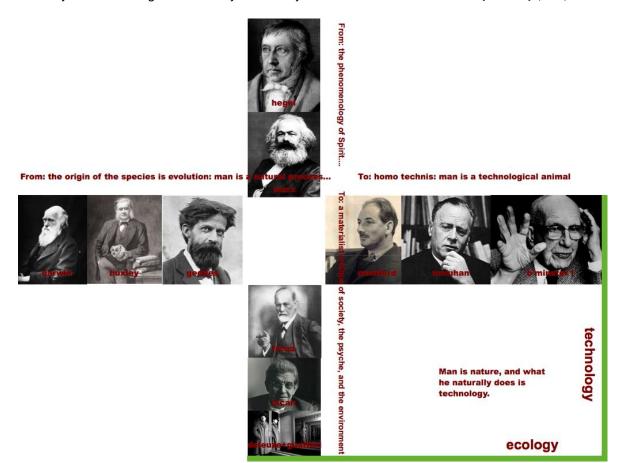'Town plans are no mere diagrams, they are a system of hieroglyphics in which man has written the history of civilization, and the more tangled their apparent confusion, the more we may be rewarded in deciphering it.' Patrick Geddes, *The City in Evolution* (1915)

'The city is the best organ of memory man has yet created.' Lewis Mumford, *The city in history* (1961)



# Human-Nature: Untying the Knots of Environmental Desire

*Question*
What is the role for the humanities in environmental thinking, in particular in the debate about sustainability, and in what sense does this thinking constitute research?

*Aim*
The aim of this program is to build a humanities discourse on the environment in order to contribute to the debate about sustainability - a debate typically dominated by techno-scientific thinking. The sciences are able to articulate a vision of the future, but only the humanities can account for the fact that humanity desires a vision of the future. What the humanities bring to the debate is the capacity to understand the environment as an artefact that reflects human imagination and desire. As soon as we introduce the human subject, environmental problems become knotty: desire is never satisfied; desire cannot be undone; desire rarely recognises itself. Desire is not a simple or empirical given: it has to be theorised. The humanities offer the possibility to theorise our interventions in the environment from the starting point of the desire and imagination that drives them.

*Program*
This 4 year program in humanities thinking on the environment, technology, and the human subject will firstly build a humanities discourse on the environment through theoretical and creative projects, and secondly, through a series of symposia, put this discourse before an audience of environmental and social scientists. It is the task of the humanities to study human nature by critical reflection upon existing artefacts and the creation of new ones. Patrick Geddes regarded the city as the single most important artefact in the history of civilisation; Lewis Mumford, his student, regarded the city as the most advanced expression of man's essentially technological nature. Building on this dialogue, this program will mobilise humanities thinking in architecture, philosophy, psychoanalysis, history, literature and the arts to theorise and reconfigure the human-nature relation.

*Projects*
The program will focus on the function of technology and cities in the Scottish landscape and in the imaginations of the people who occupy it. It will dwell in two modes: histories and imagined futures. It will comprise text-based and practice-based outputs. Following Geddes, it will straddle theory and practice. Its methods will include:
- archival and historical research;
- close critical reading of texts and artefacts; and
- the creation of new texts and artefacts including speculative monographs, land art, films, photographs, and architectures that interpret the human subject in the landscape.

Text-based projects will explore the body of environmental and technological thinking in philosophy and architecture, the role of landscape and city in the cultural imaginary, and the history of intervention by technologies and new towns in the Scottish landscape. Practice-based projects will explore the relation of man and environment through photographs and videos of industry and new towns in the landscape, and through architectural models of existing settlement patterns and proposed new settlement paradigms. Projects will also explore the rhetoric and platforms for the environmental debate, and propose a hybrid land/digital platform for public debate about the environment.

The program will build a network of researchers based around the Geddes-Mumford dialogue on cities, regions, and technology. The program will be supported by the researcher network and a digital discourse platform, which are vehicles for dissemination during and after the funded portion of this program.

The program comprises 5 research strands, each corresponding to a knot in environmental thinking:

<u>Knot</u> **1** <u>*Thought*</u>      Geddes-Mumford & the thinking machine

*Question*
Inspired by the Geddes-Mumford connection, how can we re-think concepts of habitation, desire and subjectivity?

*Team*
Dr. Dominic Smith (Philosophy)
Dr. Todd Mei (Philosophy)

*Context*
Polymath Patrick Geddes was the first modern thinker to systematically think Land, Livelihood, and Community (Folk) in a single synoptic view. Lewis Mumford, with whom he corresponded, was a philosopher of urbanism and technology. Their contributions to contemporary philosophy of technology requires reappraisal.

*Aim*
To build a research program around cities, technology, and the human subject, which will take the Geddes-Mumford connection as its starting point, but update it to include other thinkers on humanity and the city, including Deleuze and Guattari, Heidegger, Augé, Simmel, Koolhaas.

*Project*
The project has two strands. First, a research program focused on contemporary concepts of the city. This will cover the relation between the city and its technologies, subjects, and imaginary, and will have a bearing on questions of the sustainability of communities and cultures in urban environments. Second, we will build a global network of scholars with the potential to become an interdisciplinary institute of Geddes-Mumford scholarship and planning practice. This will link the sites of Geddes' interventions worldwide, including Dundee, Edinburgh, Tel Aviv, Madras, Mumbai, Montpellier. The research program and network will complement one another, building on established strengths in architecture and humanities at Dundee.

## Knot 2 Settlement        Mapping the urban-rural interface

*Question*
How has architecture and planning practice inscribed us upon the surface of the earth, and what does this say about our concept of ourselves, our world, our future?

*Team*
Dr. Lorens Holm (Architecture)
Professor Graeme Hutton (Architecture)

*Context*
Architecture has the capacity to re-imagine how we inscribe ourselves upon the surface of the earth, and to imagine new possible ways; its task is to spatialise desire, and its innovations reflect shifts in the paradigms for what a human being is and what its world is. Architect Koolaas said that the space of the city is sculpted by the flow of money. We say that space is sculpted into the land by the flow of desire. Hence, a research project on how we occupy the land and how it occupies us.

*Aim*
To develop new paradigms for the human-rural interface and map them onto the human-nature interface.

*Project*
To build a database of urban-rural interface typologies (from the wilderness outpost to the managed parkland), beginning with a survey of the different conditions where settlement forms and landforms fold onto each other. It will evaluate different classifications, including place-based typologies, and urban model forms (grid, figure, net, etc.) It will conclude with design-led research into new interface paradigms. After an initial survey and scoping study, and presentation to a panel of experts (architects, civil engineers, sociologists), the project will develop particular spatial models in plan, section, and models, and – by working with other knots - put them in relation to the contemporary cultural imaginary (drawing on other arenas of cultural production, e.g., the Archers, the sublime, rural utopias). It will also put them in relation to the legislative, economic, and social contexts. It will conclude by developing new paradigms for thinking through relations between the human subject and the land.

## Knot 3 Imagination          Imaging our techno-urban futures

*Question*
How have the ruins of the future shaped thinking on cities technologies and the human subject?

*Team*
Dr. Keith Williams (English)
Dr. Chris Murray (Comics)

*Context*
Fiction, film, and comics create immersive environments, exploring and critiquing the experience of urban living. These media dramatise space in compelling ways, and give narrative shape to the 'psychogeographies' of individuals inhabiting actual and possible cities using combinations of words and images, creating a complex topography of spatio-temporal relations.

*Aim*
To write a history of aspirations and anxieties associated with the 'urban imaginary' as represented in fiction, film and comics, and thereby to identify the human criteria for designing a sustainable urban future.

*Project*
This knot will consider how the mechanised and media-saturated metropolis of the future is imagined into being in nineteenth-century illustrated texts and its subsequent influence on literary, cinematic and graphic depictions of cities. It will explore how forms of urban alienation became a key topos in cultural media and, through them, the popular urban imaginary. This strand will focus on science fiction, modernism, city symphonies, documentary, film noir, comics and graphic novels, from the 1890s onwards. This team has close links with the International Association of Word and Image Studies, the Scottish Network of Modernist Studies, the Scottish Film and Television Consortium, the Scottish Centre for Comics Studies, and DC Thomson, news publishers in Dundee, with whom they intend to develop their projects. The PhD will produce a thesis on the history of the urban imaginary, mapping its key contours of desire and anxiety, but also its

distinct forms of inter-mediality. Methodologies will be primarily library and archive based, with an appropriate toolkit of cultural and social theory. The PDRA will work with the team of academic specialists to organize and produce the seminars and symposium, with accompanying film programmes and exhibitions; also as editorial assistant for journal special numbers.

## Knot 4 Legacy        Technology & Landform

*Question*
What is the history of technological futures in Scotland, and how do these map onto environmental futures in the European and global context?

*Team*
Dr Annie Tindley (History)
Mr Gair Dunlop (DJCAD)

*Context*
Scotland has a radical tradition of imagined futures, futures that generally only exist as plans or ruins but continue to structure thinking about sustainability in both a local and global context. This tradition was situated in Scotland due to the extremes of population density found there, and the striking tensions between 'core' and 'periphery'. This project will focus on the unexpected ways and places in which pastoral idealism, ecological thinking, and attitudes to technology have played themselves out in Scotland and the wider world.

*Aims*
To identify and trace the imagined futures of the past, focusing primarily on the interface between urban and rural, culture and nature and outline the legacies of these traditions of thought and enterprise in the modern world.

*Project*
This research strand will utilise methodologies from the visual arts, history, and landscape characterisation to provide a historical context for a wider humanities discourse on the environment. It will explore the radical nature of thinking and settlement in Scotland: sites where idealism and attempts to re-establish the idea of community have succeeded in establishing thriving bases. This will be counterpointed by studies of sites related to the state, heavy industry and technology. The work will explore these places in terms of the images by which they were and are identified, how they integrate themselves into their local and global networks, and their visions of the future. Key sites include Wick, Carbeth, Scoraig, Findhorn, Nuclear Caithness, National Engineering Laboratory East Kilbride, Kishorn, Nigg and Arderseir. The PhD student will produce a thesis on the history of imagined and temporary futures in Scotland and Britain, c. 1750-2000. Methodologies will be primarily archival, with some work on contemporary mapping and architectural collections. The RA will work with Gair Dunlop to produce a photograph series and short films on Scottish and European sites of the 'ruins of the future'.

*Knot* **5** *Engagement*          Platforms for Environmental Discourse

*Question*
How do platforms for pubic discourse – land-based and web-based - inflect attitudes to the environment?

*Team*
Mary Modeen (Art and Philosophy)
Shaleph O'Neill (Communication Design and Computing)

*Context*
Everyone lives *somewhere*. Publics debate *somehow*. Public discourse takes myriad forms. Digital media, the internet, and other new communications technologies extend previous place-based *forums* for debate. Visual rhetoric has a place in this discourse as well, shaping perceptions of the kind of world we inhabit. Types of representation are critical to understandings, impact and the ability to affect behaviour. Inevitably, the quality of our environment is determined by the quality of the discourse in these public domains. Questions concerning these forms, media, and content of discourse cut across the four other knots.

*Aims*
To scrutinise appropriate platforms, rhetorics, and representations for public debate of the environment

*Projects*
Text- land- and web-based projects will:
- investigate current modes and media, which depict, narrate and convey aspects of human interactions with the Scottish environment;
- subject these examples to close analysis, studying modes of public rhetoric, visual and textual, and attendant assumptions;
- publicly re-publish/re-deliver/re-exhibit these examples, in order to confound former messages, promoting new discourse for positive change. This will entail: e-publications, youtube, art exhibitions across the UK, paper publications, and interactive/performative events.

The PDRA will work on detailed projects, including exhibitions. The PhD will assist development of a web-based interactive programme, further demonstrating the effects of representation upon environmental discourse.
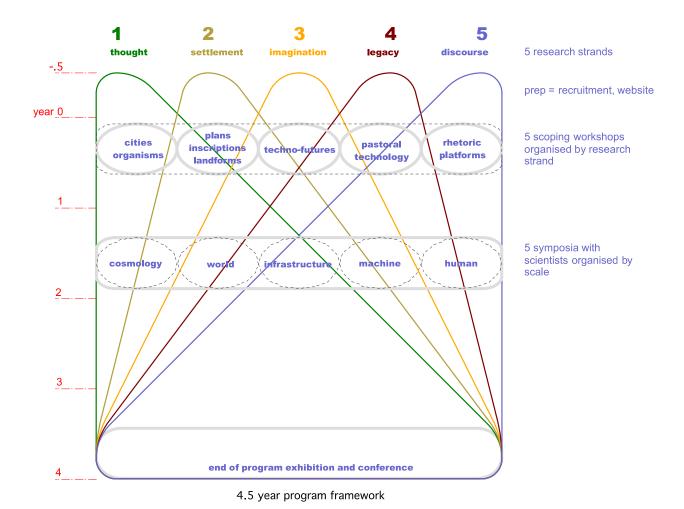
# *Discussion*

*Context*
There are other humanities-focused programs on cities (LSE Cities and Humanities), but none that take on the central challenge of the humanities: to focus inwards on man as well as outward on the world. Our proposal encompasses a broader terrain: the urban and rural, built and un-built, artificial and natural, imaginary and real.

*Scotland*

Imagine that Scotland is a medium sized regional city half the size of London, rather than a partially occupied wilderness. It has areas of greater and lesser density, a transportation infra-structure, and managed parklands, all traversed by the same laws and imagination. Without relinquishing our vision to the global, we focus on Scotland as a case study because: Scotland's history of radical insertion of new towns and technology in a landscape of outstanding natural beauty; its history of pastoral utopias; Geddes.

*Knots*

The Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing used the figure of the knot to define a form of labyrinthine and circular reasoning that returns to – without moving on from - its problematic premises. He thereby defined a surprising form of being stuck. Today, we seem to be tied in environmental knots. We intervene in the environment and it always comes back to us as if it were an accident. Our desire assails us. The humanities have the capacity to liberate our thought from these impasses, thereby opening up possibilities for new solutions to seemingly intractable problems.



4.5 year program framework

## *Dissemination*

Dissemination is integral to the structure of this program, the aim of which is to build a discourse. The 5 research strands are crosscut by 5 workshops, 5 symposia, and a conference/exhibition. (see diagram). The program will produce outcomes ranging from workshops, exhibitions and a conference, to artworks, monographs, and architectural models. Dissemination is targeted at four audiences: teachers and researchers in the humanities for whom the discipline is increasingly under threat; the general public who deserve more than they currently get; environmental researchers across the arts, sciences and social sciences; planners and policy makers. The first outcomes (year 1) will be scoping studies for each of the five research strands. These will be used to provide each strand with a dedicated workshop (year 1, 25 participants) and symposium (year 2, 50 participants). The purpose of these events is firstly to build a network of humanities researchers that cuts across each strand, and secondly to create an on-going dialogue between this network and environmentalists in other fields, drawing on the Geddes Institute and CECHR which are social science/science-oriented forums. Each strand will also produce a PhD thesis and a trained PDRA, and 4-8 research papers per strand will be submitted to high-impact journals over the course of the program. In addition, each strand will produce outcomes more tailored to its specific focus and methods (years 1-4):

*Knot 1*
- Monograph on habitation (Mei);
- Sponsored series of Visiting Speaker seminars;
- Web-supported network of scholars, planners, and urbanists inspired by the Geddes-Mumford interaction;
- Edited book on the city.

*Knot 2*
- Detailed graphic representation of new architectural paradigms (plans, sections, elevations, models and explanatory commentary);
- Web-based graphic archive and database of examples;
- Public exhibition and catalogue;
- Architectural monograph on landscape by the two leads, peer-reviewed papers.

*Knot 3*
- Film program and symposia in collaboration with Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA) cinemas;

Special issues of the journals:
- *Modernist Cultures* ('Visualizing the Metropolis');
- *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* ('Screening the city');
- *Studies in Comics* ('Architecture and comics').

*Knot 4*
- Series of large format photographs;
- Short films
- Monograph, (by RA and research leaders);
- Exhibition and catalogue.

*Knot 5*

A series of academic and public disseminations of this entire transformation of platforms of public discourse, including:

- Exhibition(s)of commissioned art/architecture landform projects;
- Web-based platform for environmental discourse linking archives of materials compiled in other research knots, linking researcher teams to their partners/publics.

In 2018, the five strands will contribute to the closing of the program with a conference in London and an exhibition curating existing artefacts and new artefacts produced by the program (probable venues: the RIBA London and the RSA Edinburgh) to which we expect to attract scientists, planners and policy makers.