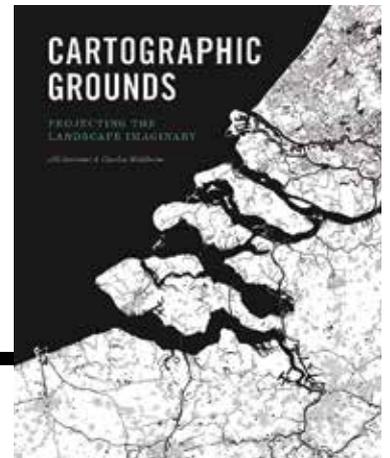


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CARTOGRAPHIC GROUNDS:
PROJECTING THE
LANDSCAPE IMAGINARY

BY JILL DESIMINI AND CHARLES WALDHEIM; NEW YORK:
PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS, 2016; 272 PAGES, \$50.

REVIEWED BY SARAH COWLES



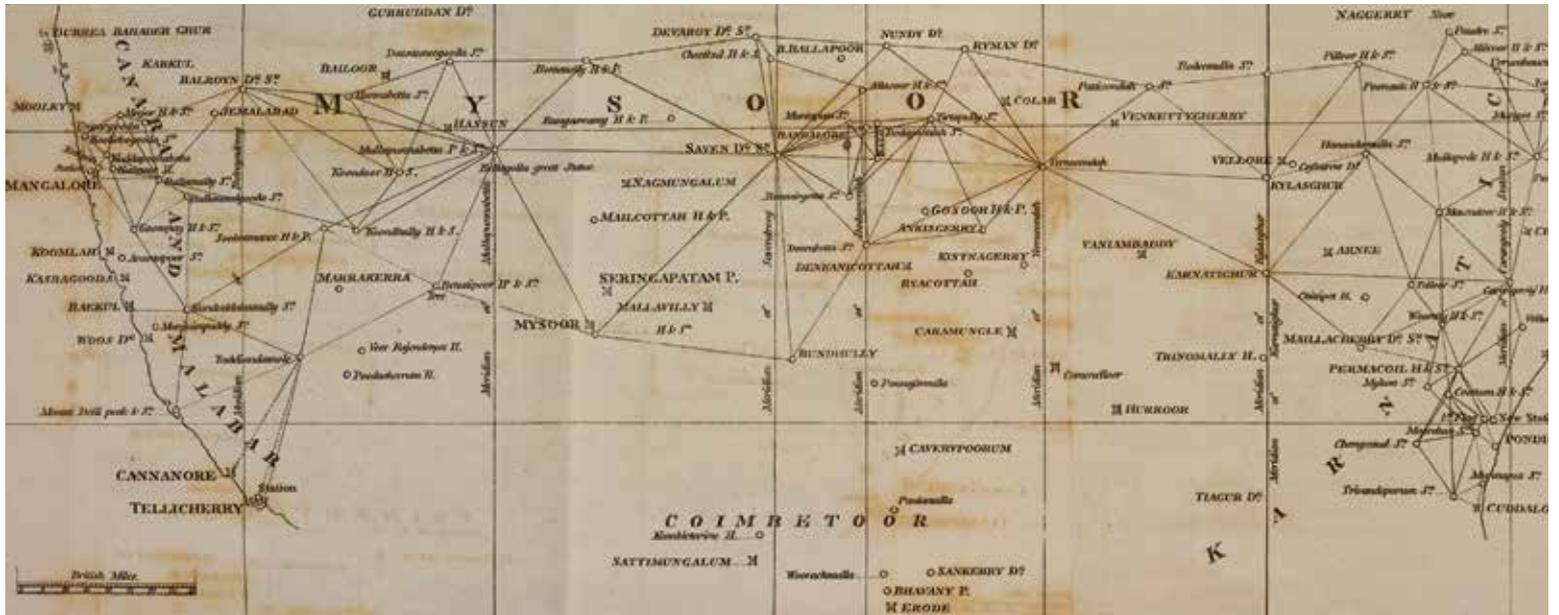
Maps beguile and enchant by combining rigorous cartographic conventions with art. Artful cartography allows us to project ourselves into a proxy landscape. To pore over a map is to project yourself into a deadpan fiction, an image that promises not to abandon you, toss you into an unwanted allegory, or lead you astray with a capricious mark.

A proper map allows us to *go there*, both in our imagination or into the physical landscape itself. Proportion and scale are paramount in maps; we trust that *this* is twice as far as *that* and plan accordingly. Maps are aids to time travel: We imagine “Where will I go?” and recall “Where did I go?” Maps are projective and reflective: They inform our mental models of landscapes and inscribe memories to draw upon in real time. They cement the spatial memories of a journey and how elements relate to one another.

Maps and their attendant geospatial data and algorithms are embedded in much of the technology that surrounds us today. We no longer need to study maps before we set out into traffic in a new city, because we can dial up a target address while in motion. Mobile devices bind maps to us and our trajectories. The right map at the right time is potentially always with us (or until the battery dies or the signal is lost). With our app location services switched on, we are individual, mobile beacons, simultaneously navigators and surveyors, our way determined by algorithms and our paths transcribed back again.

With mobile devices’ limited screen size, we don’t pore over maps; we swipe and pinch and pull and toggle layers on and off. Pushy navigation interfaces transcribe maps to routes that are sensitive to traffic and construction delays. Bitter navigation conflicts can arise between “turn-by-turn people” and “map people.”

Cartographic Grounds: Projecting the Landscape Imaginary, by Jill Desimini and Charles Waldheim, Honorary ASLA, is divided into 10 chapters covering cartographic techniques, including figure-ground, shaded relief, stratigraphic column, and cross section. Short essays introduce the history and conventions of cartographic representation. A selection of exceptional reproductions of historic maps and contemporary works of landscape architecture follow the essays. The images are described with extended captions that detail the content of the maps (depictions “as is”) and plans (depictions of “what might be”). In each topical chapter, the authors make links between maps and design: the way in which “the topographic map offers a precise reading of landform, material, and occupation at a humanly accessible scale. It allows for immersion, through which the landscape can be seen, imagined, and ultimately designed.” The maps and plans are the third—and richest—texts of the book; thus the book operates more as an exhibition catalog. The fact that *Cartographic Grounds* was initiated as an exhibition at Gund Hall of the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 2012 is a curious omission.



ABOVE
This map of the distance (some 700 kilometers) between Mangalore and Fort St. George in India hews to William Lambton's "grand meridian line" across the continent. The web of smaller meridians and interconnected triangles was used as a method of measurement.

Maps are how we plan and make plans; they lie under tracing paper or are stacked in layers in graphic and drafting software. Through convention and scalar displacement, maps are tools for suspending disbelief and stimulating a landscape imagination. To reunite the map with the plan, the authors analyze how contemporary practitioners draw from cartographic techniques to analyze, imagine, and construct new material landscapes. If a plan is a map of a virtual place, then a successful plan will support suspensions of disbelief.

Maps are a means to claim territory. In *Cartographic Grounds*, Waldheim and Desimini claim that the mapping trend—the graphic marking “of unseen and often immaterial fields, forces, and flows” in the landscape—may be coming to a close. They hold their two-dimensional ground in the contested dialogue between *maps* and *mappings*. “Between these two schools of thought—the purely geographic and the freely abstract—is a representational project that merges spatial precision and cultural imagination.” They critique today’s abstract information graphics as superficial and less instrumental in terms of design than their promise: “Yet this data can be alluring, both in content and form. It is all too often a crutch for design, eliminating speculation and agency, while supporting a methodology that looks for projects to emerge out of an illusory objectivity.” Describing maps as a “foundation to intervention,” the authors argue for a close tailoring of the “idea-driven spatial strategy...forced to respond to the map.” The designed plan is “a spatially precise drawing of a grounded, material, and topographically rich landscape” that

hovers between “the purely geographic and the freely abstract.” This perspective, illustrated throughout the book, is helpful in reconciling the variety and volume of geospatial data available today with the studied work of evolving plans within such a surfeit of information.

The authors’ pairings of exemplary maps with plans and sections of works by Lateral Office, Dilip da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, and Mosbach Paysagistes are valuable in this alternative, “cartographic read” of contemporary works of landscape architecture.

In the chapter titled “Conventional Sign,” the authors argue that reading a map key in isolation is a worthy exercise, as the “listing of symbols and conventions is analogous to an article abstract” and that the signs are “the very instruments used to construct that content.” The iconic symbols in Lateral Office’s technologically sublime Salton Sea shoreline proposal are exemplary of the land-machine dominated magical thinking of late landscape urbanism, where a compelling aesthetic system of symbols and pattern forswears any semblance of engineering or economic realities.

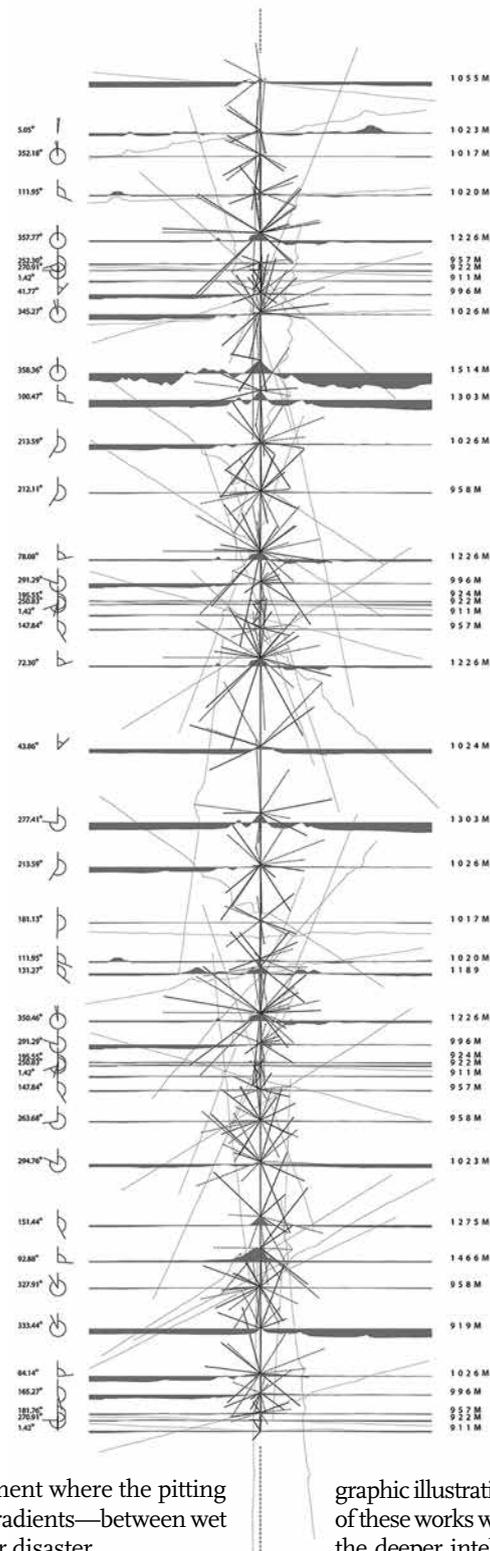
A potent example of how cartographic techniques can operate critically to reveal alternate readings is nearly lost in the chapter titled “Sounding/Spot Elevation.” Here William Lambton’s *General Plan of Triangles: An Account of the Trigonometrical Operations in Crossing the Peninsula of India* is juxtaposed with Mathur and da Cunha’s reinterpretation of Lambton’s

triangulation journey. In this work, Mathur and da Cunha transpose Lambton's abstract sight lines to land again in their context. Mathur and da Cunha's recent graphic work focused on the Mumbai estuary demonstrates how a critical approach to remapping landscapes can repatriate lands from a colonial reading. Unfortunately, the authors avoid addressing this critical aspect and implications of such methods of reinterpretive cartography.

RIGHT
This drawing by Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha reinterprets William Lambton's journey across India from a land-based perspective. Their critical approach to remapping landscapes is a means to reclaim colonial readings of territory.

A side-by-side comparison between a *General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans* by the International Hydrographic Organization and Agence Patrick Arotcharen and Estudi Martí Franch's *Les Echasses Golf and Surf Nature Resort* is an illustration of leveraging collective literacy of cartographic conventions. Rather than a line dividing wet from dry, they use gradients of color to fill contour shapes, giving the impression of an ever-changing landscape of coves and peninsulas. Such conventions will no doubt be applicable in an era of rising sea levels and increasingly severe storm events. We are at a moment where the pitting of binaries—rather than fluctuating gradients—between wet and dry conditions is truly a recipe for disaster.

The chapter "Cross Section" features a series of historic drawings of retaining walls and embankments by John Claudius Loudon (from *Observations on the Formation and Management of Useful and Ornamental Plantations: On the Theory and Prac-*



graphic illustration to constructed landscapes. The pairing of these works with their cartographic counterparts reveals the deeper intelligence of Mosbach's sculptural-tectonic approach that results in uncanny and inscrutable landscapes.

Mosbach's "environment gallery" at Bordeaux features a series of extruded 100-square-meter gardens revealing the changes in geological epochs and the soils that determine species and

tice of Landscape Gardening; and on Gaining and Embanking Land from Rivers or the Sea) paired with sections of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates' Brooklyn Bridge Park. Loudon's drawings delineate the tectonics of earthwork and highlight how little these technologies have changed in 200 years. The Van Valkenburgh series reveals the artifices supporting the picturesque landscape plan draped on the surface. Van Valkenburgh's section depicts the fine corsetry of today's urban landscapes, how they are tailored, tucked, and plumped within and around horizontal and vertical infrastructural impositions such as freeways, bulkheads, and energy conduits. In the case of Loudon, the section *does landscape* while the Van Valkenburgh section *does landscape and does landscape representation*.

The volume features two iconic works by Mosbach Paysagistes—the Taichung Jade Ecopark Competition and the Bordeaux Botanical Garden—that exemplify artful translations from analysis and interpretation of carto-



RIGHT
Mosbach Paysagistes's plan for the Taichung Jade Ecopark appears as a lithospheric painting, revealing stratigraphic gradients between wet and dry and high to low.

vegetation patterns. The authors comment on how “superimposed sections allow for the topographic shifts to register, and the shifts themselves reveal material stratification.” This reading of the Bordeaux project aids in unpacking and resounding Mosbach’s works at Taichung and the Louvre-Lens museum. At Louvre-Lens, Mosbach daylights the disturbed section, in a mannerist interpretation of the extraction processes that shaped the landscape before recuperation as a cultural center.

In “Stratigraphic Column,” Mosbach’s Taichung Jade Ecopark Competition proposal is paired with William Smith’s *A Geological Map of England and Wales and Part of Scotland*. In this

dialogue, the Taichung plan is revealed not as a soils map but as a lithospheric painting that prefigures the ongoing evolution of this landscape. Smith’s map depicts geological strata, where one can trace the veins of coal and chalk. It is a subsurface map of energy and mineral resources and a revelation of the specific material potential of the landmass, showing how what was formed in the past will sustain a nation’s future populations. These paired images poetically acknowledge and specify the components of the terrestrial body, and the embedded scales of time below the surface. Sympathetic works of studied daylighting such as Bordeaux, Louvre-Lens, and the Vogt Landscape Architects stratigraphic walls at Novartis are welcome departures from the superficial yet graphically heavy-handed patterns of contemporary urban landscapes.

In *Cartographic Grounds*, the authors lure us close to a critique of contemporary landscape architectural practice and representation. Yet rather than go there in any distinct way, Desimini and Waldheim instead interweave the volume with a series of confounding, abstract maplike compositions. Each chapter features Desimini’s visual distillations (or legends) of cartographic conventions and techniques that are drawn from primary sources. These are coupled with exploratory “metamaps” by groups such as Future Cities Lab, and the animation stills from Robert Gerard Pietrusko, which only reinforce the exhaustion with academic and abstract mapping practices. Although these visual interludes are a respite from the intensity of the detailed maps and plans, their inclusion within this context makes their ambiguity taunting. Their abstract nature may serve as tools for meditative points of entry, or are instructive as “works in progress,” but the authors do not make their contextual role in this volume explicit.

Desimini and Waldheim describe how cartography is where landscape, architecture, and engineering share a representational field. The illustrative plan may be the domain of landscape architects and planners, but the intersection is where the technical intelligence of landscape architecture is manifest.



ABOVE
Two views of the Parc des Buttes Chaumont in Paris by Jean-Charles Adolphe Alphand: A contour drawing illustrates the engineered underpinnings of the landscape, and a shaded relief drawing of the site heightens the topography.

However, the intelligence of the section is often hidden under a second layer that is a representation of nature. Though on the surface the “Stratigraphic Column” and Cross Section” chapters are taxonomically fitting, their inclusion is provocative in their potential to bring richness to imaginary landscape tectonics, while the abstract mappings by Pietrusko and Desimini’s symbol distillations are mere surface patterning.

Though the call for cartographic rigor over abstract mappings is timely, perhaps this is the right book at the wrong time. The techne of landscape architectural practice is advancing rapidly in our attempts to insinuate multifunctional and permeable landscapes into our cities. The section is where the precision and advancement of the art is revealed, from fitting fertility within gaps in infrastructure to the deadpan imposition of picturesque compositions on former wharfs such as Brooklyn Bridge Park by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, or the structural contortions of Weiss/Manfredi’s Olympic Sculpture Park. This volume exposes how a range of contemporary European practices, such as Vogt Landscape Architects, Mosbach Paysagistes, and Estudi Martí Franch, are revisiting and reinterpreting the intelligence in cartographic techniques to divine sections adapted to both the necessity and art of the practice. A precedent worth revisiting in this light is Jean-Charles Adolphe Alphand’s Parc des Buttes Chaumont, where the curvilinear plan composition is reconciled with the dramatic excavations and contours of the quarry.

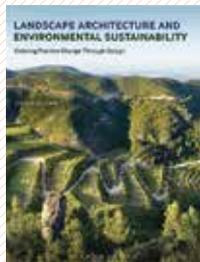
The volume is a rich resource for landscape planners and architects, urban designers, multimedia designers, students, and educators. The authors make a case for how rigorous interpretations

of cartographic practices influence contemporary landscape architectural practice. They also provide instruction for designers to marshal the data from a range of surficial, topographic, and infrastructural maps—to divine grounded and intelligent plans for landscape. A more exhaustive tracing of such map-to-landscape processes can be found in recent monographs on the work of Vogt Landscape Architects, including *Distance and Engagement* (2010, Lars Müller Publishers), that document the studio’s design development process from map to site visit and tracings, to studio iteration through modeling and mock-ups.

In his recent essay, “The Thick and the Thin of It,” James Corner, ASLA, speaks of the thinness of the plan and how its implications are often symbolic. “The fact that the plan is inevitably and universally ‘thin’ runs the sure risk of superficiality and overwriting, but it is also the most potent device we have for both the analysis and organization of more significant place-form,” he writes. While the landscapes themselves “are materially thick, in terms of geology, soils, hydrology, layers of foundations, and construction. They are temporally thick, in terms of complex interactive ecological processes.” We have come to another reckoning at the intersection of the plan and the section: between the thin and the thick. As ice melts to reveal new Arctic shipping lanes and energy fields, and sea levels rise, erasing former coastal boundaries, the plan is increasingly at the mercy of these sectional dynamics, with the landscape imaginary responsible for a productive reconciliation between the two. ●

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BOOKS
OF INTEREST

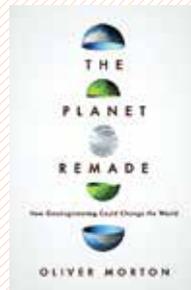


LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: CREATING POSITIVE CHANGE THROUGH DESIGN

BY JOSHUA ZEUNERT; NEW YORK: BLOOMSBURY, 2017; 320 PAGES, \$51.95.

In this engaging textbook, Joshua Zeunert, International ASLA, a lecturer in planning and landscape architecture at Australia's Deakin University, provides a comprehensive overview of sustainability's place in landscape architecture. So much is covered, in fact, that the deep level of detail achieved is a surprise. Topics include environmental infrastructure, food systems, social sustainability, resilience, and more. The book is lavishly illustrated with color photography of sites around the world, and each chapter closes with an interview featuring practitioners such as Elizabeth Meyer, FASLA; Richard Weller, ASLA; Douglas Reed, FASLA; Gary Hilderbrand, FASLA; and Kongjian Yu, FASLA. ●

DRASTIC INTERVENTIONS SEEM EVER MORE FEASIBLE—AND SUDDENLY MORE REASONABLE.



THE PLANET REMADE: HOW GEOENGINEERING COULD CHANGE THE WORLD

BY OLIVER MORTON; PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015; 440 PAGES, \$16.95.

As the effects of climate change continue to threaten the planet, drastic interventions seem ever more feasible—and suddenly more reasonable. Morton does a good job explaining various methods of geoengineering (cloud seeding, biomass capture—even an artistic wrapping of Kilimanjaro's diminished snow to shield it from the melting sun), but the most valuable and entertaining part of the book is the backstory of how things got bad enough for us to need human-made solutions in the first place. ●



NEW NORDIC GARDENS: SCANDINAVIAN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

BY ANNIKA ZETTERMAN; LONDON: THAMES & HUDSON, 2017; 288 PAGES, \$45.

“Scandinavian design is renowned worldwide: comprising work carried out with a high level of attention to functionality and quality, and based on philosophies of modesty and equality,” says Annika Zetterman. But Nordic landscape designers also like to break out of the “simplicity” box, and the book is filled with photographs demonstrating their departures: a slabbed concrete carport with a green roof of wild grass, a sculptural skatepark, and an aboveground pool fitted with a window so large, swimmers inside would seem to splash inside a big-screen TV. ●