

Patchy Panoramas: Architecture as Expanded Landscape

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ON *PATCHES*

Understanding the impacts of the Anthropocene requires observation of technological, biological, and socio-political processes right where human and non-human stories intertwine. A tool to understand the complexity of such impacts is the *patch*.

Rooted in landscape ecology, patches are distinct habitat areas that differ from their surrounding environments, exhibiting a notable level of intra-species interaction. “Patches might be as large as a national forest or as small as a tree”¹, showcasing how they can be recognized across different scales. Noticing a patch is just the first step in unpacking its aliveness: to understand its inhabitants, it is useful to recall the concept of assemblage, that describes all the beings that happen to be in a patch, whatever their relations with each other and with humans².

The artwork developed for Works & Words 2026 draws on key concepts from environmental humanities – particularly Anna Tsing’s work – to navigate the complexity of ecological inquiry. Her approach, which is grounded in landscapes, proves to be extremely operative for architectural discourse: “thinking with landscapes opens analysis to a constrained multiplicity: the material expands to include the relationships that make places and niches / but not any relation is included”³.

Tsing and colleagues have fruitfully stretched the notions of patch and assemblage beyond the disciplinary boundaries of landscape ecology, thus creating a school of thought in which it was possible to understand spaces where different ecosystems, cultures, and politics come together without pre-conceiving their relationship.

To study the Anthropocene, they focus on patches characterized by man-made infrastructures, understood as “building projects” with “feral” environmental impacts⁴. Architecture’s more typical product, namely *buildings*, are infrastructures too, even though rather banal ones, with a series of relational material effects, happening across scale and time.

Here, patches, in their *expanded* formulation, are compelling analytical tools because they facilitate the understanding of buildings as a heterogeneous assemblage of matters, actors, flows, and processes.

Could approaching buildings as *expanded patches of landscapes* be a simple yet compelling shift to read architecture *as* multi-sited, multi-scalar, and more-than-human?

ON *MAPS*

This proposition raises issues of visual culture, as it requires a conceptual step back, venturing into questions of worldbuilding, typically addressed by maps. “Maps reveal, delineate, verify, orient, navigate, anticipate, historicize, conceal, persuade, and, on occasion, even lie.”⁵ Representation, therefore, is never passive, as “it shapes what we attend to, what we avoid, and what we overlook altogether”⁶. This “cartographic impulse”⁷ has an operational nature. A map is an image-in-use, a graphic arrangement that creates a space for intellectual activity. Maps are, indeed, cultural technologies not to be considered as representations of space but as spaces of representation⁸.

How to *map* buildings as expanded landscapes? What methods for assembling knowledge and storytelling should be employed?

ON *PATCHY EPISTEMICS*

Tsing & co suggests to approach patches by producing knowledge through multiple forms of observation, documentation, and participation, resting on three core commitments: “(1) think in, and from, place; (2) embrace a variety of descriptive modes and (3) cultivate connections across difference”⁹. This displaces the term *patch*, previously used to identify expanded context, to a methodological action, suggesting the practice of “patchy epistemics”, to gain novel knowledge from transdisciplinary “piling”¹⁰.

“Piling” can be understood as a methodological approach for capturing moments in which human and more-than-human narratives become entangled. Its analytical value lies in the way it operates as a “not-so-organized assembling of materials,” proposing a mode of inquiry that involves gathering and relating elements with deliberate selectivity and critical intention, while resisting the impulse to impose order through neat or homogenizing classifications. Within this broader practice of piling, the authors identify “juxtaposition” as a specific analytical strategy that produces a “side-by-side relational tension”¹¹. In this configuration, analytical insight emerges from placing previously separate elements together, allowing unexpected connections to surface while still keeping their differences visible.

What mapping precedents can facilitate approaching buildings as expanded landscapes, through juxtaposed forms of observation, documentation, and participation?

ON *FLATTENED PANORAMAS*

One type of precedent seems particularly suited: the hybrid medium of *Flattened Panoramas*. Nineteenth-century 360-degree panoramas were multimedia artefacts combining painting, architecture, sculpture, stagecraft, and printed matter. They captivated audiences by providing immersive experiences “that unfold at the scale of landscape”¹².

Most panoramas included an *orientation plan*, a printed document that combined drawn views and text labels to help the audience understand and navigate the complex landscapes the panoramas sought to reproduce¹³.

“Panorama orientation plans are complex graphics that marry pictorial perspective with cartographic technique, including azimuthal (360-degrees) and ichnographic (plan) projection”¹⁴, where the interplay between text and images functions to weave these three distinct visual logics into cohesive, immersive compositions, easing the transition between different drawing techniques.

Other examples of flattened and hybrid media are Round Plans. Medeman’s *Vienna Besieged*, for instance, is a multi-scalar and multi-temporal map that combines azimuthal and ichnographic perspectives. The map is, in fact, a reportage of events occurring across various places.

Fast-forward to the nineteenth century, Flattened Panoramas had become widespread, and their *circular logic* had been adapted across multiple domains, including landscape maps designed for hikers¹⁵. Again, different drawing techniques combined with numbers and texts provided a narrative yet analytical description of places and itineraries. Landscapes were depicted with immersive qualities, roads were shown only where visible, disappearing when hidden by hills, and lettering was handled similarly “as though written on the landscape itself”¹⁶.

Could advocating for an immersive visual inquiry that matures at the intersection of multiple objectives and techniques facilitate an understanding of buildings that both *make* and *are made* of landscapes?

ON *ECOLONIA*

To research and test how Flattened Panorama could facilitate the reading of buildings as landscapes, the artwork developed as part of Works & Words 2026 aims to analyse the neighbourhood of Ecolonia in Alphen-aan-den-Rijn (Netherlands), an example of environmentally aware building and living that comprises 101 houses built between 1989 and 1993 [fig. 1]. Two of the authors visited Ecolonia in summer 2024, conducted fieldwork, and published a first enquiry into explorative mapping methodologies.¹⁷

The project was initiated by the Dutch Environmental Agency (Novem) in collaboration with a risk-bearing developer Bouwfonds, with the master plan managed by Lucien Kroll. He coordinated nine architectural teams tasked with designing diverse housing proposals that adhered to environmental standards exceeding conventional practice, based on three directives from the National Environmental Policy Plan: heat conservation, integrated life-cycle management of resources, and improvement of living quality¹⁸.

Under Kroll's leadership, several strategies were integrated: for example, water management and on-site biodiversity supported one another through the creation of a natural pond around which the dwellings were built.¹⁹ However, the project still causes significant terrestrial impacts. Even with better alternatives than business-as-usual solutions, the typical array of construction materials – bricks, concrete, oil-based membranes, to name a few – is still employed, and circularity is implemented only in specific circumstances.

The project's archive is very rich [fig. 2]: it describes the environmental strategies behind the different dwellings, details their construction and material choices, compares costs with business-as-usual solutions, and analyses key failures after completion²⁰. Despite this, Ecolonia is not extensively studied. Visually assessing architectural quality can marginalize projects whose value lies in non-formal strategies, as their relevance emerges across scales, time, and non-visual dimensions.

Could explorative map-making facilitate the understanding and celebration of architectures with plural environmental concerns, connecting buildings to their terrestrial dependencies? Can Flattened Panoramas help to intuitively grasp these complex dynamics?



Fig. 1. Ecolonia's urban plan, photograph by authors



Fig. 2. Ecolonia's project archive, photograph by authors

ON ECOLONIA'S PATCHY PANORAMA: UNPACKING THE MAP

Applying a way of assembling knowledge inspired by “piling” methodologies and “patchy epistemics” and learning from the immersive media of Flattened Panoramas, the proposed artwork articulates the mapping of Ecolonia based on the following attentions:

MULTI-SPATIAL

Building upon flattened panoramas' capacity to depict diverse landscapes and articulate them in a cohesive view, the mapping choreographs a multi-spatial inquiry to understand buildings' multiple relations to their terrestrial implications. Both *on-site* and *off-site* depictions are included [fig. 3], with a narrative focus: Ecolonia and its immediate landscape are positioned at the center of the drawing, and a further zoom is applied to three selected house typologies. The outer ring, by contrast, visually depicts the supply chain for the main construction materials used in the envelopes of the selected houses, with a strong focus on their landscape effects. These two views, described using a combination of 3D models (downloaded assets, originally modeled, or site-specific 3D scans), are combined with other document types, such as diagrams, photographs, or technical drawings [fig. 4].

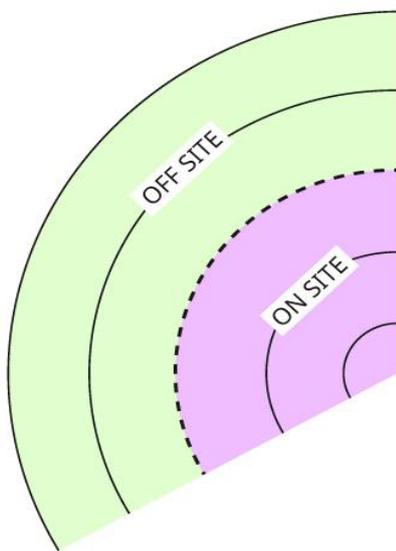


Figure 3. Multi-spatial diagram, drawing by authors



Figure 4. Detail of artwork, drawing by authors

MULTI-SCALAR

To untangle the terrestrial composition of what *actually* constitutes a building, examining it across shifting scales is essential: focusing on different actors and entities brings distinct scales of inquiry into play, as these scales arise from the specific characteristics of the phenomena under observation [fig. 5]. This is particularly evident when observing the different scales through which the selected landscapes are depicted: zoomed-in, describing the houses' gardens and their rich biodiversity, and zoomed-out, approaching the off-site landscapes of extraction and their ubiquitous entanglements [fig. 6]. Moving across scales in this context helps identify and narrate underlying relationships and immerse oneself in the concretion of space-time phenomena that are constitutive for the selected house typologies.

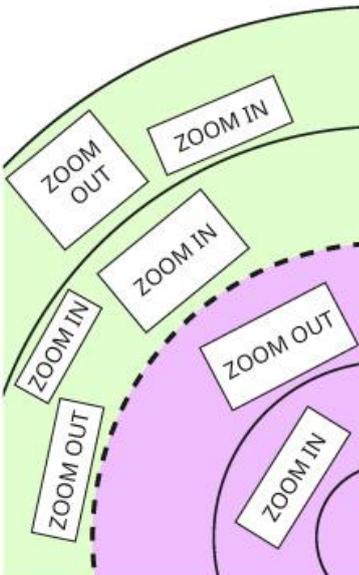


Figure 5. Multi-scalar diagram, drawing by authors

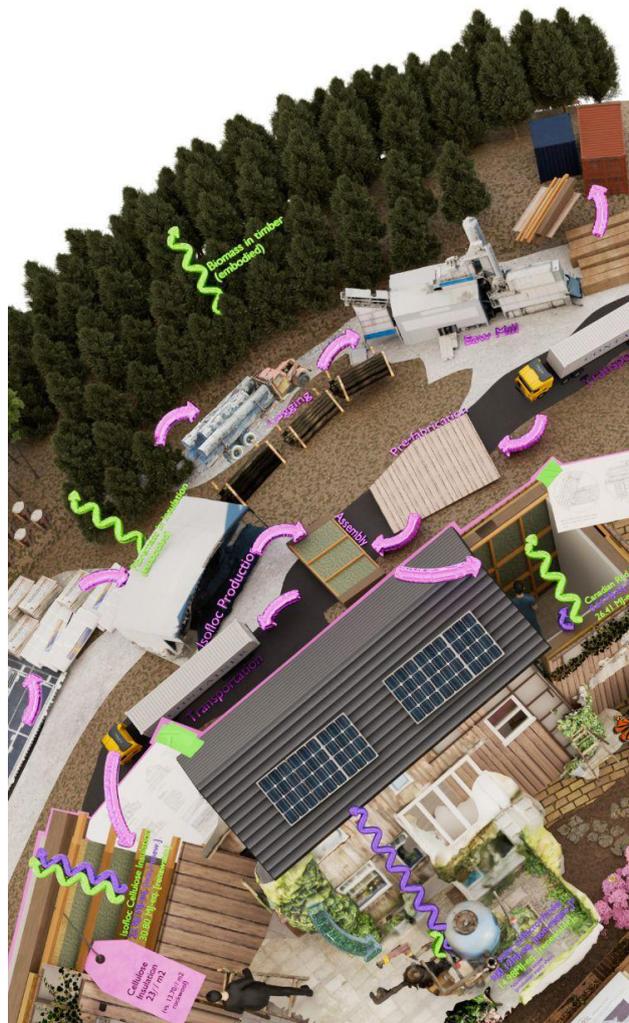


Figure 6. Detail of artwork, drawing by authors

In particular, the anecdotes collected during fieldwork, provided ‘depth and colour’ to interrogate large hypotheses through lived experiences, as “the anecdotal method makes it impossible to ignore the excluded and the effects of exclusion. It forces us to confront the materiality of people, things, and events, and therefore makes us understand that in any event the human cannot be separated from the technical, physical, or organic environments.”²¹.

Mundane stories of everyday maintenance, such as the tedious process of taking care of a green roof, were collected through long conversations with dwellers and formed anchor points from which further research expanded [fig.10].

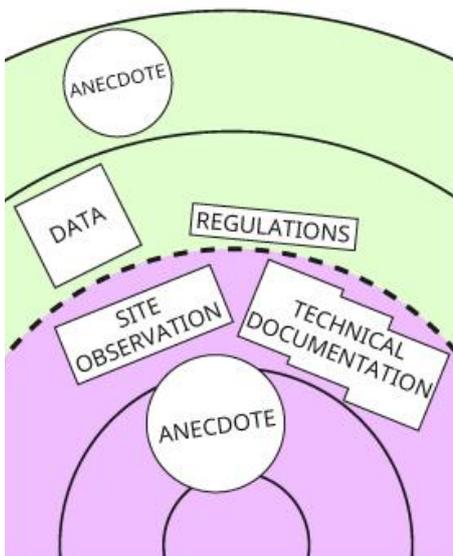


Figure 9. Multi-observational diagram, drawing by authors



Figure 10. Detail of artwork, drawing by authors

MULTI-MEDIA

Juxtaposition is also achieved through the use of drawing media to gain critical traction between narrative and analytical storytelling. 2D drawings, diagrams, 3D models, site-specific 3D scans, technical specs and photographs are deployed side by side, free from visual coherence [fig. 11].

Specifically, a combination of media with a distinct level of abstraction, such as diagrams, is mixed with high-resolution 3D models, such as site-specific scans, which seek to preserve as many material and visual qualities as possible, using precise geometry and high-resolution textures, to convey less hierarchical stories [fig. 12].

This combination helps to narrate the complexity of Ecolonia and its multiple terrestrial implications while maintaining an overall readability.

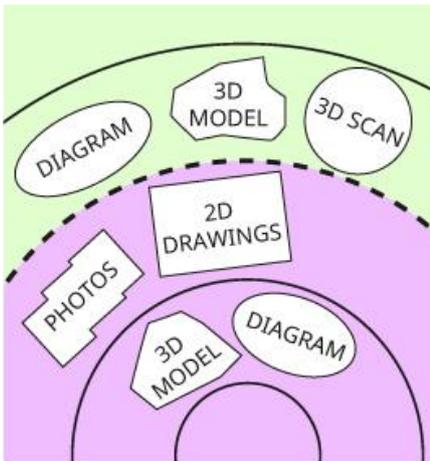


Figure 11. Multi-media diagram, drawing by authors



Figure 12. Detail of artwork, drawing by authors

A multifaceted depiction of Ecolonia emerges from the articulation of diverse stories, held together by a hybrid drawing format that aims to orient a comprehensive understanding of buildings' inherent terrestrial impacts. Learning from Flattened Panoramas, the artwork becomes a patchwork of its immediate and distant relations, collapsing scale, time, observation techniques, and media, in order to grasp the vastness of the inquiry and make room for alternative storylines [fig. 13]. The proposal suggests that novel exploratory mapping techniques could facilitate the reading of *architectures as expanded landscapes*, promoting an ecological imagination that begins at the intersection of multiple concerns and curiosities.

Notes

- ¹ Dramstad et al., *Landscape Ecology Principles in Landscape Architecture and Land-Use Planning*, 19.
- ² Anna Tsing et al., *Field Guide to the Patchy Anthropocene: The New Nature*, 1st edition (Stanford University Press, 2024), 15.
- ³ Anna Tsing, “When the Things We Study Respond to Each Other: Tools for Unpacking ‘the Material,’” in *Anthropos and the Material*, by Penny Harvey et al. (Duke University Press, 2019), 230
- ⁴ Anna Tsing et al., “Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology An Introduction to Supplement 20,” *Current Anthropology* 60, no. S20 (2019): S186–97, 176.
- ⁵ “Shannon Mattern’s Great New Course on Mapping,” *Open Geography*, July 10, 2015, <https://opengeography.wordpress.com/2015/07/10/shannon-matterns-great-new-course-on-mapping/>
- ⁶ Tsing et al., *Field Guide to the Patchy Anthropocene*, 47.
- ⁷ Sybille Krämer, “The Mind’s Eye’: Visualizing the Non-Visual and the ‘Epistemology of the Line,’” *From Ontos Verlag: Publications of the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society-New Series (Volumes 1-18)* 17 (2013), 277
- ⁸ Bernhard Siegert, “The Map Is the Territory,” *Radical Philosophy*, September 1, 2011, 13–16.
- ⁹ Tsing et al., *Field Guide to the Patchy Anthropocene*, 193.
- ¹⁰ Tsing et al., *Field Guide to the Patchy Anthropocene*, 197
- ¹¹ Tsing et al., *Field Guide to the Patchy Anthropocene*, 198
- ¹² Molly Catherine Briggs, “Panoramic Inscriptions: Perspectival Typography and Pictorial Lettering in Immersive Ephemera,” in *Panoramic and Immersive Media Studies Yearbook*, 1st edition, ed. Molly Catherine Briggs et al. (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024), 274.
- ¹³ In her chapter, Molly Briggs illustrate several examples of Orientation Plans, such as the ones used to explain the Panorama of Vienna or the Panorama of London.
- ¹⁴ Briggs, “Panoramic Inscriptions: Perspectival Typography and Pictorial Lettering in Immersive Ephemera.”, 276
- ¹⁵ Such as David Alois Schmid’s (1791–1861) Panorama or Circular View from the Rigi mountain on the Kulm, 1820.
- ¹⁶ Briggs, “Panoramic Inscriptions: Perspectival Typography and Pictorial Lettering in Immersive Ephemera.”, 285
- ¹⁷ Alicia Lazzaroni and Antonio Bernacchi, “Architectural Ecographies,” in *Structures and Architecture: REstructure REmaterialize REthink REuse*, by Mario Rinke and Marie Frier Hvejsel (Taylor & Francis Group, 2025), 883-890.
- ¹⁸ Gianmichele Panarelli, Lucien Kroll. *Architetture umanizzate*, 1° edizione (FrancoAngeli, 2018), 28.
- ¹⁹ Panarelli, Lucien Kroll. *Architetture umanizzate*, 29.
- ²⁰ Nine publications were released in 1995 providing a rich archive.
- ²¹ Sean Cubitt, “Anecdotal Evidence,” *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies* 2, no. 1 (2013), <https://www.necsus-ejms.org/test/anecdotal-evidence/>.(Cubitt 2013), 6,16.

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