

Tending to scalar ambiguity

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the degree of

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under the supervision of Penelope Allan and Saskia Schut

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Ella Farley, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of *Master of Architecture (Research)* in the *DAB School of Architecture* at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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ABSTRACT

As landscape architecture increasingly engages with digital technology in all aspects of design, there is a risk of overlooking the speed, distance, simplifications and finality of technological solutionism¹. Such tendencies of solutionism do not lend themselves to alternative and varied understandings of more-than-human landscapes, and this is particularly concerning in the initial stages of site analysis, which provide an important foundation for design.

To explore slower, direct and open-ended landscape architectural methods of site analysis and documentation, this research *tends to* the present ecology within a small-scale, suburban landscape. A conceptual framework of *fungi* provides a point of contrast to one's experience of site, embracing complex, entangled and multi-scalar ways of knowing and rhizomorphic connectivity. The method of *gardening* holds space for a close, iterative and collaborative relationship with site, while *storytelling* is embraced as a sensemaking tool that can hold multiple scales, relationships, and ways of knowing together.

Considered for how they prompt a continual return to site, these methods allow time and space for intricate ecologies and different understandings of site to emerge, inviting landscape architects to tend to the ambiguity, nuance and scalar complexity of landscapes.

Key words

fungi
mycelium
gardening
storytelling
scalar ambiguity
connectivity

¹ Solutionism is a term popularised by writer Evgeny Morozov. Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: Technology, Solutionism and the Urge to Fix Problems That Don't Exist*. London, England: Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books, 2013.

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PROLOGUE

This thesis was undertaken in 2020. The year began with extensive and devastating fires in Australia which burned nearly 13 million hectares of land and killed over 1 billion animals². As the east coast of Australia burned, smoke spread around the globe causing severe air quality issues in New Zealand and hazy skies across South America.³ On a global scale, however, 2020 will likely be remembered for the covid-19 pandemic that threw the world into upheaval, with health authorities asking communities to refrain from travelling to keep those near and far from harm.

In this sense, both crises highlighted how the impacts of an event manifest in a multitude of ways across landscapes and scales, from the microscopic to the global⁴ and everything in between. Marked by a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty, these events asked us to reflect on how our daily movements, choices and practices feed into the health of an intricately connected ecology that is currently speeding, due to human activity, towards environmental destruction.

As a result of the home becoming the main place of work and study, my initial research revolved around a backyard in a share house I moved into the week before the initial lockdown period in April 2020. I saw this site as a testing ground for how to draw, how to garden, how to notice and attend with a particular focus on the curious nature of fungi. However, as most gardens do, it became a space of joy, laughter, tears, reprieve, calm, curiosity and wonder. This small-scale urban site has now become the basis for my research project - a place to observe and enquire. I hope that by practicing curious concern for the landscapes, plants, animals and microorganisms a short step from my back door, I will invite care into my movements across the “planetary garden”⁵, including the development of a landscape practice of tending.

2 “The Size of Australia’s Bushfire Crisis Captured in Five Big Numbers.” ABC Science, Updated 5 March March, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2020-03-05/bushfire-crisis-five-big-numbers/12007716>.

3 “Australia Fires: Smoke to Make ‘Full Circuit’ around Globe, Nasa Says.” BBC News, 2020, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-51101049>.

4 The impacts of microscopic virus can be attributed as a key factor in many landscape changes. From clearer skies and waterways and short-term falls in carbon emissions to an increase in illegal firewood collection (India) or deforestation (Brazil) and an increase in plastic pollution. Diseases like covid-19 are also more likely due to rising temperatures and deforestation.

“Could Covid Lockdown Have Helped Save the Planet?” The Guardian, 2020, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/29/could-covid-lockdown-have-helped-save-the-planet>.

5 Clément, Gilles, Sandra Morris, and Gilles A. Tiberghien. *The Planetary Garden : And Other Writings*. Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

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