

Plants: Another Index for Gardens and Designed Landscapes

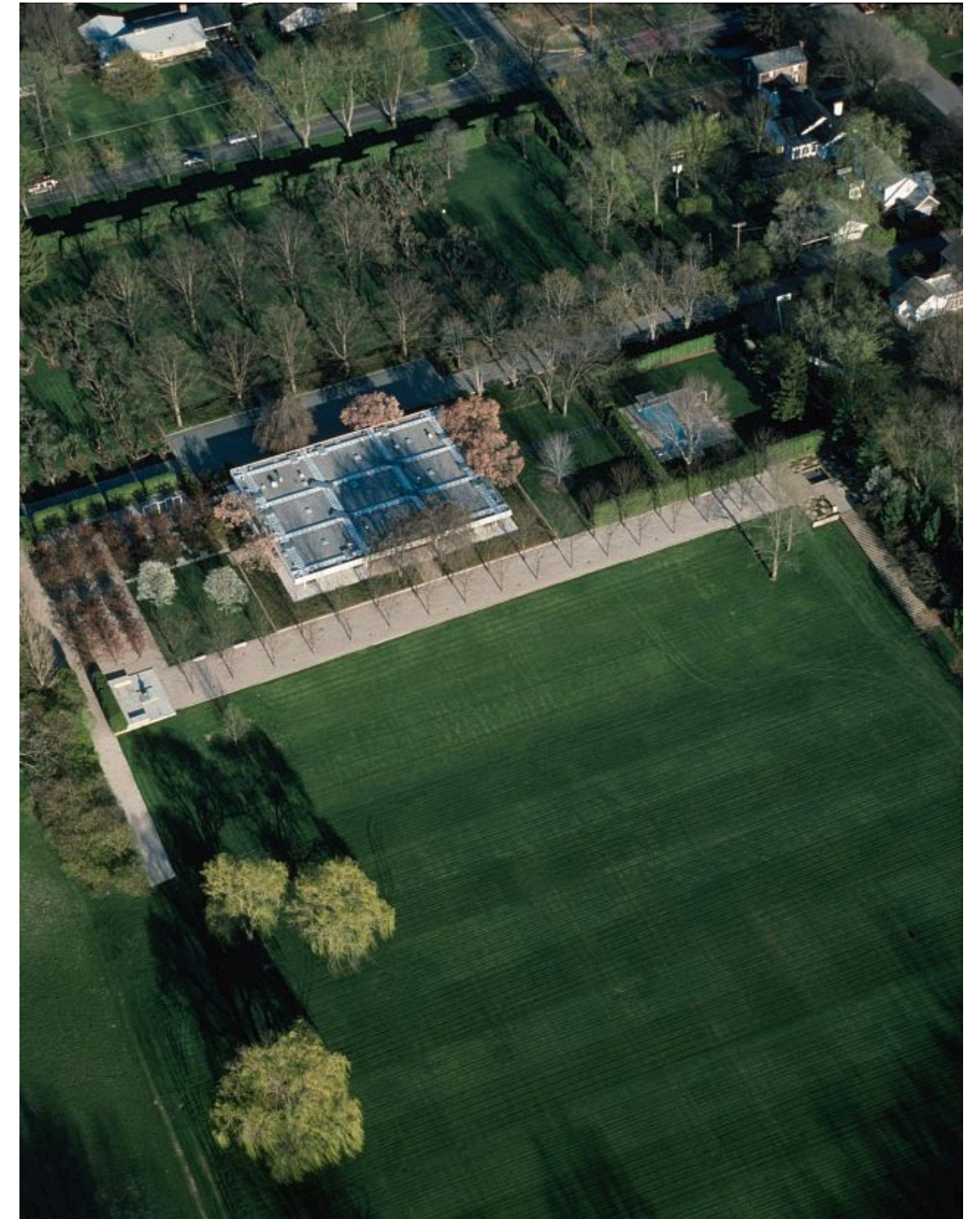
A Manifesto Towards Plant Humanities

Yao Jiang | 2020.12.02

Plants are volumetric and spatial.

Plants shall implement as a spatial construction. Plants could not only delineate an area and identify its boundaries but also produce covered or enclosed space. The impact of plants is constitutional on the spatial composition of a designed landscape or garden.

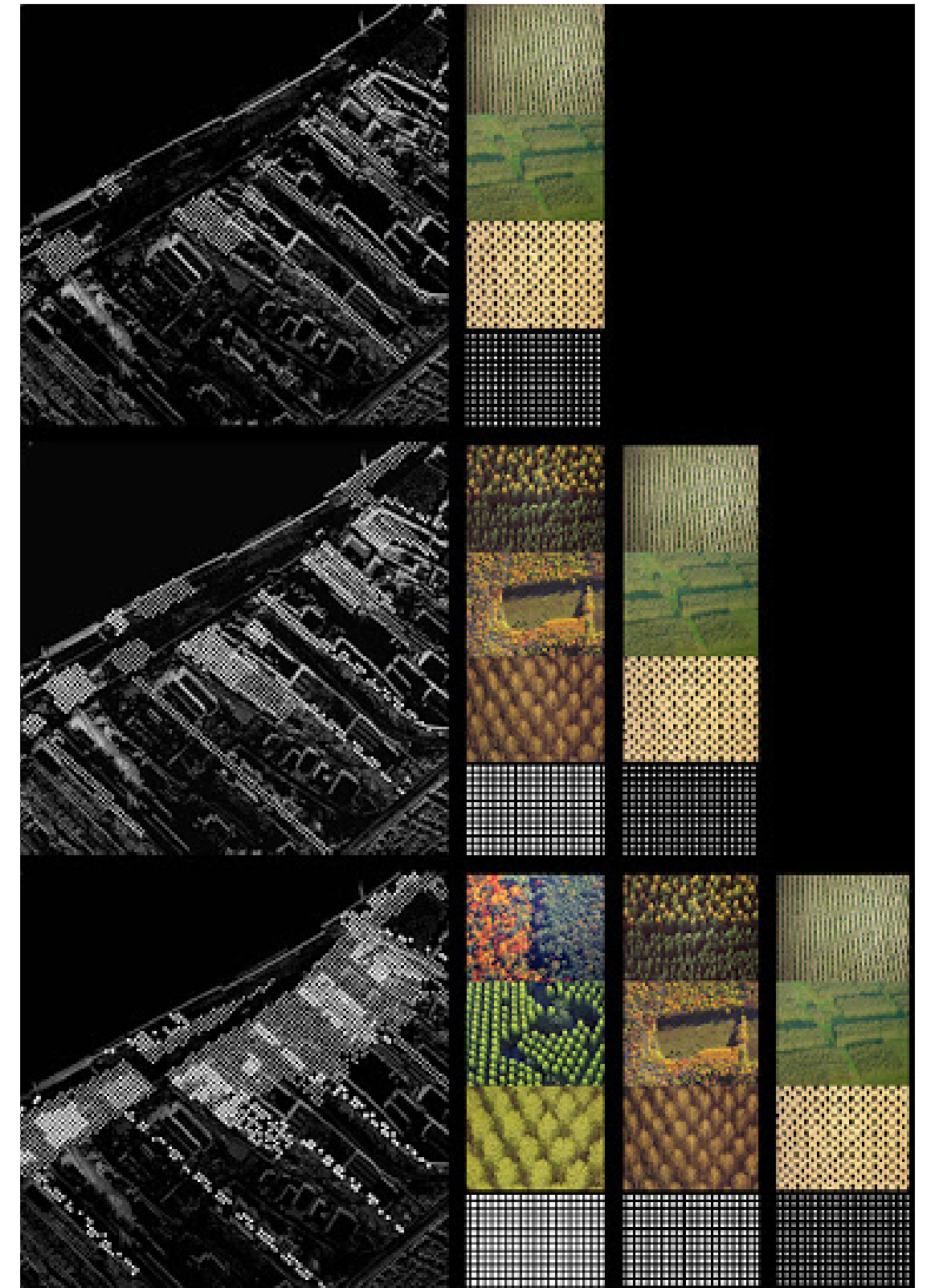
Miller house, Columbus, Indiana, 1953-57.
Image from Wikimedia Commons.



Plants transform the designed landscape as a process.

Plants change over times as they grow. Accordingly, the form of a design landscape or garden evolves step by step. Landscape architects shall leave enough spaces for this evolution to thicken their designs with the indetermination and randomness embedded in this evolution process. A designed landscape or garden never has a completed form, but always something in between with the growth of plants.

Bordeaux Rive Droite, Bordeaux, France, 2005.
Image from MDP Michel Desvigne Paysagiste Website.



Plants are social and cultural.

The appearance of plants changes periodically and seasonally. This ecological transformation provides dynamic and convivial bio-physical experiences for everyday life and seasonal-limited events. Landscape architects shall no longer focus on temporal cycles of plants but think about how ecological changes intermingle and interact with public life and activities.

Mill Race Park, Columbus, Indiana, 1989-1993.
Image from Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. Website.



Plants have personalities and memories.

Plants are alive and contribute to the process of place-making with their individual characters. Landscape architects are not the only one who dominates the making of a place.

As living beings on the site, plants attach their personalities to the site and hold the site history as memories from generation to generation.

Garden of Light at the Aga Khan Centre in King's Cross, London, UK, 2019.
Image from Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects Website.



Plants are windows to recognize sites.

Plants are place-specific, especially after long periods of adaption to the environment. Landscape architects can tell more accurate environmental information of a site from the present form, color, and texture of plants.

AMD (Acid Mine Drainage) Park, Vintondale, PA, 1995-2004.

Image from Stacy Levy Personal Website.



Plants extend the boundary of aesthetic experience.

Wild and non-native plants are always denounced as fear and loathing, excluded from the discussion of beauty and aesthetics. However, by emphasizing their stress-tolerance feature and the significance of biodiversity, it is a watershed moment for landscape architects to re-evaluate these underappreciated plants and to reconstruct their understanding of an aesthetic designed landscape.

Australian Garden, Cranbourne, Australia, 2006-2012.
Image from Wikimedia Commons.

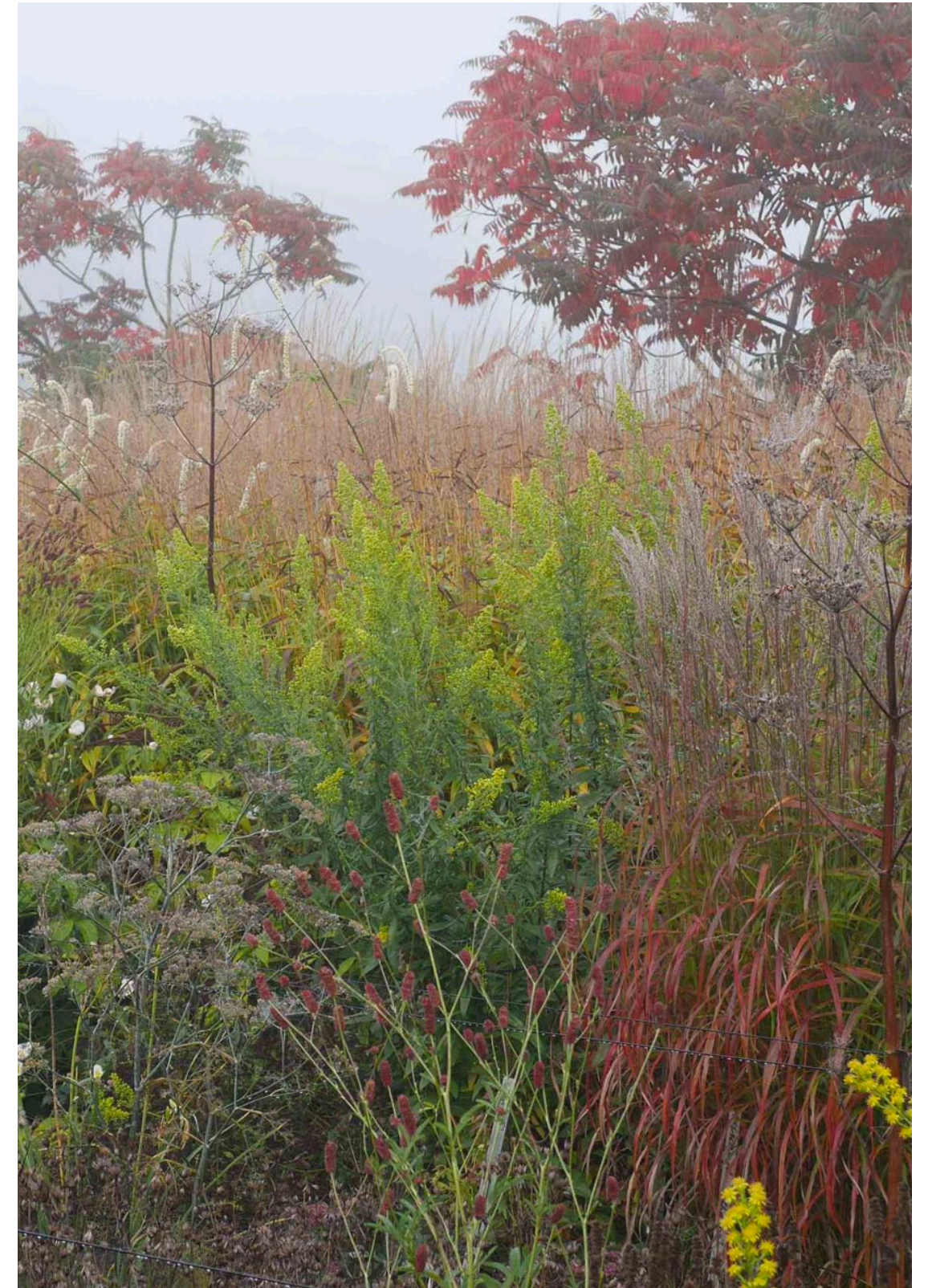


Oudolf Hummelo Garden, Netherlands, 1982-current.

Image from Piet Oudolf Website.

Plants catalyze the dissemination and circulation of landscape knowledge.

Plants provide landscape architects with an opportunity to learn and exchange associated landscape knowledge. This dissemination and circulation process are embedded almost in every stage of a garden or designed landscape project, including plant selection, the design of a planted form, as well as subsequent cultivation and daily management.



Plants get entangled in the social network.

In addition to professional practices in landscape architecture, the institutionalization of plants also relates to their settlement histories, visual representations, and ideological interpretations rooted in the social network. Therefore, landscape architects shall recognize each plant species as an actor, to identify those entangled relationships behind plants, and to embrace a broader context for garden or landscape designs.

London Plane Trees from Rikers Island to Seventh Avenue (1959),
Jane Hutton's Book Project, *Reciprocal Landscapes*, 2020.



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