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Landscapes of industrial excess: A thick sections approach to Gas Works Park

Thaïsa Way, University of Washington, Seattle, USA

Gas Works Park in Seattle, WA, designed by Richard Haag Associates and recently listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks, serves as one of the earliest post-industrial sites to be transformed into a public park through remediation and reclamation. The radical nature of the park lies in its adaptive reuse of waste landscapes, not merely ameliorating contaminated land but transforming it to serve the public. Although officials and residents called for the remains of the industrial plant to be removed, Haag convinced the public to retain elements of the industrial apparatus and, more importantly, to retain and treat the polluted soils. Previous scholarship focuses primarily on the architectural elements, leaving the landscape as mere setting. This article proposes a site narrative as read through the landform. It suggests an alternative reading that gives voice to the site's toxic history.

Gas Works Park / polluted landscapes / post-industrial landscape /
Richard Haag / thick sections

Recycling urban excess is not a new practice. The reuse of one generation's materials and forms into alternative resources and forms is at the core of two millennia of urban development. However, with industrialism new excess arose, as the wastes of production were spread across the landscape. Initially cities buried, relocated or disregarded such excesses, as they seemed only to suggest the worst of progress and civilization. At the end of the twentieth century we experienced a positional turn—to consider the wastes of production as a part of our urban landscape rather than something to be made invisible. This is not to say that we celebrate toxicity, but rather that we engage the inherent signification of the products and alter relationships to urban industrial histories.

Gas Works Park in Seattle, designed by Richard Haag Associates, was an early model of a post-industrial landscape transformed into a public park (Fig. 1). The radical nature lies in its adaptive reuse of waste landscapes, not merely ameliorating contaminated land but transforming it to serve the public. Although officials and citizens called for the remains of the industrial plant to be removed, Haag Associates [1] convinced the public to retain elements of the industrial apparatus and, most importantly, to retain and clean the polluted soil. Nonetheless, scholarship focuses primarily on the architectural ruins. This article proposes a narrative as read through the land in conjunction with that of the structures. It seeks to give voice to the disturbed site history, framing it as both a ruin and a place-maker in a new paradigm of practice (Fig. 2, 3). [2]

A history of addressing degraded landscapes has generally been one of making wastes invisible. Urban landfills have been re-covered to provide what is euphemistically called open space. The sites are covered over to become new sites as in 1936 when New York City covered its Corona landfill to create the 1939 World's Fair. The landscapes were transformed by concealing the industrial history and the embedded realities. Similar processes of transformation occur on quarries, mines, industrial sites and other wastelands. Such sites are presented as re-enacted nature, the reclamation of a once-disturbed site, as if one can remove human interference and the consequent damage disappears like magic. The public is offered a place covered in a new skin hiding the hideous history. The disturbed site is metaphorically and literally concealed by a pastoral landscape. [3]

NAME OF THE
OPERATION
Gas Works Park

LOCATION
Seattle, Washington, USA

CONTRACTING
AUTHORITY
(COMMISSIONING
AGENCY)
Seattle Parks Department
and City of Seattle

PRIME CONTRACTOR
(DESIGNER)
Richard Haag Associates,
Seattle, WA, USA

DATES OF STUDY
Project dates 1969–1976,
with continued consul-
tation

DATES OF
CONSTRUCTION
1971–1976,
some work ongoing

SURFACE AREA
8.3 ha projecting 122 m²
into Lake Union with
579 m² of shoreline

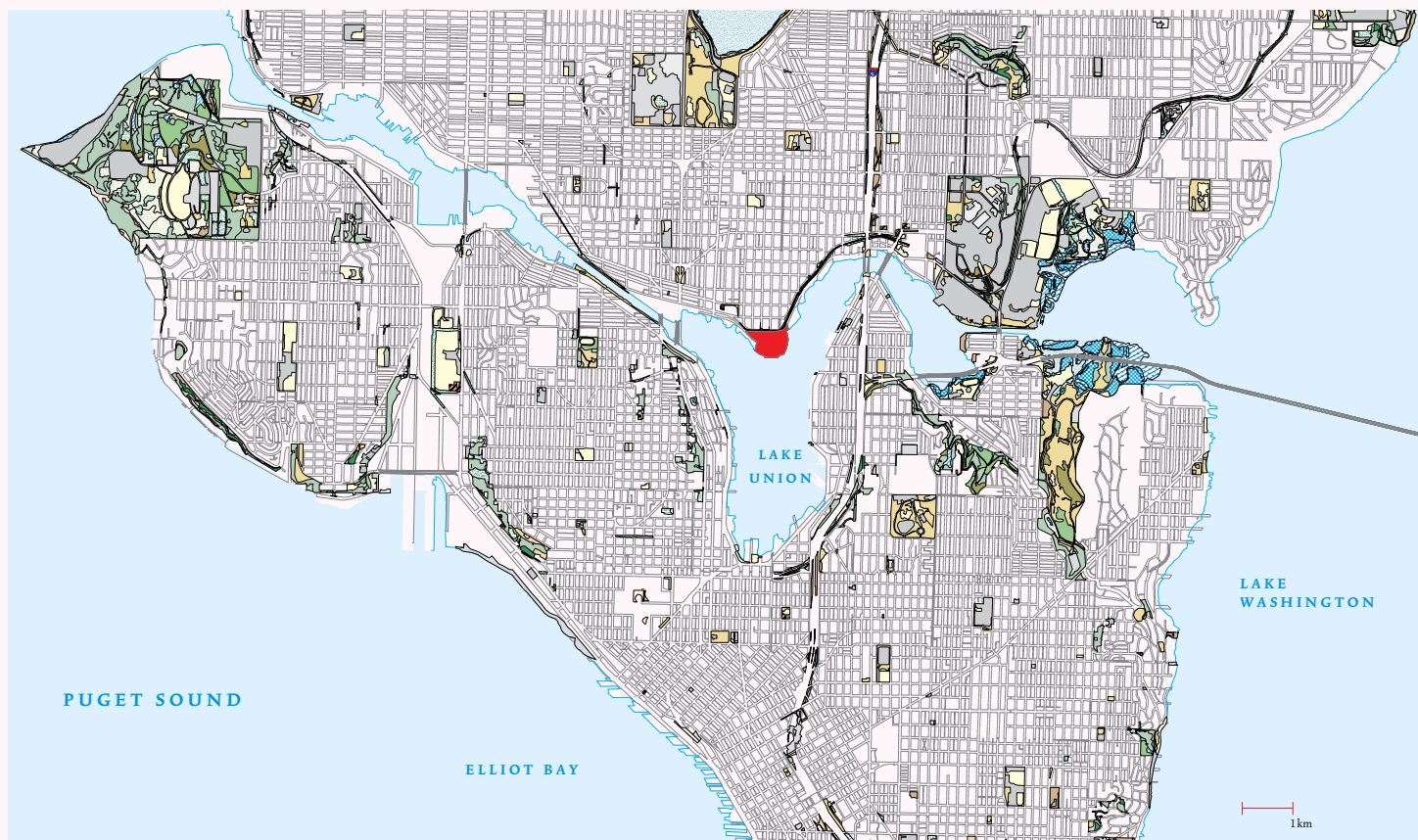


Figure 1 Seattle with Gas Works Park on the northern shore of Lake Union

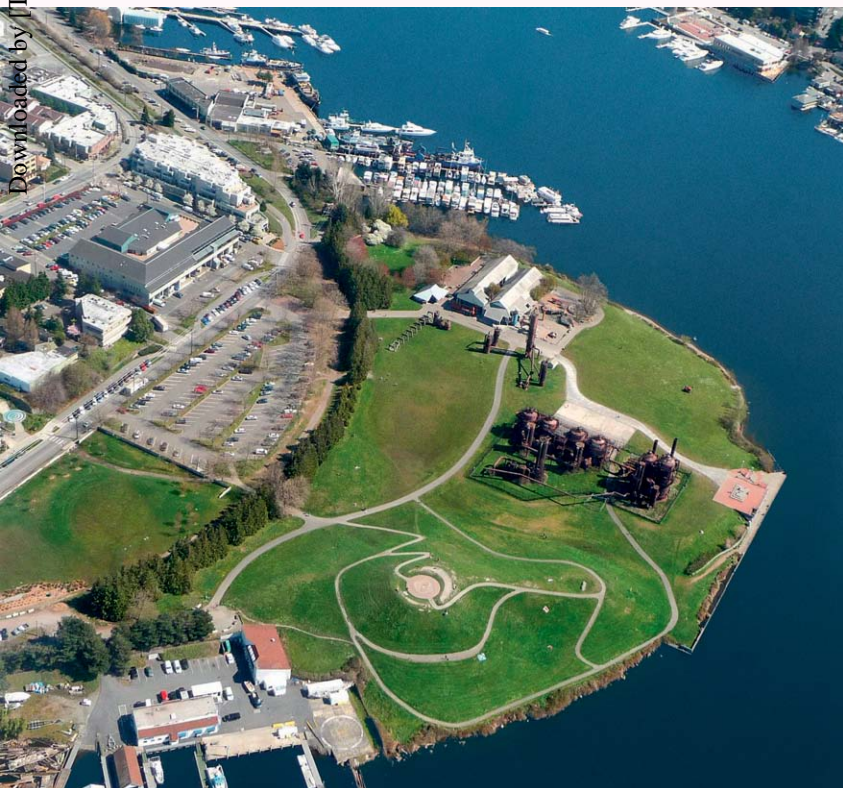


Figure 2 View of Gas Works Park, northern shore of Lake Union, centre of Seattle, WA



Figure 3 The Great Mound or Kite Hill with Seattle skyline in the distance

However, this has not been a uniform practice and alternatives can be identified in the nineteenth century. A significant project is Jean-Charles Alphand's Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, completed in 1867. Alphand transformed a significant refuse dump and former quarry into a public landscape, one in which the park experience engages with its historic narratives—geological, cultural and industrial. As noted in the work of Ann Komara and Elizabeth Meyer, the new topography and its construction offered a new type of landscape experience. [4] Sited in an industrial area of northeast Paris, the construction engaged cutting-edge technologies and practices expressing the modern nature of the site alongside its industrial character. The relationship between the former disturbances of the site and its transformation could be explicitly observed from the panoramic viewpoint where 'the visitor could ... see an industrial landscape of train yards, factories, and slaughterhouses beyond the borders of the park that stood in direct contrast to the park's tightly orchestrated picturesque experience. This industrialized physical context became a counterpoint to Alphand's representation of nature and heightened the visitor's understanding of the dialogue between the two realms' (Komara 2004: 10). Thus while the industrial nature of the site was re-interpreted through a picturesque lens, the history of the site remained present.

A second important project is the Back Bay Fens landscape as completed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Elliott in Boston, MA, in the 1880s. In this project a saltwater marshland became polluted as it filled with sewage from the growing settlements. Olmsted and Elliott were commissioned to address the health issues as well as the unsightly scenery created by the polluted waters; the project became a benchmark for land reclamation. Bringing science and engineering together with design, they transformed a foul-smelling tidal creek and swamp into a winding creek and wetland that served as a place of pleasure and recreation until dammed decades later. [5] The design and its engineering turned a disturbed site into a new kind of park—a place where ecological processes were nurtured while social access was made possible. The project is a remarkable precedent for current interest in reconstructed wetlands and stormwater management.

A third significant framework for the Gas Works Park are the creations of Brenda Colvin and Sylvia Crowe working with landscapes of power and industry in the United Kingdom. Crowe's designs for immense sites, including industries of power such as the Trawsfynydd Power Station, reframed the scope of landscape architecture in terms of scale and the relationship between engineering and design. [6] Colvin's designs for Gale Common, Yorkshire, opened the questions of reclamation and remediation. [7] These projects reflected a growing contemporary interest in and concern for environmental health. The work by Colvin, Crowe and, subsequently, Haag draws on the increasing understanding of the links between industry, pollution and health.

The design and construction of Gas Works Park reveals the complexity of the project's narratives, not just within Seattle, but also within the larger practice of landscape architecture. In this framework, Haag's design proposes that where the history of a site is disturbing, where the reality of the site analysis suggests human vulnerability and a tenuous relationship with natural processes, one should engage in complex narratives of place. One should not ignore the realities of the site, nor should one remove the disturbance to another site in some vain attempt to create a *tabula rasa*, but, rather, one should address the challenges on site and in situ. Haag advocated for engaging the complexities of the existing landscape and learning from its history as well as its potential futures. Finally his work demonstrates how a site might be read at multiple scales, from the local to the regional—and finally the global—emphasizing the potential power of landscape narratives.

To begin, one lifts up the skin of such a disturbed site to read what is below. For this purpose, the phrase 'thick descriptions' has been translated as 'thick sections', acknowledging the complex layers of history revealed in section, one of the landscape architect's tools for site analysis. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz suggests, 'The shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements' (Geertz 1973: 4). To identify and explore the complex relationships of a place, or an event embedded in a time and place, requires moving away from 'thin descriptions', toward 'thick descriptions', that engage a 'multiplicity of complex conceptual stories, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, inexplicit' (Geertz 1973: 10). A thick section draws on the work to develop a visual study of thick descriptions; thick sections suggest that the surface is merely that which is at the top of a rich history of morphologies, natural and human. This thick section is not easy to draw anymore than Geertz's thick descriptions were easy to write; however, through the act of simultaneously drawing and writing one can describe a place's thick history in a more dynamic manner.

Gas Works Park in Seattle was the first post-industrial landscape to be transformed into public space without requiring the removal of its pollutants and waste to a landfill. The park was opened to the public in stages between 1973 and 1976. It includes 20.5 acres projecting 400 feet into Lake Union with 1,900 feet of shoreline. The narrative of the park lies in its development of the idea of adaptive reuse of degraded landscape as public space, not merely ameliorating polluted land but transforming the place to serve the public. Although Seattle leaders, advocates and citizens initially demanded that the remains of the industrial plant be removed to a landfill so an Olmstedian park could be created on the site, Haag Associates convinced the community to retain elements of the industrial apparatus and, most important, to allow them to experiment with the emerging science of

bioremediation. Haag embraced the industrial ruins and translated their presence into defining features of the park, thereby offering an alternative reading of Seattle's industrial past, not one to be forgotten but to be remembered and respected. The gas towers suggest a history of Seattle focused not only on the natural resources of mountains, forests and water, but also on urban industrial ventures of previous eras. By inviting the public into the landscape of industry, Haag suggested this was a past they might find engaging and beautiful. The towers remained as rusted icons to a new way of conceiving post-industrial excesses as potential places of public engagement, recreation, contemplation and learning (Fig. 4).

Gas Works Park is also the story of its designer, Richard Haag. Haag (b. 1923) grew up on a Kentucky landscape, son of a nurseryman and farmer. After serving in the Second World War, he attended the University of Illinois; the University of California, Berkeley; and Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. Awarded a Fulbright Scholar fellowship to study in Kyoto in 1954, Haag was one of the first scholars to study in Japan after the war. In 1958 Haag joined the Department of Architecture at the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle to establish the Landscape Architecture programme. He had a legendary hold on students including Laurie Olin, Grant Jones, Robert Hanna and Jerry Diethelm, as well as later students Jennifer Guthrie and Shannon Nichol of Gustafson Guthrie Nichol. [8] Others joined Haag's firm as young designers including Frank James and Donald Sakuma. His students practice around the globe.

In a career lasting over six decades, Haag reshaped landscape architecture as a designer, a teacher and an activist. His engagement with scientists in his experimentations with landscape remediation and reclamation opened new areas of inquiry into the adaptive reuse of post-industrial sites. His project for Gas Works Park is described in every survey of twentieth-century landscape architecture. Haag is recognized as an Honorary Member of the American Institute of Architects (1981), and in 1983 he was elected a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). He is the only person to have received two ASLA Presidential Awards for Design Excellence, the first awarded for Gas Works Park in 1981, followed by a second in 1986 for the series of gardens at Bloedel Reserve. Haag received the ASLA Medal in 2003 'which is the highest honor the ASLA may bestow upon a landscape architect whose lifetime achievements and contribution to the profession have had a unique and lasting impact on the welfare of the public and the environment' (ASLA 2013).

When Haag arrived in Seattle, the gas works facility had been closed for only two years. The promontory that Native Americans once considered sacred, was littered with the detritus of industry; not a blade of grass remained. Once marshes had provided access to fishing and hunting, now they lay apparently dead. This despite the recommendation of John C. Olmsted (of the Olmsted Brothers firm) who upon

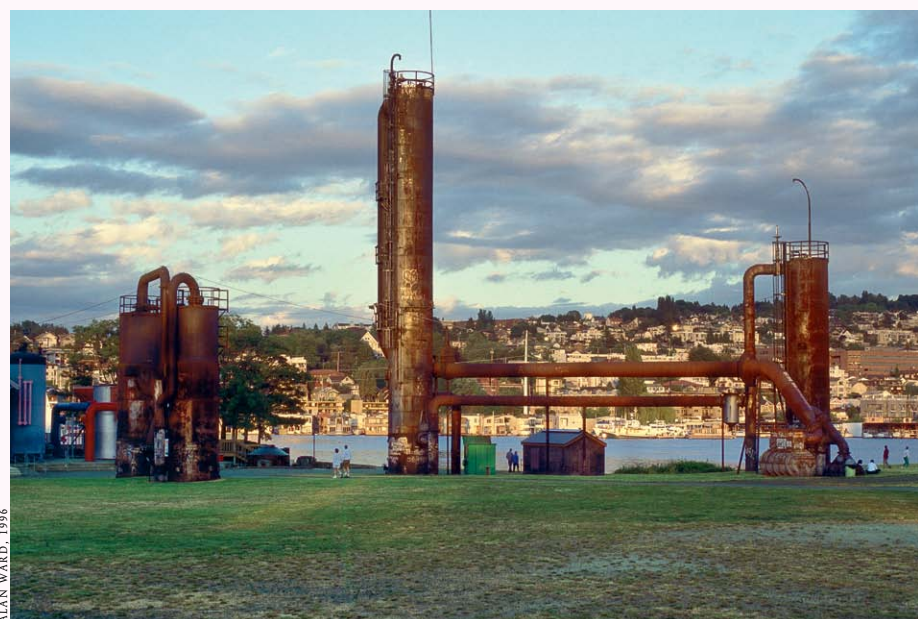


Figure 4 Gas works towers with Capitol Hill in the distance, Seattle, WA



Figure 5 View of gas works industry from Lake Union, 1910

noting the site's use as a landfill, wrote in his 1903 report to the city of Seattle that 'the point of land ... should be secured as a local park, because of its advantages for commanding views over the lake and for boating, and for a playground.' (Olmsted 1903: 47). Nevertheless, within three years of Olmsted's assessment the Seattle Gas Light Company purchased the land to build a plant to convert coal and oil into gas. [9] A tar refinery soon operated at the site, refining materials obtained as a by-product of the gas manufacturing process, and producing coal tar-based products (Fig. 5). Operations ceased in 1956 when the products were no longer needed and natural gas had been introduced. In 1962 with public support, the city of Seattle began the decade-long process of purchasing the site for an undetermined function.



Figure 6 Towers and ground of gas works prior to reclamation

Many in Seattle found the site of the gas works a blemish on the city; a vivid reminder of the disregard for the natural environment that was at the heart of the city's success (logging, quarries, fishing and so forth). In 1959 a resident noted in a letter to the *Seattle Times* editor 'With all the rush to beautify our city before the Century 21 Exposition ... a large black eyesore has been overlooked: The abandoned gas works ... stands out—a huge blot on an otherwise interesting and beautiful waterway' (Kinslow 1959). The first and most general response was to clear the land, to wipe away all evidence of this history and to create the park that most thought should have been there from the start. The concept of an industrial palimpsest seemed out of reach (Fig. 6). As early as 1946, however, artists and others dreamed of what the place might become. Painters, poets and intellectuals described the black towers as dramatically sited on the promontory of Lake Union, suggesting a significant city landmark. [10] Their perspective would frame how Haag presented his ideas to the public and to the city—as a work of artistic merit.

On arriving in Seattle, Haag was drawn almost immediately to the somber black towers, situated on the promontory surrounded on three sides by water with the Olympic Mountains visible in the distance. This piece of land served as a dramatic visual reminder of an industrial past just ended. Haag led a design studio in 1961 at the UW and then, in 1963, a national student design competition in hopes of identifying an alternative approach to the site, one that might engage with its industrial history. To his frustration, of 130 student submissions, not a single proposal retained any of the structures or elements. Each submission proposed depositing the polluted soil in landfills to create a park in the tra-

dition of Central Park. A tabula rasa seemed the only option for this site of industrial waste and ruins. It would take another decade for Haag to turn the process around and construct Gas Works Park as a post-industrial landscape of remediation and reclamation.

The well-known story of how Haag led the design effort generally focuses on two facets of development: the decision to retain elements of the industrial structures and the role of the public in the design of the park. Missing from these narratives are three important histories that are critical to how the park is experienced today. The first story relates how Haag successfully changed the opinions of Seattle's residents and leaders; the second is Haag's interest in experimenting with bioremediation methods for reclaiming the polluted soils and water; and the third story explores the landform as both an art medium and a form of storytelling.

Narrative 1: process of persuasion

First and foremost Haag's intention was to coax the public into seeing the potential of re-thinking the possibilities of the site, essentially asking the public to develop new eyes for old. This was an approach Haag had adopted from Stanley White, his teacher and mentor at the University of Illinois, a process that was meant to help one realize alternative solutions to what might seem insurmountable problems. However Haag's suggestion was not merely any new eyes or views or ideas about the park, but rather the strength of his eyes, view and ideas. Haag's process of persuasion was not one that invited community participation per se, as Randy Hester and others have claimed. Rather, Haag retained a foundational belief in the role of the landscape architect as the primary artist and designer. The intent of his public outreach was to persuade concerned individuals and groups that his design concept met the shared goal of a beautiful public park



Figure 7 Gas works barn and machinery with original mural under ceiling truss

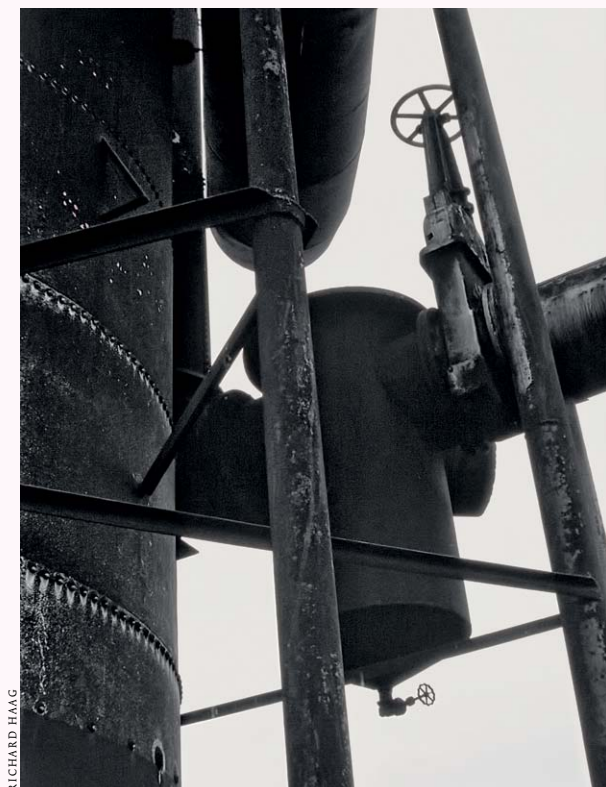


Figure 8 Tower structure photographed to emphasize its aesthetic nature. It can be viewed as industrial art.

on the stunning location of the gas works location, but in a new language of post-industrial ruins. He did not design in response to the community, but rather he convinced them of the power of his design. And this design was based in the belief that the retention of the rusted industrial structures would be an asset, an artistic contribution to Seattle, and would serve to shape a new kind of urban public park.

In 1969, after he was retained by the Seattle Park Board to develop a master plan for a new park, Haag set up an on-site office in one of the abandoned blacksmith shops to, in his words, 'make love to the site' (Way 2009-12). This simple move of positioning himself within the polluted landscape became evidence of his belief in the site's potential, indicating the site was not all one might see on the surface. Adrian Zeigler, a philosophy professor at the UW, suggested he invite city residents and leaders to join him on the site, to tour them through the site. Haag did just that, offering to meet with anyone who would listen, anyone who could get 'three people together'. He connected with community groups from floating-boat residents to school groups, from kite enthusiasts to Seattle's business leaders (Way 2009-12). His first successes were when his invitations were accepted and he could personally win over another visitor to the site.

Once Haag had a captured audience on the site, he would listen to their programme ideas, what activities they thought were important to include in the new park. Asking each group what they imagined the park might offer, he drew the ideas on his plans to demonstrate how their ideas for museums, playgrounds and such could be integrated with the artifacts already a part of the site. While the community sug-



Figure 9 Gas towers cast a long shadow over new topography.

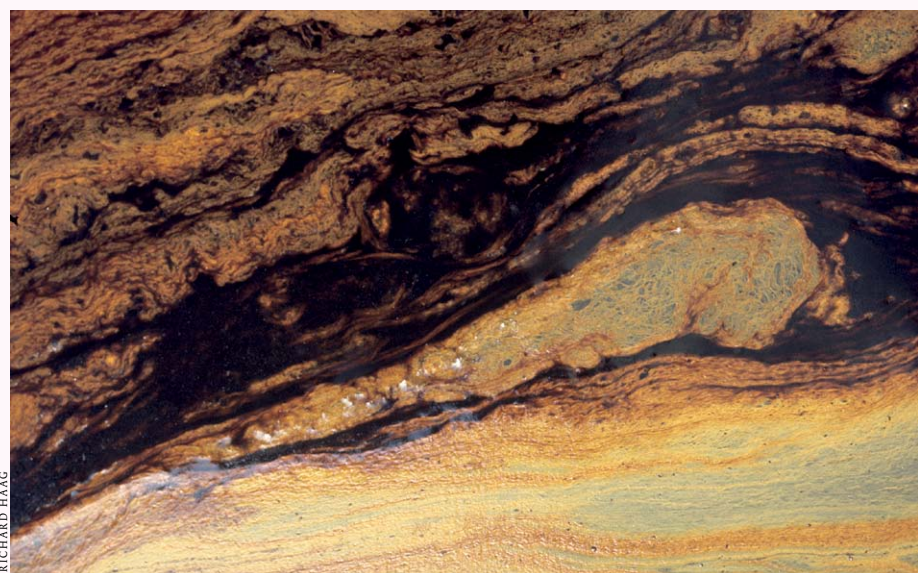


Figure 10 Oil film on pool of water, gas works site. Even disturbance can be seen with new eyes.

gested programmes and these ideas were sometimes adopted into the schematic plans, Haag designed the site to highlight the preservation of the plant's structural elements, emphasizing their 'historic, esthetic and utilitarian value' (Haag 1971). He reminded his audiences that these structures were responsible for much of Seattle's successful growth as a city in the first half of the twentieth century. The power plant had allowed Seattle to prosper and expand. Its demise was a matter of time and technology, and yet by retaining the structures, that history could remain a part of the local memory. This argument was clearly tangible in the final decision to retain the barns and their machinery. Over time, many community members began to see a wider potential for the park and became less concerned with realizing their own visions, adopting Haag's vision for the park. Today the brightly painted machines remain, inspiring the imagination and prompting questions about their former uses and, thus, the longer history of the site (Fig. 7).

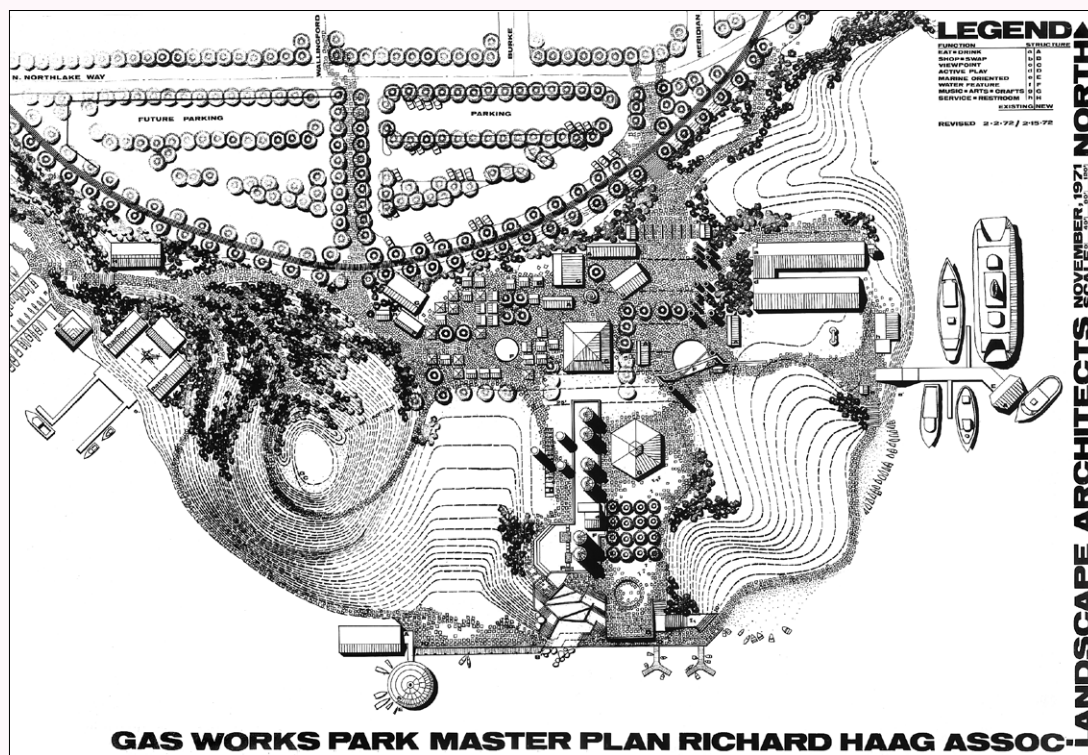


Figure 11 Approved master plan, Gas Works Park, 1971. Not all elements of the design have been constructed.

However, more important than the verbal argument was Haag's visual argument made by means of slide shows. He collected photographs and sketches of the site's structures and artifacts—not merely to document—but to suggest that an inherent beauty existed in these elements. The towers against the skyline suggested the evocative beauty of grain elevators and other industrial or utilitarian architecture. They can be seen as art in the details (Fig. 8) and as compositions (Fig. 9). Haag juxtaposed these images with works of contemporary sculpture. How might the works of Jean Tinguely's *Métamatic* sculptures, created between 1955 and 1959 and modeled to resemble the aesthetics of the Industrial Revolution, suggest a new way of seeing that might be applied to the towers and structures of the Seattle plant? Similar to works of contemporary art, the gas works artifacts in situ might serve as a modern sculpture park. Haag offered his photographs of tar spills and oil slicks next to the seemingly dead ground, suggesting that these, too, might be seen in a different light (Way 2009–12). Here navigation through argument does not suggest that oil slicks would remain or tar spills be featured, but rather the existing landscape as a whole could be re-imagined as having artistic value (Fig. 10).

After intense public appeal, Haag's master plan was unanimously approved in 1971 by the Seattle City Council (Fig. 11). The Council had come to see potential in the disturbed site and in a new type of site history. Writing in the *New York Times*, Paul Goldberger said it was one of the:

... nation's most advanced pieces of urban landscape design. The complex array of towers, tanks and pipes of the gas works forms a powerful industrial still life ... serving ... as a monument to the city's industrial past. The park represents a complete reversal from a period when industrial monuments

were regarded, even by preservationists, as ugly intrusions on the landscape, to a time when such structures as the gas works are recognized for their potential ability to enhance the urban experience. (1975)

The original structures qualify as industrial archaeology and are the last remaining examples of this gas works technology in the US. That the public was swayed by Haag's arguments, as well as those of colleagues Laurie Olin, Victor Steinbrueck and Fred Bassetti, is important but does not constitute community participation as understood in practice today. Haag's was a process of persuasion and conversion.

Narrative 2: experimental methods of on-site/bioremediation

While the official master plan focused on recycling the structural artifacts, equally important was the proposal to conserve the soil and treat the toxins in situ. In fact, this was Haag's most radical idea. The site was clearly polluted; industrial processes had saturated the ground with tar and aromatic hydrocarbons. Industrial waste deposits as thick as nine feet spread across the park over Vashon till of glacial origin. In Haag's words, the site was 'a composition of rubble-fill capped by a 50-foot high mound of sub-soils filled with industrial afterbirth: oil, tar and so-called "exotic toxicants"'. Erratic ground water tables caused layers of oil-filmed water to perch within two feet of the ground surface' (Trivison & Heitsch 1988: 4). Richard Brooks, a former engineer at Boeing, had joined Haag's team of advocates for the new park and he introduced Haag to Willis Lebo, a farmer, businessman and inventor who had extensive experience selling fer-



Figure 12 Haag's employees look over newly delivered sawdust and organic matter that will be incorporated with contaminated soil.

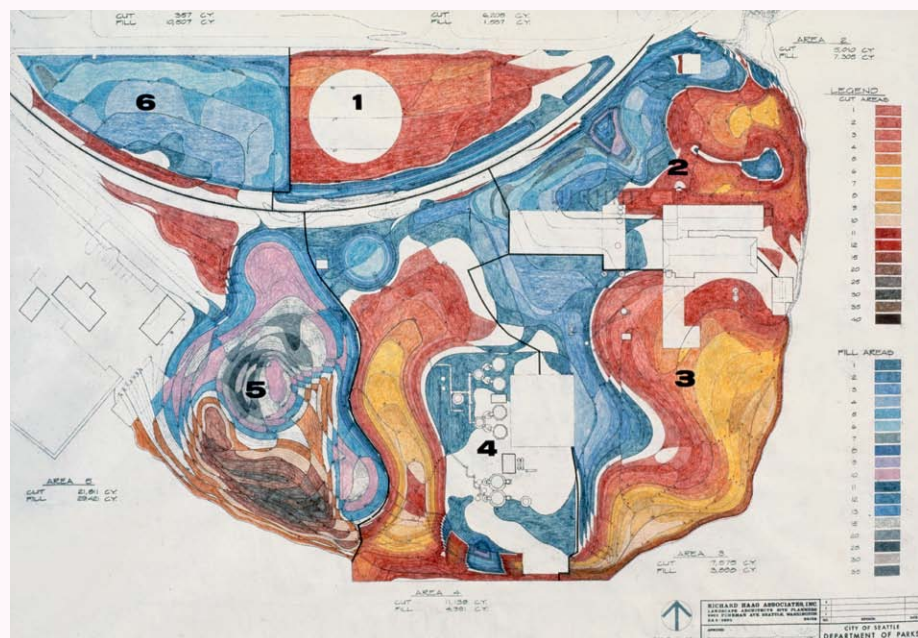


Figure 13 Richard Haag, grading and drainage plan, Gas Works Park

tilizers and technology to farmers in the region. Lebo told Haag and Brooks to mix the soil, introducing oxygen below the surface, since an anaerobic (no oxygen) condition existed. He described how bacteria would digest the hydrocarbon molecules that permeated the soil. 'We need to till the soil to bring sunlight to it and oxygen to it. And if we want, we should put down some compost, and till that in' (Rozdilsky 1991: 84). Together the three prepared demonstration plots in the most contaminated soils and Haag directed the bulldozers to break through the surface, mixing the soil with water and air. They added sewage sludge, biomass, leaf litter and a free fly ash from a cement factory for the acidic areas (Fig. 11). By the end of the first year, 18 inches of sewage sludge and sawdust had been added. According to Brooks, after 'allowing the bacteria to work for a few months, the treated soil germinated rye grass where none would sprout before. Even the oil lake succumbed to this treatment in an amazingly short time' (Rozdilsky 1991: 84). Haag took a sample of the soil to the greenhouse to use as a planting medium. It worked. Soil that had not hosted any vegetation in decades had in one summer become fertile.

Successfully demonstrating bioremediation, Haag created a design for the entire site though not all of the site could be remediated by the simple process. Thus Haag set aside the most polluted soil, and the construction rubble that could not be recycled, placing it into a large pile to form the base of the Great Mound or Kite Hill (Fig. 13). This most perfect cone was then capped with 18 inches of hard-packed clay. With a steeply graded surface area, rainwater flowed at a faster rate, successfully avoiding permeation of clay and the disturbed material below its surface. A topography of rolling hills and valleys was designed for the remainder of the site to nurture

the dynamic process of breaking down the pollutants. Hills keep stormwater flowing, while in the valleys where water is allowed to permeate, that process lifts the hydrocarbons into the active bacterial bio-zone. In this way rainwater engages in the process of cleansing the soil, resulting in a system that constantly revives itself.

Haag's proposal did not merely preserve the architecture, but also the soil, water and waste. Through bioremediation techniques, the site was cleaned and greened, and became once again culturally and biologically productive. In 1974 newspapers reported tomatoes growing from seed in the sludge. The tomatoes were tested and found as healthy as any grown in the city.[13] With national coverage, the Gas Works Park story developed into a global narrative, one that eventually opened doors to projects such as Latz + Partners's Duisburg Nord in Germany and, more recently, the work of Kongjian Yu and Turenscape's Houtan Park in Shanghai, China.

Narrative 3: landform as art medium/storytelling

A third narrative of the site is regional; defined by the landforms that shape the physical and aesthetic experience of the place. Seattle is a city of hills and valleys, its history often dominated by its topography. This has been a blessing and a curse. The hills offer iconic views and vistas of the mountains and water. During the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition of 1909, Seattle's claim to fame was its location in the midst of nature with panoramic mountain views. Nonetheless, the mountains also made travel difficult, road building complicated, and some sites prone to landslides. City lead-

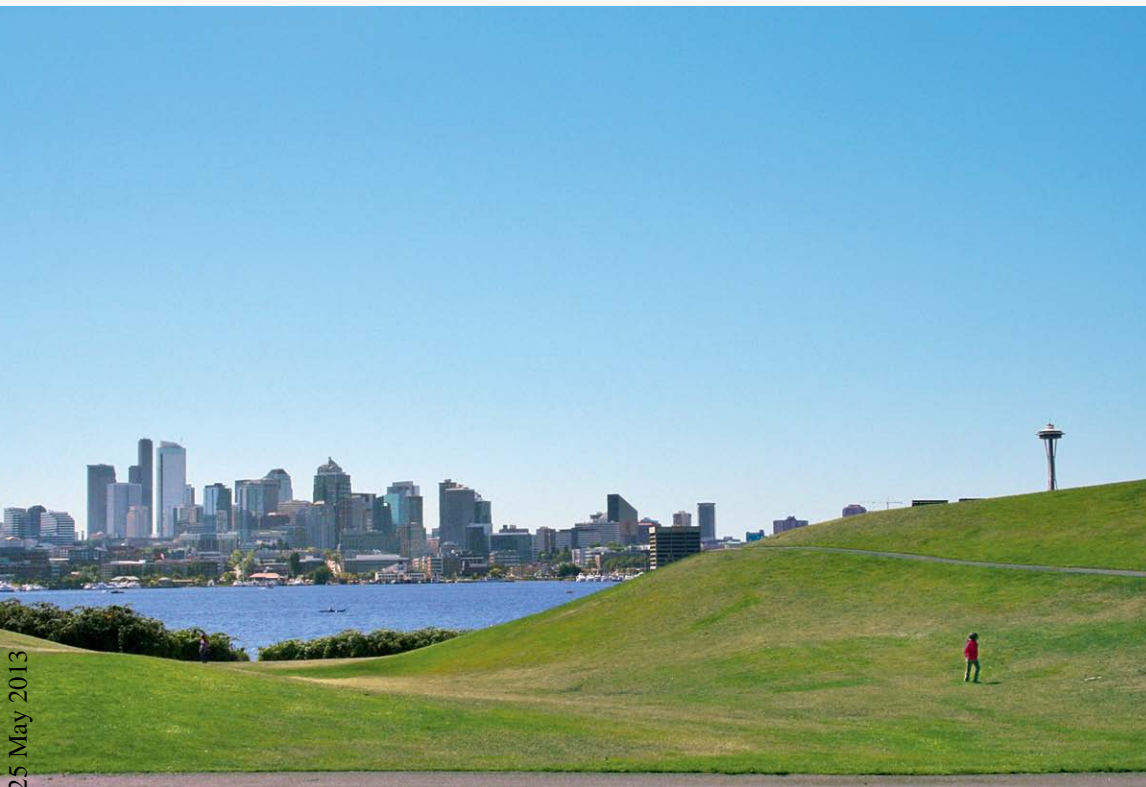


Figure 14 View of Seattle skyline framed by gas works land forms; left: towers; right: Great Mound

ers struggled to level the land, starting with engineer Reginald H. Thomson who, at the turn of the nineteenth century, re-engineered much of Seattle's topography. Recalling this history of land forming, Haag re-shaped the promontory to serve as a microcosm of Seattle. He created hills where there had been flatness, and valleys where there had been marshes. Where others leveled the land, Haag honoured the region's native topography. The result? A topographically complex landscape.

With the forest behind, water ahead, and a landscape of hills and mountains framing a vista of the city and its culture, Gas Works Park today replicates Seattle's topographic history at a smaller scale (Fig. 14). Climbing the Great Mound or Kite Hill by means of a spiraling path offers a view across the water to the urban setting, the bowl to the Space Needle and, finally, nearby Ballard's fishing industry. These are the histories of Seattle: the settling of a city in the hilly landscape, the struggle to level the city site, the aspirations of the twentieth century and the industries of gas and fishing, as well as logging and high technology. Haag moulded the landforms to carry water and to serve the community, to perform as part of natural and cultural processes.

A final narrative of Gas Works Park might be how the various stories are woven together to create thick sections (Figs. 15 & 16). The park's design engages Seattle's most characteristic icons—the water and coastline, trees and forests, the hills and mountains—except in this particular reading, they are not simply land elements, but are imbued with memories. The towers testify to the industrial past, its scale, its presence and its traces (Meyer 1998). As they rust, they recall the decay that is a part of the process of aging. The Great Mound, cloaked in what first appears as innocuous green lawn, contains the site's worst toxic residues. From the top one sees all that Seattle has been. At the northern edge where the city meets the park, tall cedar trees form the threshold of the park while demarcating the edge of polluted soils. On one side of the threshold is the park, a landscape that is in the process of being reclaimed and remediated where trees cannot yet grow; on the other side is the neighbourhood of Wallingford, a thriving community of environmental activists and stewards of the planet where trees shade almost every street. It is the culmination of all of these narratives that makes Gas Works Park the dynamic green space one finds today. Clearly this place is not intended to replicate an Olmstedian respite from the city, rather it offers a means to en-



Figure 15 Tera Hatfield's investigation of thick section, Gas Works Park, focuses on ecological and cultural histories and narratives.

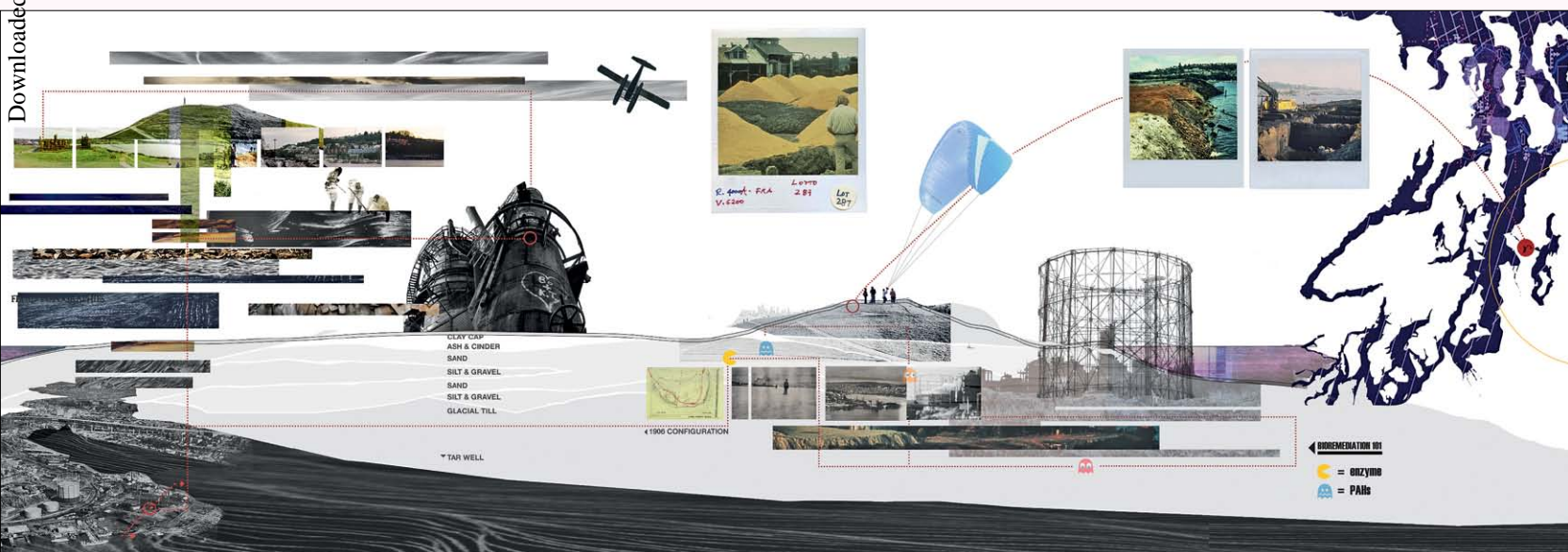


Figure 16 TeraHatfield's investigation of thick section, Gas Works Park, focuses on industrial and urban histories and narratives.



Figure 17 Golden grasses sweep across landscape in late summer.

gage the dual character of Seattle as urban and natural (Fig. 17). In the thick section, the mound of soil is anything but a pastoral scene. It is a sublime reminder of the past. [12] The rolling topography serves as a container of memories. This is not a park bounded by trees in order to escape the chaos of the urban, instead it offers a means to engage the dual character of Seattle as urban and natural, as a city in nature.

By considering the landscape as embodied history, designers might better understand post-industrial landscape architecture grounded not only in the artifacts of previous times, but also in the land that comprises site. The idea of the thick section helps one to visualize how the complex layers and narratives relate to one another. For the post-industrial landscape, the ability to better understand what is below the surface allows one to re-imagine the site's future. And such post-industrial sites, while they are just one type of site, are increasingly the most prolific and the most challenging of our urban landscapes. The thick descriptions of Gas Works Park expose the challenges of designing places over time, translating cultural developments over generations and revealing the multiple stories of all landscapes.

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Notes

1 While efforts were always collective, I refer to Richard Haag as the leader and reference his work specifically. Others included Laurie Olin, Kenichi Nakano and Victor Steinbrueck.

2 Elizabeth K. Meyer, 'Uncertain Parks: Disturbed Sites, Citizens, and Risk Society', in J. Czerniak and G. Hargreaves (eds.), *Large Parks* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), pp. 59–85.

3 Ibid.

4 Ann Komara, 'Concrete and the Engineered Picturesque: The Parc Des Buttes Chaumont (Paris, 1867)', *Journal of Architectural Education* 58/1: 5–12; Elizabeth K. Meyer, 'The Public Park as Avant-Garde (Landscape) Architecture: A Comparative Interpretation of Two Parisian Parks, Parc De La Villette (1983–1990) and Parc Des Buttes-Chaumont (1864–1867)', *Landscape Journal* 10/1: 16–26.

5 Catherine Howett, 'Ecological Values in Twentieth-Century Landscape Design: A History and Hermeneutics', *Landscape Journal* 17/2: 80–98; Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1982).

6 Sylvia Crowe, *Tomorrow's Landscape* (London: Architectural Press, 1956); Sylvia Crowe, *The Landscape of Power* (London: Architectural Press, 1958).

7 Brenda Colvin, *Land and Landscape*, 1st ed. (London: J. Murray, 1948); Trish Gibson, *Brenda Colvin: A Career in Landscape* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2011).

8 Gary R. Hilderbrand, 'A Teacher's Teacher', in W. S. Saunders, (ed.), *Richard Haag: Bloedel Reserve and Gas Works Park* (New York, Cambridge, MA: Princeton Architectural Press in association with Harvard GSD, 1998).

9 Seattle Municipal Plans Commission, Seattle 1911. The 1911 Seattle Municipal Plans Commission noted: 'The fact that (Lake Union) is located in the very heart of the city indicates that if properly developed it will become a most important factor in the commercial and business activities of the city'.

10 Parker McAllister, 'Seattle Landmarks, Sketches by Times Staff Artist', *Seattle Times*, 20 January 1946, sec. Sunday Magazine.

11 Bob Lane, 'Tomato Plants Grow Densely at the Gas Works Park. Flowers, Trees, Grass, Weeds Thrive in Salvaged Sludge', *Seattle Times*, 29 August 1974.

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