic of the landscape and that of metropolitan developments is so intense that they have truly become indistinguishable. This can be viewed on a map, but is hardly perceivable at ground level. One needs a place like a garden to experience what this interplay means.

Julian Raxworthy opens up our eyes to soil, the invisible place in which all plant life is rooted. It is evident that a gardener must know about his soil, but when the metropolitan developments claim more and more space, the ground becomes abstracted to measurements and dimensions. Instead, the consideration of the physical and spatial properties of, and access to, soil should have its place in urbanisation processes.

Bieke Cattoor and Valerie Dewaelheyns have studied private gardens in Brugge and Brussels to collect evidence that justifies an exploration of landscape design strategies that enables the garden complex of all private gardens in the metropolitan landscape, to become a powerful ecological, cultural, and social agency.



FIGURE 1 Map of the discussed gardens in this issue. (Drawing by Michiel Pouderoijen, 2020).

Visual essays

Secondly, in this issue of SPOOL we have introduced the form of the visual essay: a design proposal or an artistic expression, in order to facilitate the encounter between academia and practice. Rather than the critical distance of the academic, a visual essay allows for the engaged nearness of the practitioner: the artist or the landscape architect. Just how hard it is to bridge the gap between practice and academia is illustrated by the fact that the landscape architects and artists we invited (ZUS, Atelier Le Balto, Jeroen Doorenweerd) did not make it into the final selection for the issue. Although they make impressive and relevant work on the intersection between art, gardens, and the metropolitan landscape, it is something else to reflect upon how the singular design concept relates to the context of the wider metropolitan landscape, or to the larger disciplinary context of theoretical concepts and design approaches. The contributions that we did select aim to support critical investigations and to promote scholarly discourse on the arts and design culture in the field of the built environment.



FIGURE 2 Shoreline Park, Göteborg (S), Atelier Le Balto. This temporary park acts as the forerunner for the Jubileumsparken, which will be a vital part of the new district Frihamnen, the former industrial harbour of Göteborg. The temporary park makes the area a part of the city even before the housing district is realised, and acts as a series of test beds for the development of Jubileumsparken: experimental surface, plants, soils, materials, and furniture. (Photographs by Atelier Le Balto, 2017, 2020)



FIGURE 3 Luchtpark Hofbogen, Rotterdam (NL), ZUS. The park on the roof of the former Hofbogen train station is part of a heterogeneous ensemble of gardens in Rotterdam, both on and above ground level. Executed incrementally, whenever the situation provided a possibility, the design took place in a hybrid process between landscape activism and municipal involvement. The ensemble connects public and private, building and landscape space, nature, and culture. (Photograph by Ossip van Duivenbode, 2018)



FIGURE 4 Vortex Willem Wilmink Square, Enschede (NL), Jeroen Dooreweerd. This whimsical natural grotto with its baroque-romantic aesthetic does not belong in a city, nor in the Dutch landscape, and not at all in a newly-built square. It becomes an “other space”, or a “vortex” as Dooreweerd calls it: a whirlpool that sucks its surroundings in. Everything a vortex does is done in a violent or liberating way, as if it is a gateway to the unknown. This type of completely contrasting associations becomes a metaphor for imagination, for allowing yourself to fantasise that you are somewhere else. This is what art can do. (Photograph by Eric Brinkhorst, 2014)

Asbjørn Jessen uses the visual paper as research-by-design, to highlight how non-human life might survive in utterly human environments. Even the most unlikely sites can become a garden, if we wish to acknowledge the right to life of the unwanted plants and animals that have persevered in a brutalist housing estate in Copenhagen.

Our own interest in the relationship between the garden and the metropolitan landscape is expressed in the visual essay on the Land of Chabot in Rotterdam, where we describe how even a non-executed idea for a design can be a starting point to look at the metropolitan landscape in a different way. What was just a leftover piece of land is conceptualised as a garden with a “borrowed boundary”, as a means to discuss with the authorities involved the securing of a plot of land for observing the horizon within the city limits.

Overview essay

The final paper addresses the idea of the garden as a lens to look at the metropolitan landscape. Udo Weilacher gives an overview of the evolution of 20th century garden and park design, leading to the statement that in a time when the clear boundaries between city and landscape have dissolved into a hybrid metropolitan landscape, garden thinking is becoming more relevant than ever. Garden thinking involves relations between space and process, between culture and nature, between doing and perceiving, exactly those relations that we need to understand in order to act meaningfully in the metropolitan landscape.

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