

*Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'une grande vie ?
C'est une pensée de la jeunesse, exécutée dans l'âge mûr.*
Alfred de Vigny cité par Sir Patrick Geddes

THE SCOTS COLLEGE : a stagecraft of Geddes' thought by **Sabine Kraus from Montpellier**

Trained as an architect, I am undertaking a PHD in History of Sciences at the EHESS at Paris. My research in History of Medicine is focusing upon Vitalism, of which Montpellier and Edinburgh were the two leading medical centers in the Age of Enlightenment.

Beginning my cross-channel study of Vitalism, I first met Patrick Geddes in June 2009 at the Burn House, a unique study center in the Highlands of Scotland. Through 'Biology', and 'Evolution', I discovered one of the greatest biologists of his time. During his life, Geddes constantly transferred his scientific knowledge into social and educational practices, and became a 'mediciner of environment', thinking of 'Life in evolution as the union of Nature and Civilisation'.

**And our Outlook! That's the secret
Open to all with eyes,
Here's the place for all who seek read
Nature! City 'fore us lies!**

As the text describing the Session 1933-34 let us know : The aim of the Scots College was not merely to provide a comfortable home for students of all nationalities, and to help them to acquire a sound knowledge of French and contact with French Culture, but also to supplement the personal work of each and the regular teaching of the University by a more general culture. In the words of its founder 'it seeks to harmonize the too dispersive character of modern studies by bringing together the naturalist and the humanist at present too much divided : Science too indifferent to the Humanities and the Humanities or Letters, or Arts as we say in Scotland, insufficiently related to Science'. Lectures and discussions, dramatic and musical recitals, excursions and regional survey are arranged with the co-operation of students, leading to an intellectual interest and deeper understanding of present day problems.

The concept of the Scots College as an international students' Center emerged during Geddes' first travel to Montpellier in 1890, when invited by his friend Charles Flahault. He met the French botanist at the Marine Station of Roscoff in 1878, while studying zoology and biology, amongst others, in Paris. Flahault and Geddes began to exchange their young during holidays, in order to learn and understand more about foreign cultural societies, a meaningful means to build peaceful relationships between different countries.

Coming back from India in 1924, Geddes, who was then seventy years old, traveled

to Montpellier to see Flahault and his other montpellierian friends. The Southern climate and the pleasant city surroundings led him to settle there in order to create the first international students residence in France, a living place for observing Nature and the fact of its beauty.



Philosophers Alley

**Hence Medicine's foremost Western School,
Herb-students' Garden too;
And here may Michael Scot have found
Lost Aristotle anew.**

Montpellier is a town developed around the nucleus of its long-standing illustrious medical faculty and botanical garden, embedded in Rabelais' humanism and Reformation. The new colleges network of the Southern elbow was mainly directed by Scottish regents. In the States-of-Languedoc, most of them were trained in medicine at Montpellier.

The enlightened medical philosophy of Vitalism had been leaded there by Paul Joseph Barthez, founder of the so-called 'Vitalisme de Montpellier', as well as by William Cullen at Edinburgh. Barthez was the first to introduce Thomas Reid's Common Sense principles in France during his teaching at the medical school.

William Cullen and Paul Joseph Barthez were physicians whose philosophy was 'to read the book of Nature'. Patrick Geddes the biologist always claimed the 'Vitalistic mood' of his work, and was the leader of the Scottish neo-vitalist School. A school who studies Nature 'as a whole', an human nature in 'the web of Life'.

When studying at Paris, Geddes discovered the work of Edmond Demolins, founder of the 'Ecole Nouvelle'. At this time, education became a science, and new reforms and practices in experimental education were mainly the fact of educators trained in biology and medicine. 'Education is life itself' said John Dewey, who became Geddes' friend.

When working at Roscoff, Geddes discovered symbiosis, a biological process of mutual interactions between species for common benefits. Coming back at

Edinburgh, Geddes transferred this process into social symbiosis, in order to regenerate the Old Town landscape which gradually had deteriorated into a slum. By mixing craftsmen, workers, students, teachers and artists, as it was the case during the Age of Enlightenment, Geddes developed a creative network of education in Science and Art experimenting new methods.

By bridging the gap between biology and sociology, Vitalism sowed the seeds of ecology, by re-connecting living organisms with their physical, cultural and social environment, and with each others. As such, Geddes' Scots College landscape and the medical faculty with its botanical garden are the two meaningful symbols of Vitalism in the city of Montpellier.

**House and Garden, microcosm
Of culture, urban, rural,
Survey the whole world macrocosm,
West 'Frisco;- east, to Surul!**

In 1930, due to Geddes' friendly relationship with India and Rabindranath Tagore, the Hindus Pavilion was built and housed Josias Braun-Blanquet laboratory : the S.I.G.M.A. (International Station of Mediterranean and Alpine Geobotany). In contact with Geddes' bio-sociology, Braun-Blanquet defined the plant community as a plant group having characteristic species based on their ecological fidelity and abundance and a stability with the surrounding environment.

Think Global, Act Local : Geddes' human ecology unifies Nature and Civilisation. Regional survey became diagnostic before treatment, done by a 'mediciner of environment', a bio-social regionalism that takes in account man *in* nature, man in the **Web of Life**.

All these concepts are engraved into the form of *thinking machines* on the walls of the Scottish Pavilion, as well as modeled in the landscape.



The Scottish Pavilion (1924-28), by Edmond Leenhardt, and the Hindus Pavilion (1930), by Franck Mears, Norah Geddes' husband.



Geddes' Outlook Cabinet, next to Classification of Sciences Terrace and King Arthur Garden.

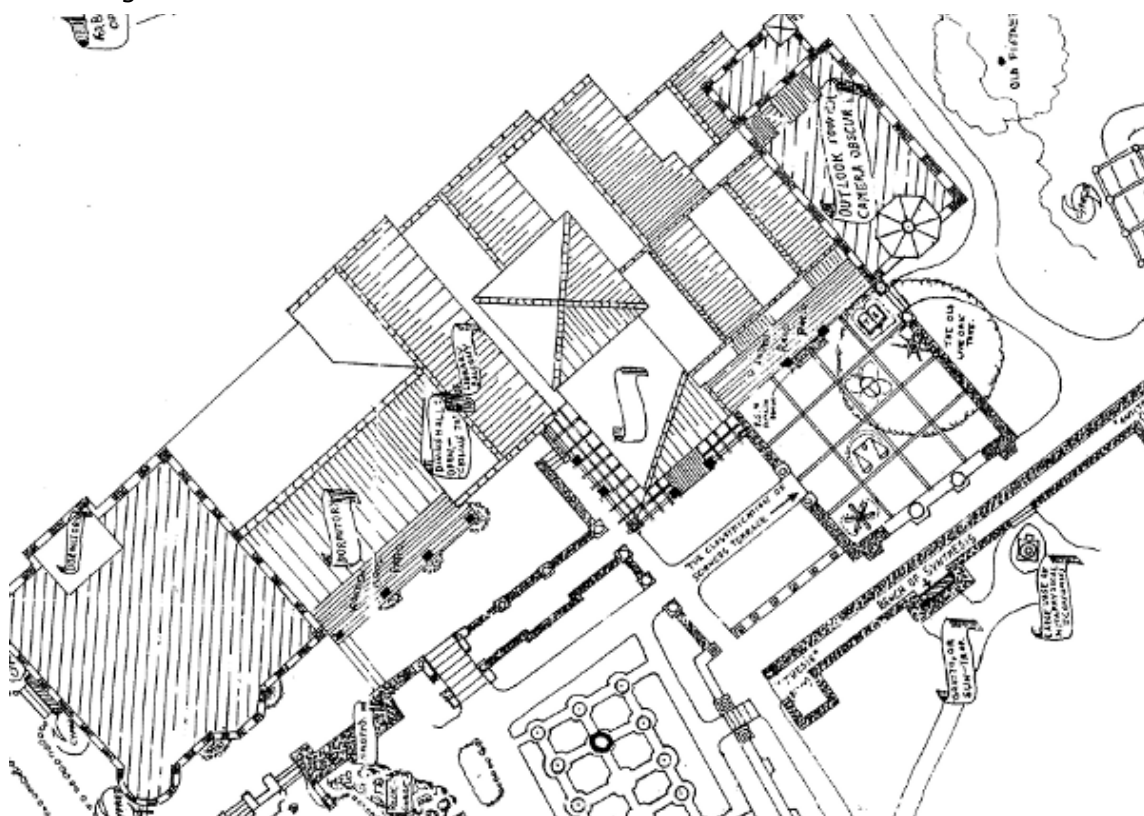


On the wall of the Outlook Cabinet : The **Valley Section**, with its basic human activities, and on both sides, the **PLACE-WORK-FOLK** diagram.

Man in his living environment : Medical topographies were the model for Le Play regional surveys. Geddes' Valley Section takes also its influence from 'Histoire d'un ruisseau' written by his friend the French human geographer Elisée Reclus. Place-Work-Folk relates to the biological interactions between Environment-Function-Organism, and relates to the social interactions between Geography-Economics-Anthropology.



Montpellier-born philosopher Auguste Comte's Classification of Sciences gives its name to the Terrace, and is found engraved on the top of the Outlook-Tower. There are axes for Mathematics, a balance for Physics, a scarab for Biology, and an open book for Sociology, then on to their applied counterparts: Economics and Politics; 'Biotechnics' (Medicine and Agriculture); 'Technics' and finally Metrics. This classification places Sociology, Economics and Politics at the culmination of all knowledge.



Classification of Sciences Terrace and Symbolic Gardens, in Philip and Benjamin Boardman's copy of Patrick Geddes' original drawing.



By living we learn : the three SSS **Sympathy-Synergy-Synthesis** (vitalistic medical notions) symbolised as three Peace-doves, are embedded in the *Vivendo Discimus* motto, between Scottish Thistle and French Lily of the *Auld Alliance*.

**Scots College and Palestinian,
American as well as Indian -
Sister nations, old and new,
Come ye, build your college too!**

But with the time, Geddes' work and the Scots College fell into oblivion. At the announcement of a future sale to town developers, no care was taken about this unique place, where one can have a direct experiment of Geddes' thought and of the *genius locii*.

Due to the creation of a website, together with public actions such as communications, symposium, exhibition and commented visits during two years in order to spread Geddes' work through Montpellier, the Scots College became afresh a part of the collective memory of the city. The inhabitants acquired a new awareness of the historical and scientific value of the place. From September 2012, I have also led an international campaign of protection application, addressed to the Regional Direction of Cultural Affairs at Montpellier. The Patrick Geddes Memorial Trust also took an active part in the campaign, after the intervention that they invited me to do at Edinburgh in April 2013.

Besides of its broad international spreading, this site is also a symbol of the cultural and scientific history of the town of Montpellier. Finally, the case of the Scots College has been discussed by the Regional Commission of Heritage and Sites on 3rd October 2013. The entire site of the Scots College has been registered as French National Heritage on 19th December 2013.

The demand to recognize the Scots College as a national heritage includes also the question of the future occupations to be developped there in a global vision, insofar that Geddes' living and symbolic heritage is grounded into the integrity of the place *as a whole*, a humanistic and creative place of education, science and art.

I am at present involved in ecological education projects taking place at the Scots College. These 'Art and Environment' workshops will apply to classes of young pupils, with '**Hand, Heart and Head**', the principles of living education laid down by Sir Patrick Geddes.



Geddes Symposium at the Scots College, 10-11 May 2012

Montpellier, the 6 January 2014

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<http://metagraphies.org/Sir-Patrick-Geddes/>