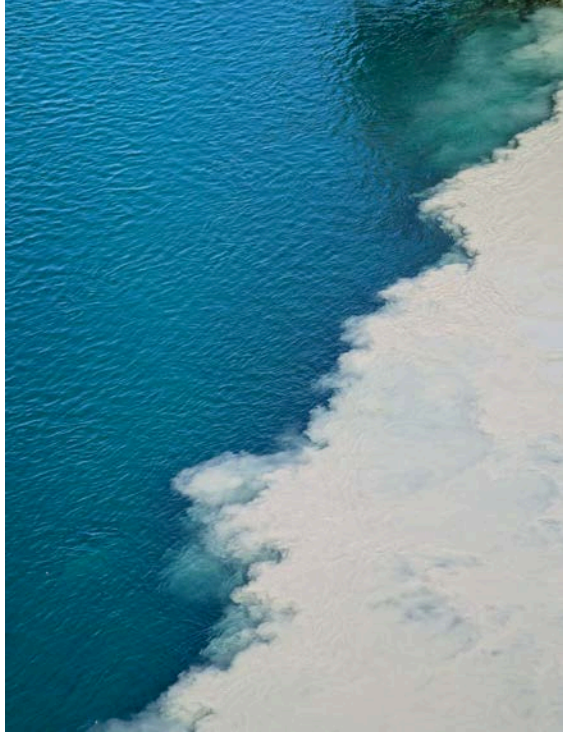


“We have ourselves become foreign to our everyday”¹ — Ronald W. Hepburn



Introduction

Since moving to Geneva in September 2024 for this master's program at HEAD-Genève, I've walked over the viaduct in La Jonction over 400 times. This is the perfect spot to view the confluence of the Rhône and Arve rivers. Standing high above from a bird's eye view and witnessing this natural phenomenon for the first time, I was immediately in awe. Luckily, my first encounter with the confluence was on a sunny afternoon, which brings out the teal of the Rhône and the white, milky qualities of the Arve. Depending on the day, the confluence of the rivers doesn't mix; they swirl before merging west of the bridge. This swirling is the ideal condition for the flow of rivers, as there are days when one overpowers the other.

SEPT 10, 2024 | FIRST PHOTO TAKEN

Richard Long is a British land artist whose medium is walking to create artworks with nature. He is performing with it with the simple act of walking. His piece from 1967, “A Line Made by Walking” shows a visible straight line in the grass field of Wiltshire, England. The end result is a black and white photograph of the field with no animals or humans, just the landscape with the forged path in the field. There's a stark contrast between the wild and the line. Although there is no one visible in the photo, it serves as a reminder that a human was present. As time passes, we can imagine the line fading away and nature continues on its way.

As Spanish philosopher Marta Tafalla notes, “His relationship with nature is that of one who passes through it, who recovers old, little-used paths or who opens up new ones.”² This signifies our need to create our own paths, metaphorically and physically. Even in a built environment like a city, there are countless examples of where a path designed by urban and landscape

¹ HEPBURN, Ronald, 2004. Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty. In: CARLSON, Allen and BERLEANT, Arnold, eds. The aesthetics of natural environments. Peterborough, Ont.; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, pp. 49–66. ISBN 978-1-55111-470-5.

² TAFALLA, Marta, 2010. From Allen Carlson to Richard Long: The Art-Based Appreciation of Nature. . Vol. 2.

designers is defied by its walkers. We will find the quickest and shortest path to our destination, often called a “desire path”. You can see this right outside HEAD-Genève as paths are created from the green landscaped area around the southeast entrance of the main building.

In contrast to Long, these desire paths in an urban environment are a by-product of our need to arrive at our destination as fast as possible, whereas Long takes his time to be in nature. We are trying to save time, but Long is taking his time.

I am in between the two, as I walk across the bridge as a means for me to arrive at my destination, but I am also there to enjoy the rivers intermingling and Mont Salève and Mont Jura in the distance. Walking along the Viaduc de la Jonction, I have no option but to go in a straight line but this does not mean I cannot appreciate what surrounds me. Although, I have to admit, as time goes on, my initial feeling of my fascination with the confluence diminishes. The honeymoon fades and as I start to live my life in Geneva, it becomes part of my everyday.

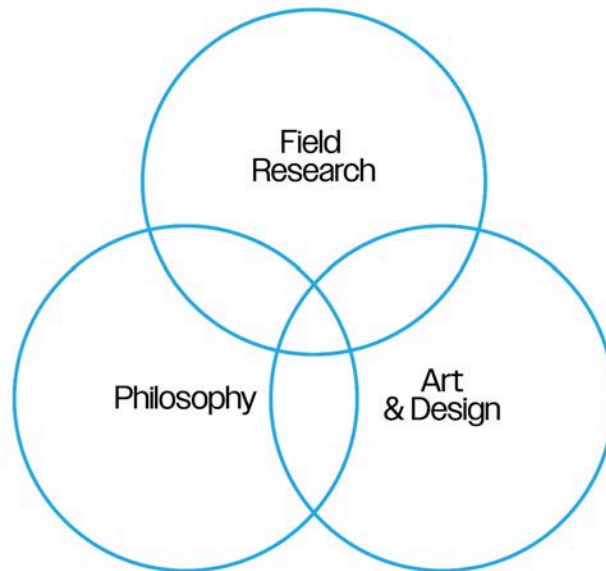


SCREENSHOT FROM GOOGLE MAPS WITH LABELS

This is my starting point and the inspiration for my thesis. I want to explore this relationship I have to this location and understand why I’m drawn to it, despite having no prior relationship to Geneva before my arrival. In addition, I want to examine how we can connect, re-connect, and stay connected with nature in our built environment and have a deeper appreciation for it. I’ll use a philosophical frameworks on technology and environmental aesthetics, as well as interviews

and case studies to explore how artists and designers have attempted to appreciate nature through their practice.

Intersections of Methods



I have an extensive catalogue of photos which will serve as a basis to examine the visual aesthetic of the rivers from a photographic perspective and I have been mapping³ the soundscape of La Jonction to understand the acoustic and sonic characteristics of the place. With this combination, my goal is to understand how to appreciate nature from different mediums while informing how to proceed with a practice of field documentation and recording. By examining case studies on how artists and designers have created projects around nature, it will also de-centre my perspective and allow me to see a diversity of ways on how people have approached this problem.

I've narrowed down on a specific site for my field research. I purposefully want to work with a location that is close to home, literally. The place of the confluence is around the corner from me and is accessible to me at any time of day. Besides this being a convenient location, this is also important because my goal is to build a situated practice. I want to be able to interact wholeheartedly in the site of investigation to understand it, to embody it. This has also been true for how I approach my interviews. In a world where everything is accessible by a mouse click, we can conduct interviews online from anyone around the world. However, there's spontaneity

³ A collection of field recordings hosted on Aporee. This is a sound map project created by German artist Udo Noll as a way to document the soundscapes of places around the world. There's a standard and quality they uphold to ensure a good listening experience and to represent a location's soundscape accurately. <https://aporee.org/maps/work/user.php?u=3849>

and magic lost when we are not face to face, and it's the same when we are only viewing nature from a screen.

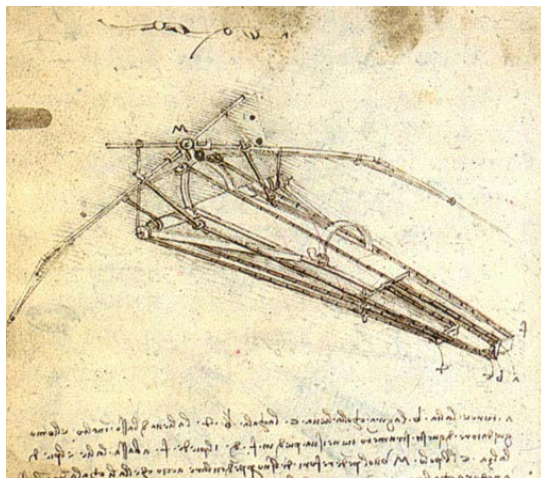
I've selected a philosophical method to analyze projects and my research because this discipline can help create frameworks for actions and give us language to talk about a design practice such as media design. A discipline that is changing so fast as we try to keep up with technology. I also appreciate that philosophy allows for the analysis of a simple question as how do we appreciate nature? It's a simple question and can be deceptively obvious, but often times, the simplest questions are the ones that are overlooked.

Before exploring the appreciation of nature through aesthetics, I would like to start with our relationship to technology and its connection to the natural world. I think it's essential to set this context because technology can help us appreciate nature, but it can also be detrimental to it.

Technology and Its Relationship to Nature

There is and has been a complex relationship that we have with technology and nature. There is a contrast between the two: one being of human invention and everything else that is not human. One that feels rigid and the other organic. However, this dichotomy, separation, and distance have contributed to our current state in the fight to repair Earth.

Going back to the ancient Greeks, they thought that technology is a form of nature mimesis, that is, “technology learns from or imitates nature”⁴. This positions nature as a teacher, helping us find solutions to our human development. We can see this with biomimicry and our desire to be in the air. With the first attempt by Abbas ibn Firnas, a ninth-century poet, he mightily flapped wings attached to his arms. But it was only until Leonardo da Vinci studied how birds fly that the ornithopter was conceived. This led Otto Lilienthal, a German engineer, to conduct a series of successful flights after studying the aerodynamic properties of storks⁵.



ONE OF LEONARDO DA VINCI'S DESIGNS FOR AN ORNITHOPTER, C.1489; MILAN, ITALY

For Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher and Nazi, saw the world as raw material and that technology can reveal nature⁶. In contrast to the ancient Greeks, nature is not a teacher but a resource, and through technology, we can extract this resource to reveal its true being through human intervention and invention. This is the function of technology according to Heidegger.

The example he gives is that we have altered the landscape of rivers and figured out that we can produce electricity through hydrop power. There are 24 dams in total along the Rhône: 19 in France and 5 in Switzerland that regulate the flow of the river while producing electricity. The

⁴ FRANSSEN, Maarten, LOKHORST, Gert-Jan and VAN DE POEL, Ibo, 2024. Philosophy of Technology. In : ZALTA, Edward N. and NODELMAN, Uri (eds.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [online]. Fall 2024. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. Retrieved from : <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entriesechnology/> [accessed 24 April 2025].

⁵ PRIMROSE, S. B., 2020. *Biomimetics: nature-inspired design and innovation*. Hoboken, New Jersey : Wiley. ISBN 978-1-119-68334-6.

⁶ VERBEEK, Peter-Paul. The Technological View of the World of Martin Heidegger. FutureLearn [online]. Retrieved from : <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/blog> [accessed 27 April 2025].

one in Geneva located at Sejuet which accounts for 1% of the city's consumed electricity⁷. It's a small amount compared to large hydrodams and primarily serves as a way to regulate water flow. However, this small amount illustrates that we will maximize a resource while revealing what it can do for us. Heidegger's critique of technology was a warning since if we view everything as a resource, then we will only take.

Ernst Knapst, if technology is an extension of our organs, or in a similar statement from Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, technology is an extension of man. Here, both are claiming that technology comes from within us. Where Knapst refers to organs, McLuhan means our senses. These distinctions perhaps convey the same thing, because if we say 'our eyes,' we are also referring to our sight. The way that cameras, telescopes, and microscopes are all technologies that are extensions of our sight.

It would be interesting to think instead of what can a river reveal to us through Heidegger's perspective, but instead Knapst. That is, what are the organs of a river and how can we develop technology that extend its ability or help it. For example, we have eye glasses for people with poor sight, what would be the equivalent of an invention for a river that supports its being while helping it. Here, I have no answer to what this invention could be, but more so a way to frame how to incorporate into a practice of trying to make with a river.

The Pastoral View of La Jonction

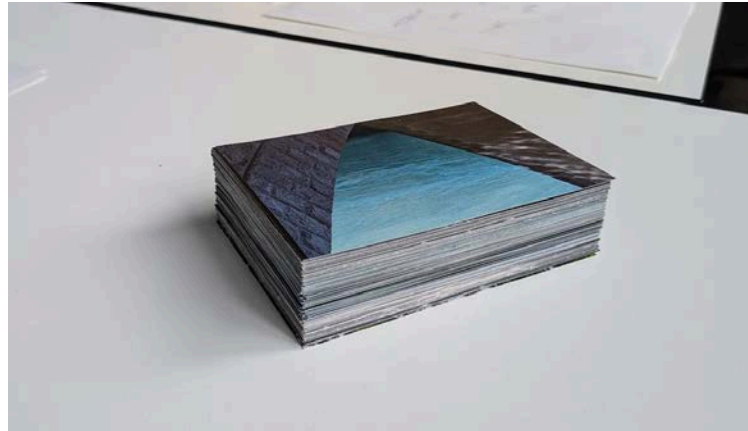
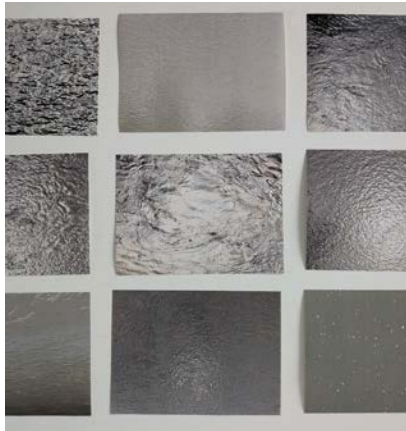


VIEW OF GENEVA FROM THE CONFLUENCE OF THE RHONE AND THE ARVE, ENGRAVED BY FRIEDRICH SALATHE (1793-1860), ORIGINAL BY JEAN DUBOIS

⁷ Sites et patrimoine : le barrage du Seujet | SIG, [online]. Retrieved from : <https://ww2.sig-ge.ch/en/node/99> [accessed 18 September 2025].

Talk about the landscape model while using La Jonction and paintings of this time to talk about the starting points of environmental aesthetics. Would then segue into the next chapter which is looking at photography and my own collection of images.

A Photographic Study of the Rhône and Arve Rivers



(Note, would like to take better photos of the photos, this is just place holder, or I may have the digital photo instead in the printed book. Also these are not all the photos I have either...Maybe also conduct a session with people interacting with the setup and seeing how they arrange photos and record what they say as another method of research)

Appreciating the rivers from a photographic perspective. We are a visual culture and a practice I feel comfortable with. Here I deconstruct the river into its components and rearrange them, viewing them from the perspective of the bridge. I attempt to break away from the philosophical problem of art being framed and nature being unframed.

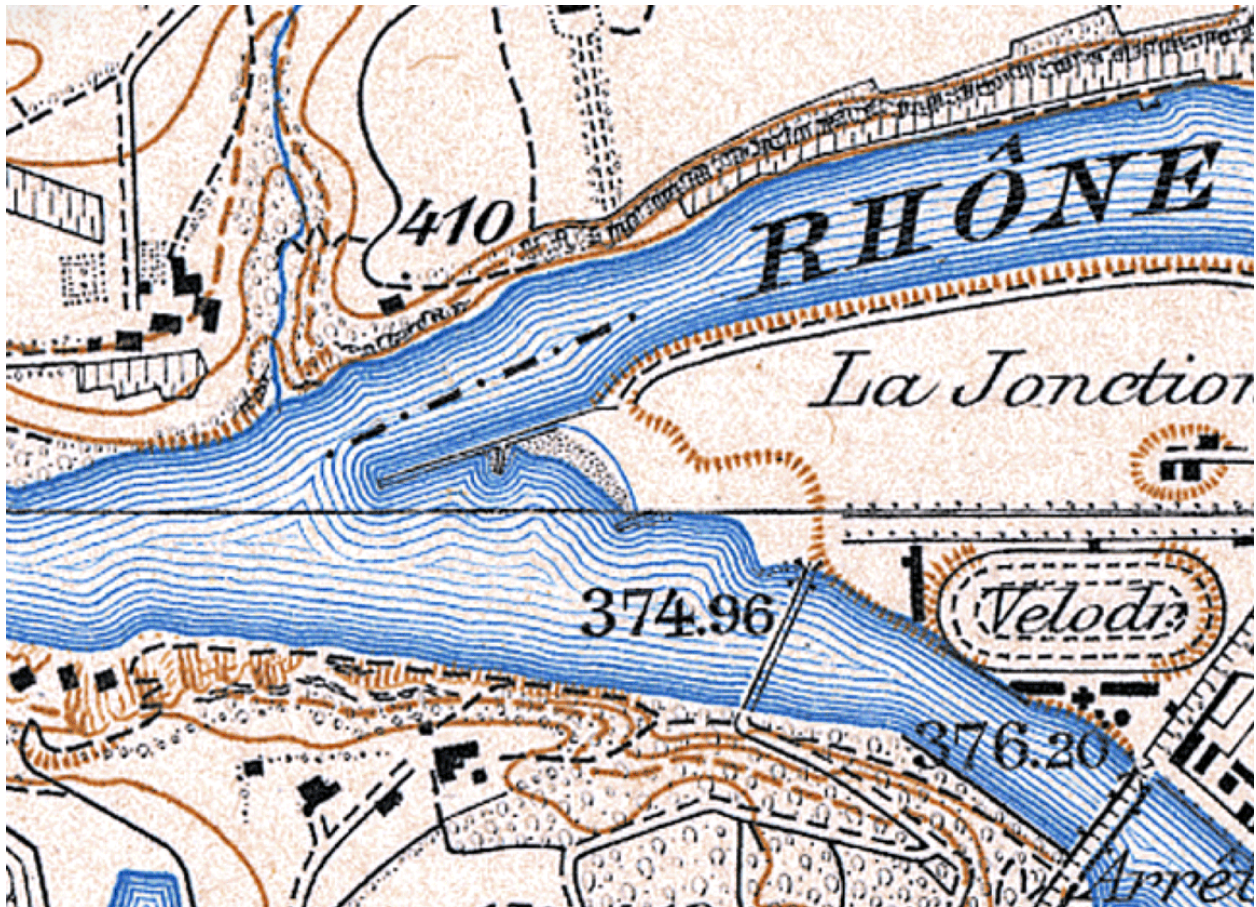
But of course, a photograph immediately frames nature. If painting is to look at the formal qualities through a landscape model, then photography can document and also play with time. With digital photography, it can document over a period of time without economic constraints. In this sense, a viewer can begin to notice changes in an environment over time, rather than just a snapshot. A criticism of this approach is that these photos are from a three-month period from March to June 2025, with most taken during times when the weather is ideal for being outside. So in this sense, I am still selecting, or framing, the times that I document.



With photography, it is also possible to capture aesthetic qualities of a river beyond what we can perceive with our eyes. Through long-exposure, we can get a sense of the flowing quality. And as with any long-exposure photography, it's about movement and light. In this example, the attempt is to capture the aesthetic quality of movement. In person, you get a sense of movement from the shimmering light on the waves but you do not see the continuous line. It is only apparent through photography. This is one aesthetic quality that cannot be experienced in person, but only through photography.

(will expand further).

Mapping La Jonction

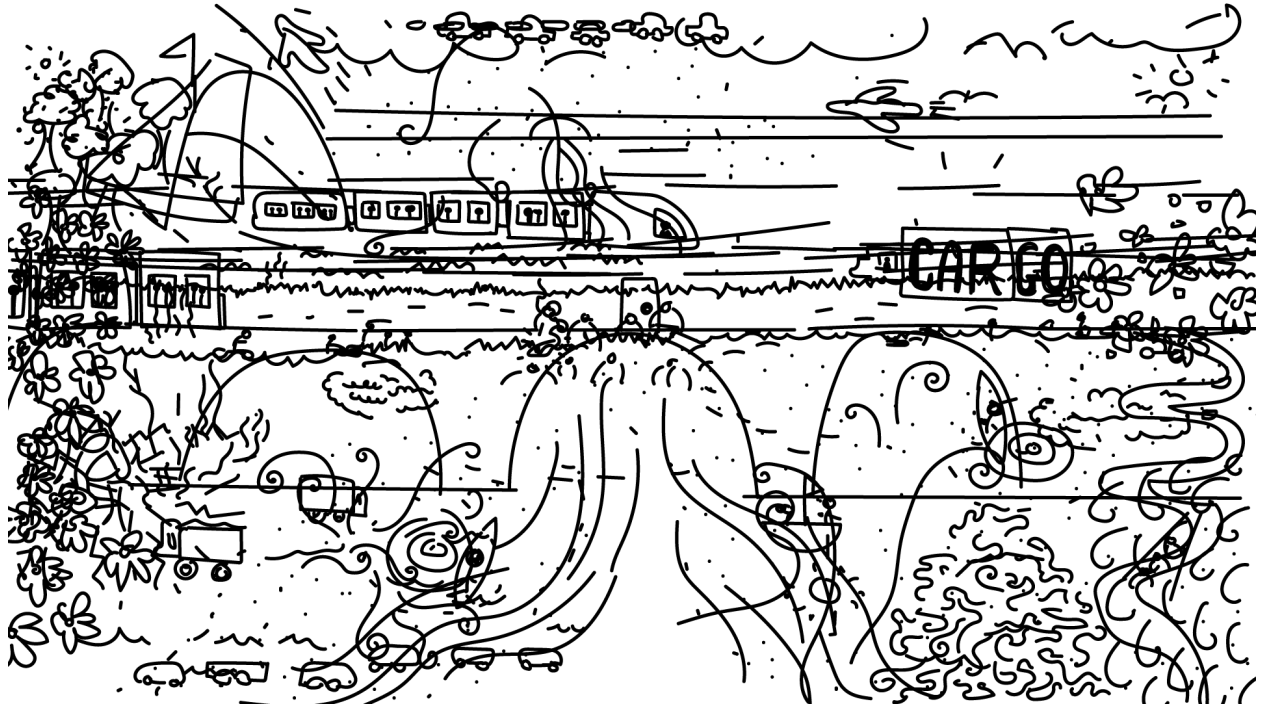


FROM GEO.ADMIN.CH

Making sense of an environment through mapping. This requires being in the space and being immersed. It's another way of understanding a place that goes beyond just the formal qualities because you can embody the location. And with this, it can lead to psychogeography, opposed to cartography.

In contrast to the satellite and cartographic maps, psychogeographic maps are personal and objectively incorrect. Instead, they try to capture the essence through the line drawings or compartmentalize the location into its individual components. This is my individual experience not just from this exercise, but from a culmination of going along this path on a daily basis.

Here can reference Nicolas Nova's observation exercise on psychogeography and Aesthetic Appreciation And The Many Stories About Nature by Thomas Heyd.



SOUND + LANDMARK + VEHICLES AND PEOPLE + ODOUR MAPS OF THE CONFLUENCE AREA

Giving Voice to Rivers

With sound, there's also the idea of a voice. Personifying/humanizing rivers and referencing Ronal Hepurn on his ideas of humanizing nature. Support with projects such as Natural Networks by Six:Thirty x Matteo Loglio and The Ecological Intelligence Agency by Superflux which uses a poetic tone for personifying the rivers.

Escaping Soundscapes

We've been disconnected from the natural world. By going inside, we have blocked out the sounds from nature and when we are in the city, we are going from Point A to Point B with a mission to arrive at our destination. We have technological devices to distract us and headphones to disconnect us from our fellow humans and more than human.

Field Recording Practice and Theoretical Framework for Appreciating Nature