

Representing the More-than-Human

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In the thread *Landscape Metropolis*, SPOOL addresses the interrelation between urban, infrastructural, rural, and living formations as a dynamic, intertwined, and layered landscape structure. Triggered by the profound changes of the Anthropocene, the complexity of the metropolitan landscape asks for reorientation when addressing physical space as well as spatial investigation and theory, in terms of aesthetic appreciation, designerly concepts, guidelines for planning and governance, and design theoretical understandings. Spatial design responses to this growing complexity cover a broad spectrum of areas. They range from a focus on negotiation processes between human actors and demands—such as approaching the need for inclusivity, accessibility, and democracy in urban spaces (e.g., *Landscape Metropolis #5 – Park Politics*)—to a technical or ecological systems-oriented focus on managing landscapes, as in landscape ecology.

Further dimensions open when taking a post-humanist view, understanding spaces as animated worlds consisting of a multitude of actors like waters, soils, animals, microbes, plants, and technology, in which humans live entangled, in dependencies with other cohabitants (see, for example, Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016; Latour & Porter, 2017; Tsing, 2012). How can designers and design disciplines reposition their roles toward this more-than-human, and how does it change the alignment of spatial interventions—the processes of designing in landscapes? In this SPOOL issue, *Representing the More-Than-Human*, we inquire about the role of visual representations in this reorientation: How can drawings—and the act of drawing—mappings—and the act of mapping—exhibitions and the act of exhibiting help to practice this approximation toward what we are part of: the more-than-human?

In doing so, we locate ourselves in a rapidly intensifying scientific and practical field. Spatial-oriented disciplines are increasingly in dialogue with approaches evolving in post-humanism and new materialism. Notions like multispecies 'making-with' (Haraway, 2016, p. 55)—highlighting that nothing exists in isolation and everything evolves in dependencies with other entities—or 'vibrant matter' (Bennett, 2010)—proclaiming material's agency—are translated to spatial inquiry (see, for example, Katsikis and Muñoz Sanz, 2024). The attention to mappings and their agency in this context is growing. Research and experiments are increasing on what is often called counter-mappings—as they provide alternative narratives of spaces by countering the ignorance about processes and entities—in this case, the more-than-human. This issue aims to contribute to this current debate by opening a polyphony that addresses multiple landscape-related dimensions—bringing a new focus on the strands that connect to spatial design. For, as discussed in the previous SPOOL issue on representation, the potential of visual representations that are in dialogue with rethinking space is 'to create awareness, understanding, (...), and, most of all, to move beyond documentation and to inform the process, the focus, and the intention of the spatial design itself' (Bobbink et al., 2022, p. 1).

The constant reorientation to the contested field of 'landscape' is a central concern in spatial theories and practice. In a way, more-than-human entities have been part of this process from the beginning. In spatial plans, entities such as water bodies, meadows, and forests have always been the subject of study and design. In reflecting on how landscapes are represented, however, it becomes clear that landscape-oriented

disciplines are—as are all other disciplines—mainly influenced by anthropocentric mechanisms. The landscape is predominantly understood and designed as the background for human action. More-than-human actors remain objects in drawings, mappings, and plans. Here the transformative potential of more-than-human thinking sets in. For the landscape-related disciplines, this means focusing on the dimension of the more-than-human in the central matter—the landscape—and critically examining where it is to be uncovered and reinvented, as it has been overlooked, simplified, neglected, or suppressed.

With all the potential of visual representations, it is crucial to be critical, as in any transformation process. This offers a spectrum of approaches for reflection, emphasizing that representations of the physical landscape imply making decisions, prioritizing, and directing the focus, constantly arising in power structures and from a way of thinking. Like all other humans, designers will never be ‘innocent’ (Haraway, 1988, p. 597) in the messy realities of our times.

Decisions are also to be made regarding the complexity and accessibility of the representations. There are limitations to what a reader of a drawing can comprehend; should it be understood by experts or a broader audience? The tension between oversimplifying complexities and comprehensibility is also a point of discussion in this issue. The question of decision-making and accessibility is directly related to the political dimension of representing the more-than-human. It is a constant process of negotiating, interpreting, and narrating the interests of humans and more-than-humans and their dependencies. This must be considered to avoid misinterpretation as an apolitical or supposedly neutral approach. The dangers are easy to imagine: ‘The idea of entangled socio-ecological systems ruled by the laws of self-regulation and co-adaptation, with caring, protecting, and respecting as collective ethos, replaces contested interests and political struggle’ (De Block & Vicenzotti, 2018, p. 154).

In this posture—bringing together excitement about the potential of representing the more-than-human and a critical attitude—this issue touches on a spectrum of areas where representations of more-than-human worlds affect spatial design processes, discussing their potentials and limits. The contributions reveal the agency of these representations in a range of areas, from conceptualizing space and landscapes anew to opening new perspectives for design interventions. All contributions can be read as approaches on how to, in this context, address the hyper-complex entanglements of actors, relationships, agencies, and dependencies through representations.

The issue opens with a discussion on Latour’s concept of ‘critical zones’ (Latour & Weibel, 2020) and how this can be approached and developed through different ways of representation. The notion of critical zones, which is groundbreaking in spatializing more-than-human thinking, is discussed in many articles in this issue. It offers a new perspective on the ‘critical’ space that should be taken care of—the ‘porous and permeable layer’, a ‘skin, a varnish, a biofilm’, in which more-than-human actors are in correspondence, constituting it all the time (Arènes et al., 2018, p. 2). Irrgang, co-curator of the critical zone’s exhibition at ZKM Centre for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, investigates the potential of ‘thought exhibitions’ and some of its most central approaches to get a grasp on the notion of critical zones and to imagine new relationships to the world we inhabit. These approaches can be interpreted as rethinking landscape and space through representing entangled, more-than-human processes.

Three more articles resonate with this theory and investigate how the concept of critical zones translates into representations related to spatial conception and design processes. Anna Rhodes’ visual essay reflects on various experiments evolving from a design studio, exploring an area in Scotland through understanding it as a specific critical zone, coined by geological forces of deep time. The essay emphasizes the impact of representations in the design processes, which are also brought together in an exhibition format that enables a multifaceted narration. Also in the context of a design studio, Neuhaus and Orduz reflect on a method of matter and process-oriented mapping—rerepresentation—and investigate how it enables design

strategies and approaches as recursive and relational processes. Their investigation is located in critical zones focusing on wetness, opening up perspectives on what designing in more-than-human worlds can be. Bobbink and Soshnikova highlight, in correspondence with other mappings, the agency of ‘Gaia-graphies’ (Arènes et al., 2018)—not so much as a method of investigation or communication, but in the first place as a tool to inform innovative design processes. Here the act of drawing—‘drawing’ interdependent relationships as a verb—informs the process, content, and the design’s aims. Moreover, the authors give centre stage to material processes, in this case peat subsidence and growth, and thus engage the soil in the analyzing and designing process.

The following articles engage in the debate from different perspectives that overlap with the previous articles in translating concepts of animated matter. Mussault understands water, soil, and rocks as lively processes. She investigates how mapping can help to recognize and interpret their dynamics and behaviours to enhance their agency to plan and strategize not against but with the forces (Clément, 2014). Likewise, Goldinger discusses the agency of material, here sea ice, by focusing on its melting and drifting character. She uses explorative scenario building and interdisciplinary, multimedia material experimentations to understand the ice as a formative design tool for marine spatial planning. The drawings map the ice on its path from the Siberian nurseries to the melt passage of the Fram Strait as an integral piece of landscape infrastructure. Bracke et al. combine different forms of representations into multispecies collages. With this approach they aim to mobilise various data sources to unravel the interdependent relationships on the site they investigate and include them in discussions about its future with multiple more-than-human actors. These collages aim to create awareness and approachability amongst various (human) stakeholders and, therefore, must be simple and easy to read.

The issue shows a wide range of directions and approaches of representation (e.g., hand-drawn mappings, multidimensional diagrammatic representations, filmic approaches). It discusses how different focuses and methods can bring new ideas and aspects to be involved in more-than-human worlds. Various topics are still open to discussion, such as further investigations into design processes and the spatial implementation of these attempts, e.g., through guidelines or governance approaches. All articles introduce aspects that reflect and enrich design processes, ranging from orienting these processes by giving ideas on how to rethink space through representations (Irrgang) to reflecting on how standard methods of spatial representation are insufficient in meeting these dimensions (e.g., Bobbink). Further, the relationship between tools, and their strengths and limits, is shown. Their different abilities in enabling approachability, complex narrations, or the depth of rethinking epistemologies show a large diversity (compare, e.g., Neuhaus et al.).

All contributions highlight that the authors of representations are and will be the medium through which materials and other actors like flora and fauna get a more dimensional voice and, hopefully, a louder one. The issue can be seen as a contribution at the beginning phase of an evolving discourse which integrates various disciplines and preludes a profound reorientation toward the more-than-human landscapes in spatial disciplines.

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