Landscape Research

Ten Tenets and Six Questions for Landscape Urbanism

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ABSTRACT   *This paper offers an interpretation of Landscape Urbanism, then initiates a critical analysis. It attempts to decode the sometimes prolix language in which Landscape Urbanism is presented and to identify a number of 'tenets' which most of its adherents would hold. The second part of the paper questions some of these tenets, asking whether Landscape Urbanism's attack on the urban–rural binary is well conceived and whether it is a helpful contribution to the problems raised by worldwide urbanisation. It also considers the implications of Landscape Urbanism for other discourses, including those of heritage, landscape conservation and participatory planning and design. It concludes that there are a number of inconsistencies and lacunae which landscape urbanists ought to urgently address.*

My strategy in this paper is first to offer an interpretation of Landscape Urbanism and an explanation of where it has come from, then to instigate a critical analysis. The paper attempts to interpret the sometimes prolix language in which Landscape Urbanism is presented and to identify a number of 'tenets' which most of its adherents would hold. In this it follows the example and method of Marc Treib, who did the same for Modernism in his *Modern Landscape Architecture, A Critical Review* (Treib, 1993). Treib distilled Modernist landscape architecture into six 'axioms' which, he tentatively suggested, amounted to an 'incomplete manifesto'. This paper seeks to do the same for Landscape Urbanism, but I have used the word 'tenet' rather than 'axiom', as there is little that is self-evident about the principles identified here, and any attempt to find such truths would fly in the face of the post-structuralist spirit which infuses most writing by landscape urbanists. Once I have advanced my interpretation, I will ask six searching questions by way of critique.

A Pocket History of Landscape Urbanism

Landscape Urbanism is most usefully described as a discourse or a nexus of ideas. It came together at a conference at the Graham Foundation in Chicago in 1997, which

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was followed by a touring exhibition. It draws upon ideas from Kenneth Frampton's critical regionalism, Ian McHarg's sieve-map approach to regional planning, Peter Rowe's writings on housing and urbanism and Rem Koolhaas's questioning of programmatic architecture (and also his fascination with the large-scale and his celebration of the randomness of urban life). The practitioners and theorists who have been most influential in articulating and spreading the ideas of Landscape Urbanism are: Charles Waldheim (who coined the term), formerly Associate Professor at the University of Toronto and currently Chair of the Landscape Architecture Programme at Harvard Graduate School of Design: James Corner, Chair of the Landscape Architecture Department at the University of Pennsylvania: and Mohsen Mostafavi, formerly Chairman of the Architectural Association (AA) in London and currently Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

It is apparent from this lineage both that Landscape Urbanism is an initiative born in North America and that its proponents hold very high academic ground, indeed the principal nexus of ideas is that which exists between Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, which might be thought of as the intellectual twin peaks of landscape architecture. Landscape Urbanism also has a foothold in the United Kingdom at the Architectural Association, where, during Mostafavi's term as Chairman, a programme was developed with the architect Ciro Najle, which now continues under the leadership of Eva Castro, Najle having also moved to Harvard. In 2004 the AA published *Landscape Urbanism: A Manual for the Machinic Landscape* (edited by Mostafavi and Najle), which was illustrated with work produced on the programme, but also contained 13 essays or interviews with practitioners, educators and theorists, among them Corner. In 2006 Princeton Architectural Press issued *The Landscape Urbanism Reader*, edited by Waldheim, which contained a further 14 essays. More widely distributed than the AA volume, the *Reader* has played an important role in propagating Landscape Urbanism around the globe. In 2007, the editors of *Kerb*, a journal produced by the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT University, Melbourne, devoted an issue (no. 15) to Landscape Urbanism, which included interviews with Mostafavi and Waldheim. Most recently *Topos*, an international review of landscape and urban design produced by the Munich based publisher Callwey, devoted a themed issue to Landscape Urbanism, organised once again around the trinity of Waldheim, Corner and Mostafavi (No. 71, 2010).

In his *Topos* article, Waldheim suggests that the discourse of Landscape Urbanism has already entered "a robust-middle age", which may come as a surprise to many outside North America for whom it is still something novel to be weighed, assimilated or rejected. Most of what has been written about Landscape Urbanism has been written by its proponents, but in the absence of substantial critique, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that landscape architects are puzzled or irritated by it. Even the *Topos* editor, Robert Schäfer, prefaced issue No. 71 by saying that the aim was to "become more familiar with the ambiguous concept of landscape urbanism" and then urged his readership to pray for the retention of the "unifying concept" of landscape architecture. Among the most frequently encountered criticisms are the thought that Landscape Urbanism is nothing new—it is just landscape architecture or landscape planning re-presented ('old wine in new bottles'), and also a suspicion

that this is some sort of 'land grab' by architects wishing to move into territory that the landscape architects had considered their own. Such comments are unlikely to trouble the landscape urbanists themselves, since Landscape Urbanism is nothing if not a provocation. However, there is also a sense of bafflement. Gunilla Lindholm from the Department of Landscape Architecture at SLU, Alnarp, Sweden has written of Landscape Urbanism that "those who are looking for a clear, unambiguous platform, a guide for urban planning and design, seek in vain". She cannot decide whether Landscape Urbanism is "large-scale architecture, ecological urban planning or a designerly research policy" (Lindholm, n.d.). Tom Turner, who teaches landscape architecture at the University of Greenwich, accuses the Architectural Association of draining the term 'landscape urbanism' of meaning, drawing a distinction between the lucid way in which landscape architects such as Corner have written on the subject and the obfuscatory way that the topic has been presented at the AA (Turner, n.d.).

Ten Tenets

Rather as Treib claimed to have produced an 'incomplete manifesto' for the Modernists, Waldheim refers in his introduction to *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* as a 'Reference Manifesto'. As he rightly says, the *Reader* "assembles the fullest account to date of the origins, affinities, aspirations, and applications of this emerging body of knowledge" (Waldheim, 2006, p. 18). This paper is based upon a close and comparative reading of the essays in the *Reader* and in *Landscape Urbanism: A Manual for the Machinic Landscape* (these publications will be referred to from here on as the *Reader* and the *Manual* and referenced as such). For the most part, the articles in *Kerb* and *Topos* reiterate themes laid down in these earlier publications. Analysis of these seminal texts involved the coding and collection of recurrent themes, from which it was possible to identify the following ten tenets:

1. Landscape Urbanism Rejects the Binary Opposition between City and Landscape

In 'Terra Fluxus', Corner's influential contribution to the *Reader*, the landscape architect argues that we must move away from traditional ways of speaking about landscape and cities "which have been conditioned through the nineteenth-century lens of difference and opposition" (*Reader*, p. 24). The city's footprint extends way into what we would traditionally call the countryside, and the latter is organised to provide resources for the city, whether food, drinking water or energy. Meanwhile the inclusion of some Romanticised nature within the city is at best an irrelevance, at worst a kind of camouflage or deceit which obscures the real conditions. The target of the landscape urbanist critique is the ancient notion of *rus in urbe*, the countryside in the town (or the illusion of such), first found in the *Epigrams* of the first-century Roman writer Martial (book XII, 57, 21). Though influenced by McHarg, Corner and Waldheim both reject the opposition of nature and city implied by his environmental planning practice. Similarly both Corner and Waldheim reject pastoral ideas of landscape and nostalgic forms of environmentalism, which, says Waldheim are "naïve or irrelevant in the face of global urbanisation" (*Reader*, p. 38).

This 'tenet' is as close to an axiom as it is possible to get, though perhaps landscape urbanists would not accept anything so un-rhizomatic as a cornerstone or a foundation. Many of the questions raised in the second part of this paper concern this key idea.

2. Landscape Replaces Architecture as the Basic Building Block of Cities. Corollary: Landscape Urbanism Involves the Collapse, or the Radical Realignment, of Traditional Disciplinary Boundaries

In the *Manual*, Corner states that Landscape Urbanism, which he thinks of as "an ethos, an attitude, a way of thinking and acting" is a "response to the failure of traditional urban design and planning to operate effectively in the contemporary city" (*Manual*, pp. 58–59). Because contemporary cities, particularly in North America but also in megacities worldwide, have become so extended horizontally, landscape supplants architecture as the basic building block of cities. Koolhaas has argued that we can no longer understand the city as the result of rational acts, no longer the result of a plan by an urban planner. In 'The Changing City', his 1995 Mondrian Lecture (a biennial lecture sponsored by the Sikkens Foundation), he argued that a city developed, but was not created. It was a process, not a design. Landscape was the only thing left that could link a city together. Writing on "Landscape Urbanism in Europe" for the *Reader*, Kelly Shannon remarks that "landscape—in both its material and rhetorical senses— has been brought to the fore as a saviour of the professions of architecture, urban design, and planning" (*Reader*, p. 58). But landscape architects should not let this sudden attention turn their heads, for as Richard Weller argues in 'An Art of Instrumentality: Thinking Through Landscape Urbanism' "landscape architecture's scope and influence, whilst in all likelihood increasing, is still weakened by its own inability to conceptually and practically synthesize landscape planning and landscape design, terms which signify science and art respectively" (*Reader*, p. 71). In 'Urban Highways and the Reluctant Public Realm', Jacqueline Tatom states that the intellectual promise of Landscape Urbanism is "to integrate the conceptual fields of landscape architecture, civil engineering and architecture for the design of the public realm" (*Reader*, p. 181). The constellation of relevant professions varies from article to article, but the common thought is that Landscape Urbanism can be the solvent which breaks down the barriers between these disciplines.

3. Landscape Urbanism Engages with Vast Scales—Both in Time and Space

Landscape Urbanism is inherently outward looking, always seeking connections with a wider context. Tatom refers to the "metropolitan scale" (*Reader*, p. 181), while in 'Drosscape' (*Reader*, pp. 197–218) John Berger invokes the time-lapse film *Koyaanisqati* which reveals the city as a kind of gigantic organism. Berger has developed his thoughts at greater length in *Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America* (2006), a book which has been influential beyond the field of urban and landscape design (it has, for example, been reviewed in the art journal *Frieze* [Horn, 2007]). Meanwhile, Richard Weller states that Landscape Urbanism is not

just about the city, but about the whole landscape and refers to the "globally interconnected scale" (*Reader*, p. 73). In 'Constructed Ground: Questions of Scale' (*Reader*, pp. 125–140) Linda Pollak says that landscape urbanists must concern themselves with areas much larger than any interconnected site, encompassing multiple ecological systems. There is a need to look beyond the boundaries of whatever site has been given or the scale that has been chosen. Less is said expressly about the time dimension, although everyone seems to agree that there is one. There is much talk of process, development, flux, duration and phasing, which draws attention to extension in time, but landscape urbanists (unwittingly perhaps) follow Heraclitus in believing that all is flux and this sharply distinguishes them from the New Urbanists who actively seek permanence through the revival of traditional urban forms (i.e. pre-automobile). An article in the *Boston Globe* caricatured these different approaches as a battle of the urbanisms, with the New Urbanists holding out for "denser, more diverse towns where people could walk to work and to the store—places where neighbors might wave hello to one another from their porches" while the Landscape Urbanists were portrayed as friends of the suburbs, sanguine about urban sprawl and use of the automobile (Neyfakh, 2011). We might wonder whether the Landscape Urbanist's acceptance of constant change has a political dimension. A key trope of management literature in the 1990s was the permanence of change, and the notion that in a globalised economy places undergo continual cycles of reconstitution has been investigated by sociologists Luc Bolantski and Eve Chiapello in their wide-ranging critique *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2006).

4. Landscape Urbanism Prepares Fields for Action and Stages for Performances

The word 'field' occurs frequently in landscape urbanist writing, sometimes in reference to a horizontal urban surface, but sometimes as a term for a place where forces act. Preparing the ground can be given a literal interpretation, as in reclamation, regrading, earth modelling and so on, or it can be used metaphorically to refer to other non-physical things which must be done to prepare the way for activity, such as bringing together the actors, finding the funding, obtaining permissions etcetera. Preparing stages for performances is another metaphor which is used. Echoing Lawrence Halprin (1970), Corner likens this to "the tactical work of choreography, a choreography of elements and materials in time that extends new networks, new linkages, and new opportunities" (*Reader*, p. 31). 'Performativity' has become an important concept in the humanities, the origins of which can be traced to the speech-act theory advanced in the 1950s by the analytic philosopher, J. L. Austin, who noted that there were many situations where saying something was not to describe something but to *do* something (e.g. to promise, to name, to command, etc.). By extension, there are all sorts of expressive, but not necessarily verbal, ways of intervening in the course of human life. In landscape urbanist writing the notion of 'performance' slides between meanings: there is performance as something performed—just as a play or a ballet is performed—and performance as the activity or output of a machine. We can evaluate the performance of a landscape as we might judge the performance of a motor engine.

5. Landscape Urbanism is Less Concerned with What Things Look Like, More with What They Do

Landscape Urbanism is interested in systems, but asserts that it is not concerned with the aesthetic qualities of space. Indeed there is a powerful strain of anti-Picturesque rhetoric throughout, which is a legacy of modernism. James Rose once wrote that "we cannot live in pictures" (Rose, 1938). Weller takes things further by advocating "an ecology free of Romanticism and aesthetics" (*Reader*, p. 79). In this he seems to be the heir to those Modernists who thought that predicating design upon function would take care of the aesthetics, or perhaps to those ecologically zealous landscape architects who believed that if you look after the ecology, the aesthetics will take care of themselves. In her contribution to the *Reader*, Julia Czerniak reviews some recent projects, including the collaboration between Eisenman Architects and Hanna/Olin at Rebstockpark (1991) in which the inclusion of agricultural landscape typologies, such as drainage swales, fields and hedgerows, delivered a range of benefits including the conservation of rainfall, the cleaning of waste effluents, the improvement of air quality and microclimate and support for wildlife diversity (*Reader*, p. 115). She applauds the fact that the landscape is productive (a near synonym for performative?), rather than merely ornamental. As with the Modernists, we might wonder if Landscape Urbanism is truly indifferent to aesthetics, or is simply proposing the replacement of traditional aesthetics with some new ones. This is an instance where the contradictions between the various essayists start to show. Berger, for example, wrote that "the challenge for designers is thus not to achieve drossless urbanisation but to integrate inevitable dross into more flexible aesthetic and design strategies" (*Reader*, p. 203), apparently acknowledging that the search for a new aesthetic was part of the landscape urbanist project.

6. Landscape Urbanism Sees the Landscape as Machinic

So we come to the awkward and troublesome word 'machinic' which is so prominent in the title of Mostafavi and Najle's edited book that it must carry considerable theoretical weight. What did they mean by it? Certainly there is a shock-tactic involved here, because landscapes, at least in every day conversation, are not thought of as machines. As we have seen, landscape urbanists focus upon the functions which landscapes perform and the services which they provide, and they are not alone in thinking in this way for it is common in such fields as landscape ecology and green infrastructure planning. Despite the emphasis on performance and function in Landscape Urbanism, Mostafavi and Najle avoided the words 'mechanical' and 'mechanistic' which have negative associations. To be mechanical is to be automatic and routine, while the associated philosophical doctrine of mechanicalism, the doctrine that all natural phenomena are produced by mechanical forces, is discredited.

Landscape Urbanism's favoured philosophers however are the double act of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, whose *A Thousand Plateaus* has recently become required reading across the humanities. These authors use commonplace words in uncommon ways and they stretch the metaphor of the machine in ways it has never been stretched before. They make it deliberately difficult to pin this usage down, but

they are happy to talk about love machines, literary machines, mad war machines, revolutionary machines and so on. Machines, in this very broad sense, can connect or plug into other machines. "A book itself is a little machine", they say (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 6) and we should not ask what it means or represents. A related expression is "machinic assemblage" which they use to discuss the way in which elements come together, mix or connect. An example they give is the "feudal assemblage": "we would have to consider the interminglings of bodies defining feudalism: the body of the earth and the social body: the body of the overlord, vassal and serf; the body of the knight and the horse and their new relation to the stirrup; the weapons and tools assuring a symbiosis of bodies—a whole machinic assemblage" (p. 98). I have quoted this to give a flavour of Deleuze and Guattari's writing and to show that they use the terms 'machine' and 'machinic assemblage' in ways which are remote from the usual dictionary definitions of mechanism. So when landscape urbanists employ the term 'machinic' (which, incidentally, does not appear at all in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*) they are using it in this free and open-ended way to suggest notions of connection, coming together and assembly. This is consonant with the idea that boundaries between disciplines should be collapsed and with the dismantling of certain binary oppositions.

7. Landscape Urbanism Makes the Invisible Visible

In urban areas landscape has been very much in the background, even though it has performed vital functions such as mitigating climate or providing drainage. It has been our habit to hide infrastructure and certainly to keep it away from landscape considered to be scenic. Echoing Modernism's calls for honesty and authenticity, landscape urbanists would reverse this situation. Waldheim puts it thus: "contemporary landscape urbanism practices recommend the use of infrastructural systems and the public landscapes they engender as the very ordering mechanisms of the urban field itself, shaping and shifting the organisation of urban settlement and its indeterminate economic, political and social futures" (*Reader*, p. 39). Although Robert Thayer's work is not mentioned in the Landscape Urbanism discourse, this notion of foregrounding infrastructure, whether mechanical, green or some hybrid, seems to have much in common with Thayer's diagnosis of a societal technophobia and his suggested remedy, the adoption of greener technologies which would engender no guilt or shame and thus would not prompt us to hide them (Thayer, 1994). Berger's call for the integration of dross into new aesthetic forms, echoes the convictions of the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who was artist-in-residence with the NYC Santitation Department in the 1980s. Her installation at the Marine Transfer Station, where garbage trucks emptied their loads into barges for shipment to the Fresh Kills landfill site on Staten Island, sought to bring this neglected process to public attention. In *Sculpting with Environment*, she stated:

> The design of garbage should become the great public design of our age. I am talking about the whole picture: recycling facilities transfer stations, trucks, landfills, receptacles, water treatment plants, and rivers. They will be the giant clocks and thermometers of our age. They will be utterly ambitious, our public

cathedrals. For if we are to survive, they will be our symbols of survival. (Oakes, 1995, p. 193)

Ukeles went on to produce proposals for Fresh Kills, where James Corner's firm, Field Operations, was appointed in 2001, following the 2200-acre site's closure as a landfill, to prepare designs for an extensive public park.

A corollary of this foregrounding of the invisible is that all sorts of neglected, marginal, interstitial and stigmatised elements of the landscape, from sewage farms and landfills to railway sidings or the spaces beneath motorway flyovers, are pushed centre stage, in a reversal of traditional urban priorities. Czerniak advocates the opening up of culverted rivers so that the hidden hydrology of the city can be restored to legibility, citing as an example Hargreaves Associates project for the Guadelupe River in downtown San Jose, California (*Reader*, p. 109).

8. Landscape Urbanism Embraces Ecology and Complexity

The extent to which Landscape Urbanism makes direct use of ecological science is not very clear (and that science itself is constantly evolving), however Landscape Urbanism certainly draws upon the vocabulary and conceptual apparatus of ecology for understanding site and city (as did the Chicago school of sociologists in the 1920s and 1930s). It employs the language of flows, shifting populations, succession, patches, dynamic systems, matrices, self-organisation, instability, etc. The key notion, easily allied to theoretic notions of 'machinic assemblage' is that of 'interconnectivity'. However, Landscape Urbanism distances itself from the sort of 'hands-off' ethics of many biocentricists. Weller, for example, looks forward to "a synthetic future of constructed ecology" (*Reader*, pp. 75–76).

We have learnt through the sciences of ecology and complexity that natural systems are dynamic, fluid, unstable, complex and indeterminate. A central insight of Landscape Urbanism, which it shares with Daoism, is that we must find ways to live harmoniously within this flux. Daoists believe that a balanced life is partly active, partly quiescent: they are not against action, but only seek to act when the time is ripe and the occasion demands it (Billington, 1997, p. 92). Design and planning should not set themselves against natural processes in a misguided quest for permanence. Instead they should be responsive and catalytic, generating creative syntheses. Future conditions can be anticipated, but never precisely predicted. As Weller puts it: "Landscape architecture—insofar as it is implicitly concerned with materials and processes subject to obvious change—seems well placed to give form to an ecological aesthetic. Landscape achitecture is *not* frozen music" (*Reader*, p. 75). It is worth noting, in passing, that this call for an 'ecological aesthetic' contradicts Tenet 5.

9. Landscape Urbanism Encourages Hybridity between Natural and Engineered Systems

It follows from Landscape Urbanism's interest in infrastructure and ecological functioning, its challenge to the nature–culture dichotomy and its promotion of creative assemblages, that it promotes hybridity between natural and engineered

systems. The push for environmentally sustainable design has already introduced such features as SUDS (sustainable urban drainage systems) and reed-bed water purification systems into urban areas. Another example, though on a larger scale and usually constructed outside the urban area, would be the artist-engineer Viet Ngo's lemna (pondweed) facilities, also designed to clean up waste water. But the starting place for all of this is a recognition of place and its connection to natural systems. Elisabeth Mossop, in 'Landscapes of Infrastructure' (*Reader*, pp. 163–195) suggests that "there should be a relationship between the underlying structures of topography and hydrology and the major structuring elements of urban form, such as the use of catchments as the basis for physical planning and regulation" (p. 72).

10. Landscape Urbanism Recognises the Remedial Possibilities Inherent in the Landscape

It is not surprising that the discourse of Landscape Urbanism should have got going at this particular moment in human history, nor that it should have come to the fore in North America. For most of the twentieth century the United States was the world's dominant industrial power, but, as Berger points out, America is rapidly de-industrialising: "In 2005 more than 600,000 abandoned and contaminated waste sites have been identified within U.S. cities" (*Reader*, p. 199). At the same time, he observes, America "is simultaneously urbanising faster than at any other time in modern history". The population of de-industrialising cities declines, the most marked example being that of Detroit, once the powerhouse of the American automobile industry, now a museum where abandoned factories, office blocks and grand hotels await the wrecker's ball. Detroit is a city which seems to be hollowing out from the centre and its plight, similar to that of many post-industrial cities, if more extreme, has attracted attention from Landscape Urbanism's theorists, who contributed to an edited book *Stalking Detroit* (eds Daskalakis, Waldheim & Young, 2001). In his contribution, Corner punningly advocated the 'landscraping' of Detroit, a creative process of clearance which would not however seek to create a Modernist *tabula rasa*, but would create 'voids' or 'prepared grounds' which would function as places for potential action. Writing about this in *Harvard Design Magazine*, Grahame Shane approved of a strategy which he linked to the variety of spontaneous or seasonal activities which occur on London's Hampstead Heath. Shane also linked this vision to the novel landscape type Town-Country advocated by Ebenezer Howard, in which the industrial city would merge with a landscape of small-holdings (Shane, 2003, pp. 1–8).

The Critique: Six Questions for Landscape Urbanism

1. Can You Get an 'Ought' from an 'Is'?

Consider this parallel between Landscape Urbanism and Marxism. Marxism offers a materialist interpretation of human history in terms of the struggle between classes and a critique of capitalism which suggests that the latter will collapse as a result of its own contradictions. Then comes the shift. Because this is the way history is inevitably heading, Marxism urges the working classes to rise up in revolution and

place the productive capacities of society into collective ownership. This is an instance of what the empiricist philosopher David Hume controversially called the 'is-ought fallacy', whereby prescriptive statements are derived from descriptive statements (Hume, 1975). It would be possible to accept the Marxian analysis of society *without* concluding that one must overthrow capitalism. Landscape Urbanism draws upon empirical evidence of certain urban phenomena, such as the widespread existence of suburban sprawl, the growth of mega-regions and urban corridors, the decentred nature of Los Angeles, the 'hollowing out' of Detroit, the splintering of privatised infrastructure provision and so on, and concludes that *this is the way that urban areas are going*. Then comes the landscape urbanist's shift. As this is the way that things seem to be going, *we have to go with them*. Our cities must become radically decentred, rhizome-like networks, spread wide across the landscape. Do not worry about sprawl—embrace it. Do not try to prop up the centre—let it go. There is here an almost Daoist notion of going with the flow. Yet in the history of urban planning there are plenty of examples of successfully going against, or redirecting, the flow. It was concern about urban sprawl and 'ribbon development' along trunk roads which led to planning laws in Britain requiring developers to seek planning permission and which introduced green belts to contain the spread of the city. All such instruments may be criticised and all may have unintended consequences, but the point is that unbridled capitalism and unchecked sprawl do not have to have their sway. Sometimes good city planning means redirecting, slowing, or stopping things from happening. One of the ironies of the 'battle of the urbanisms' is that New Urbanism and Landscape Urbanism are both uncritical of capitalist urbanisation and suspicious of governmental intervention.

2. Should the Binary Go?

The attack on binary oppositions is inspired by the writing of Jacques Derrida. It is a key strategy of deconstruction. According to Derrida, Western thought has been structured since classical times in terms of binary oppositions such as real versus unreal, presence versus absence, centre versus periphery, life versus death and so on. Derrida claims that such oppositions do not peacefully co-exist, but suggests that one of the terms always dominates or governs the other in a violent hierarchy. The deconstructive approach is to question the dominance of the privileged term by reversing the hierarchy. This causes a breach which radically unsettles the hierarchy. The aim is not to reverse or replace the binary, but to derail the whole system, creating a space for ambiguity, difference and playfulness (Derrida, 1998). The subversive playfulness of deconstruction appealed to the architectural avant-garde. Writing about his approach to the competition brief for the Parc de la Villette, Bernard Tschumi, who knew and was directly influenced by Derrida, said that his intention was to "encourage conflict over synthesis, fragmentation over unity, madness and play over careful management" (Tschumi, 1987, p. vii). He also sought to unsettle the established oppositions between town versus country and civilisation versus nature. The meaning of the work 'park' itself was to be undermined. The Parc de la Villette would not be *rus in urbe*, it would be "one of the largest *buildings* ever constructed—a discontinuous building". The influence of all of this upon landscape urbanists should be apparent, particularly their desire to

do away with traditional ways of thinking about town and country or the urban and the rural.

Deconstruction became a fashionable philosophy which swept though the arts and humanities, but was dismissed as obscurantist posturing by many philosophers in the Anglo-American analytic tradition. The following passage comes from an exchange in the *New York Review of Books* in February 1984. In it, John Searle, Professor of Philosophy at Berkeley, defended his earlier review of John Culler's *On Deconstruction*:

> I believe that anyone who reads deconstructive texts with an open mind is likely to be struck by the same phenomena that initially surprised me: the low level of philosophical argumentation, the deliberate obscurantism of the prose, the wildly exaggerated claims, and the constant striving to give the appearance of profundity by making claims that seem paradoxical, but under analysis often turn out to be silly or trivial. In my review, I gave examples of all these phenomena. There is an atmosphere of bluff and fakery that pervades much (not all, of course) deconstructive writing. What becomes even more surprising is that the authors seem to think it is all right to engage in these practices, because they hold a theory to the effect that pretensions to objective truth and rationality in science, philosophy, and common sense can be deconstructed as logocentric subterfuges. To put it crudely, they think that since everything is phoney anyway, the phoniness of deconstruction is somehow acceptable, indeed commendable, since it lies right on the surface ready for further deconstruction.

Searle's own work is in the tradition of ordinary language philosophy which was dominant at Oxford between 1930 and 1970 and has been influenced by the later writings of Wittgenstein. One of Wittgenstein's central arguments was that there was nothing much wrong with ordinary language, as it stood, and that many philosophical misunderstandings could be traced to the abstraction of words from their context in everyday use. So whenever a word caused puzzlement, the best remedy was to look at the way it was actually used. This can be summed up in slogan 'meaning as use'. If one starts from this position, then the revision of language to serve some ideological or theoretical enterprise becomes very difficult. Although ordinary language philosophy, like post-structuralism, is anti-essentialist and recognises that meanings are fluid and can change over time, it also sees that these uses are embedded in 'language games' and 'forms of life' and are thus resistant to deliberate manipulation.

So when we consider a binary such as 'town–country' we ought to ask how these words are used. The answer, of course, is that they are used in myriad ways, but also that people already know how to use them. They understand the distinctions which they are drawing when they employ them. It would not be possible for some kind of magician to wave a linguistic wand and make them disappear, because they are enmeshed in our forms of life. There are, of course, examples of ideologically driven language change, notably the feminist critique which substituted 'chair' for 'chairman' or 'actor' (applied to both genders) for 'actress' and so on, but these do not, of course, abolish the distinction we sometimes need to make (in medicine, for example) between 'man' and 'woman'. So it is worth asking what sort of revisions

the landscape urbanists are really hoping for when they contest the urban–rural binary? Feminism aims to eradicate the inequalities that exist between men and women, but the desire to somehow make town and country the same does not seem to be driven by a similar sense of injustice.

In the town–country binary it would seem to be the town which is in the dominant position in the Derridean sense, yet it is also primarily the ills of the town, rather than the country, which Landscape Urbanism seeks to address. A two-fold process is envisaged, whereby voids within the city are opened up to natural processes such as ecological succession, while, at the same time, the constructed and machine-like nature of the countryside is fully acknowledged. This is indeed, as Shane suggests (*Reader*, p. 60), very close to the conception of Town–Country advocated by Ebenezer Howard. Having analysed the benefits and disbenefits of life in the town and life in the country, Howard proposed a hybrid which would combine the benefits of both, without any of the disadvantages. This was to be a new landscape type and it was to be achieved by building self-sufficient new towns in the countryside around a metropolis and liking these new settlements with each other and with the original city by railway lines. Meanwhile the exodus of population from the metropolis would allow for more parks and open spaces to be created, so that even the urban area would take on more of the characteristics of Town–Country. Frank Lloyd Wright echoed many of these ideas in Broadacre City his vision for a sprawling, low-density, suburban utopia.

One person's utopia can be another's dystopia. There is the lurking danger that Town–Country, were it to become the dominant landscape type, would replace both Town and Country with a sort of homogenised Nowhere. In 2005 British architect Will Alsop set out his vision for a 'super-city' which would stretch from Liverpool on the west coast of England to Hull on the east coast, following the line of the present M62 motorway. Exhibited at the Urbis centre for contemporary urban culture in Manchester, Alsop's proposal involved a corridor 80 miles long and 15 miles wide in which people would live in Stacks, his contribution to new urban form. Interviewed by Helen McCormack for the *Independent* newspaper (McCormack, 2005), Alsop described this as "beautiful urban sprawl". Echoing the claims once made for Corbusian high-rises, Alsop stated that the Stacks would be horizontal modern villages encapsulating all living needs. "Turning the *Bladerunner*-style vision into a reality may seem a long way off", wrote McCormack, adding that Alsop thought the plans were more viable than first appeared. She reports the architect as saying: "Much of the infrastructure is in place to allow this to happen in the not-too-distant future. And on a national level, building up rather than out is the only way we can save our natural areas while having ready access to them", but Alsop's proposal seemed to involve both verticality and horizontality. Part of his justification was that the existing settlements along the M62 were spreading and likely to merge. Though not identified as a landscape urbanist, Alsop's argument moved from the facts of sprawl to endorsement of it in a typically landscape urbanist way. Meanwhile his proposal ignored the existing landscape character of the South Pennines through which the M62 passes. This is a significant cultural landscape lying between two areas, the Yorkshire Dales and the Peak District, both of which have National Park status. It is, to quote the website of Pennine Prospects (a partnership which promotes economic development in the area), a landscape "of stark contrasts, consisting of

vast tracts of open moorland intersected by steep wooded valleys, the areas in between softened by a subtle patchwork of hamlets and fields''. ''Future economic and cultural prosperity'' the website continues ''depends upon protecting and valuing the past whilst finding new ways to create a 'living landscape' for the 21st century'' (Pennine Prospects, n.d.). It is difficult to see how this vision of the South Pennines' future could accommodate Alsop's futuristic imaginary of the mega-city. Might Landscape Urbanism give comfort to those who would ride roughshod over existing landscape character in the pursuit of new forms of urban living? If this is what is implicit in the attack on the town–country binary, then this attack should surely be resisted.

3. What of Wilderness?

John Dixon Hunt has usefully divided landscapes into three categories, respectively first nature, second nature and third nature (Hunt, 2000). First nature is the pristine nature of wilderness, unaffected by the presence of mankind. We know what we mean by this (ordinary language philosophy again) even though it might be argued that human activity has now affected the very atmosphere and climate of the earth and that nowhere is truly exempt. Second nature refers to cultural landscapes which, very broadly, can be taken to include all agricultural landscapes and all the landscapes of our settlements, including those of large cities. These are places which have been shaped by human purposes and needs. Though aesthetic considerations may have entered into consideration, they were not created primarily for aesthetic intent. Hunt reserves 'third nature' for landscapes of this last sort, a category which includes all parks and gardens. The discourse of Landscape Urbanism is almost entirely concerned with second nature, which is only a concern if it treats values associated with first or third natures with disdain. What it has to say about parks and gardens, for example, tends to be dismissive—they are more about form than about process, or that they involve a Picturesque deceit.

Similarly Waldheim and Corner believe that there is no such thing as autonomous 'nature' ''conceived to exist *a priori*, outside of human agency or cultural construction'' and they dismiss current-day environmentalism as ''naïve or irrelevant in the face of global urbanisation'' (Waldheim, *Reader*, p. xy). Whether this pessimism is justified, it is based on a philosophically controversial position which needs to be argued rather than just asserted. Many philosophers working within environmental ethics would profoundly disagree. As Andrew Brennan and Yeuk-Sze Lo write in their entry on Environmental Ethics in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: ''much of the last three decades of environmental ethics has been spent analysing, clarifying and examining the evaluative thesis of non-anthropocentrism, which has now achieved a nearly canonical status within the discipline''. Much effort has been poured into theories which seek to prove that entities such as species and ecosystems, landscape features such as mountains, forests or islands, or indeed the whole biosphere, have intrinsic value, which is to say value in their own right, not merely an instrumental value for *homo sapiens*. Eric Katz (1991) has argued that nature as a whole is an ''autonomous subject'' which must not be treated as means to human ends, while Robert Elliot (1997) has argued for the primacy of ''naturalness'' itself as the property which determines what things, events or states of affairs have

intrinsic value. Natural environments have the properties of having been naturally evolved and having natural continuity with the remote past. For Elliot and Katz, even restored environments do not have these qualities and so they cannot have the intrinsic value of environments which have not been affected by humans. One does not have to agree with such positions to recognise that Waldheim's easy dismissal of autonomous nature would be met with a barrage of counter-argument in such circles.

Biologists, as much as environmental philosophers, might also be expected to take exception to some of Landscape Urbanism's assertions. The ecologist E.O. Wilson has alerted us to the catastrophic rate at which natural environments are being lost and species are being consigned to extinction, arguing that this destruction of the complex web of life will eventually put the continued existence of *homo sapiens* in peril. Unlike Elliot and Katz, Wilson has no difficulty with the notion of restoration ecology, indeed he thinks it will be essential to efforts to end the present extinction spasm. Moreover, he sees a vital role for landscape architecture in this:

> Parcels of land will have to be set aside as inviolate preserves. Others will be identified as the best sites for extractive reserves, for buffer zones used in part-time agriculture and restricted hunting and for land convertible totally to human use. In the expanded enterprise, landscape design will play a decisive role. Where environments have been mostly humanised, biological diversity can still be sustained at high levels by ingenious placement of woodlots, hedgerows, watersheds, reservoirs and artificial ponds and lakes. Master plans will meld not just economic efficiency and beauty but also the preservation of species and races. (Wilson, 2001, pp. 301–303)

The vision in the last two sentences just quoted is perhaps not so different from something a landscape urbanist might advocate (compare Czerniak). Landscape urbanists claim to embrace ecology, but they do so in the context of the abolition of the artificial-natural binary, so that the ecologies they embrace are "the new ecologies of our future metropolitan regions" (Corner, *Reader*, p. 33). But is there space in the landscape urbanist worldview (where, remember, the binaries between urban–rural, artificial–natural, town–country have all been radically rejected) for 'inviolate preserves'? Landscape Urbanism, for all its vigour, does not think far beyond the city hinterland. For all their iconoclasm, would landscape urbanists, if pressed, be willing to retain a binary distinction between the humanised and the wild?

4. Where are the People?

The most striking features of the *Manual* are its illustrations, many of which are examples of work produced by students on the AA's Landscape Urbanism programme. The first thing that strikes one are their complexity and precision. They are clearly the result of much painstaking work and some of them, at least, have the beauty of a blueprint for a piece of complex engineering (suggesting, perhaps that aesthetics are at stake, after all). Problems arise on closer inspection, for most of them do not indicate their scale, their context or their orientation. They seem

to eschew such commonplace communicative devices as labels and keys, so the overall effect is of a species of self-absorbed inventiveness which has little to do with real places and nothing to do with real people. The text which accompanies these illustrations is written in such tortuous language that many of the diagrams remain cryptic. Here is a sample:

> The physical conditions in the fabric are reduced to a system capable of receiving non-physical determinations through variations in its configuration. Determinations are categorized as informational inputs, then quantified and sedimented in the organization as they are associated one by one to simple parameters of variation in the geometry. A single matrix indexes them in the organization of the river edge. (*Manual*, p. 40)

It reads as if something quite profound were being explained, but I freely admit that I have no idea what this passage means. Sadly, rather a lot of the *Manual* is written in this sort of way. What possible chance has such writing of communicating anything to the layman, to the people who might, in some imagined future, populate the built forms suggested by such graphical exercises? These cryptic diagrams are presented as generative 'machines' for creating places in which real people will live and love, work and play but they are utterly mute regarding the experiential qualities of these places or the inner lives of their imagined inhabitants.

The most revealing, and indeed chilling passage, was written by Ciro Najle and is to be found on page 39 under the heading 'Medium':

> Landscape urbanism permeates segregated domains by installing itself before them through the construction of a machinic medium. Abstract without being reductive, virtual without being ideal and ubiquitous without being Utopian, the machinic is a technically controlled sieve that acquires consistency as it integrates a multiplicity of determinations in a medium of production, virtualizing potentials by constantly oscillating between management of information, programming of responses, generation of organizations, evaluation of performance, coordination of collaborations, scripting of protocols, coding of communication, engineering of materials, modulation of expression, and fine-tuning of inflections. (*Manual*, p. 39)

One does not need to be an expert in discourse analysis to catch the general tone of this paragraph. One only needs to look at the language: *management, programming, generation, evaluation, coordination, scripting, coding, engineering, modulation, fine-tuning*. Are we in the computer lab or perhaps the engine-testing bay? It is certainly not a language that captures anything about what human beings might want or expect from a place, anything about their likes or dislikes, their hopes and their fears. Contrast this with Henri Lefebvre's observation about the language in which 'social space' is discussed:

> Everyone knows what is meant when we speak of a 'room' in an apartment, the 'corner' of the street, a 'marketplace', a shopping or cultural 'centre', a public 'place', and so on. These terms of everyday discourse serve to distinguish, but

not to isolate, particular spaces, and in general to describe a social space. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 16)

There is a great danger, particularly when operating at the extended scales envisaged by landscape urbanists, that the individual human life gets forgotten. The film *Koyaanisqati*, mentioned by Berger (*Reader*, p. 202), can for this reason be quite disturbing to watch. Apparently speeded up, through time-lapse photography, the people shown in the film scurry like ants and their rich interior lives are reduced to inhuman flows.

Moreover using the jargon of the expert rather than that of everyday speech is a move which keeps power and control firmly in the hands of the technocrat. There seems to be nothing in either the *Manual* or the *Reader* about local people having an influence upon the way sites might develop, other than their participation in 'performances'. A charitable reading is that this sort of bottom–up local planning is supposed to happen once the landscape urbanists have 'cleared the ground' or 'prepared the stage', but there is not much on how this is supposed to occur and Landscape Urbanism needs urgently to incorporate the values and the methods of participatory planning and design and to pay attention to small-scale practices of resistance, such as guerrilla gardening. In fairness to Landscape Urbanism as a whole, Najle's technocratic style is balanced by Corner's far more humanistic approach. In 'Terra Fluxus', Corner recognises that "public spaces are firstly the containers of collective memory and desire, and secondly they are places for geographical and social imagination to extend new relationships and sets of possibility" (*Reader*, p. 32). What needs to be articulated is how these social imaginaries can be germinated and cultivated.

5. Is it Too American?

Landscape Urbanism appeared in North America after a period of sustained industrial decline, during which brownfield sites were being created faster than they could be reclaimed, and populations were leaving the inner city for the ever expanding suburbs. The model of the decentralised network city, meanwhile, has greatly influenced the phenomenon of the 'edge city' first brought to attention by the *Washington Post* journalist Joel Garreau in his *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (1992) which suggested that the real growth points in American cities were not in downtown areas, but around the periphery where new places to live, work, shop and seek recreation sprang up around freeway interchanges.

Garreau believed that this phenomenon could be identified worldwide. It is sometimes suggested that it can take 20 years for social and cultural trends which originate in the US to become established in Europe. There are undoubtedly edge cities in Europe, but their growth has generally not been matched by a corresponding downturn in city centres. Indeed the evidence, from Britain at least, is that the decline in city centre population has been reversed even in former industrial cities such as Glasgow, Newcastle or Sheffield (Bromley *et al.*, 2007). There is no British equivalent of Detroit.

In contrast with both Europe and North America, where the great population shift from the land to the city is already complete, in the developing world the trend

is toward metropolitan extension, creating mega-cities, but the form this takes varies in different countries. According to UN-Habitat, in most African countries people make for the largest city (usually the capital) where the slums may grow at more than 4% per annum, while in India dense urban populations are shifting to the 'bedroom communities' which ring cities such as New Delhi or Mumbai. Growth patterns in China have favoured the eastern coastal belt producing 'city-regions'. Within the next two decades, predicts the UN, 60% of the world's people will live in urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2008).

The facts of global urbanisation are often cited by landscape urbanists, and perhaps drive their vision of decentred, network cities and endless Town–Country, but the specific conditions to which Landscape Urbanism first arose, that is, deindustrialisation and depopulation of the city core, are the reverse of what is happening in most developing countries, that is, industrialisation and concentration of population. What is happening in, say, Guangzhou or Sao Paulo, is the twenty-first-century equivalent of what happened in Manchester, the first city of the Industrial Revolution. Among the responses to nineteenth-century industrialisation and the great influx of workers to the new cities was the campaign to provide public parks for healthy recreation, which in turn inspired Frederick Law Olmsted in his advocacy of a park for Manhattan. Central Park might be considered one of the first 'prepared grounds', for though much effort was put into Picturesque *rus in urbe* it has served as a place where myriad activities, many completely un-envisioned by the designers, can take place. On one February day (my only visit) I saw a primary school class taking the part of trees (moved around by their teacher to form avenues and clumps), a fashion shoot, and a septuagenarian performing ballet moves on roller blades. Moreover, though Olmsted's Picturesque principles are disparaged, he is often cited by landscape urbanists for his vision in combining cultural significance with advanced thinking on environmental health.

6. What Happens to Heritage?

Much of Landscape Urbanism's energy has come from high design culture, driven by architecture's thirst for the avant-garde. It is revealing that Waldheim talks in *Topos* of the movement being "no longer sufficiently youthful" (after only a decade) to satisfy such appetites (Waldheim, 2010, p. 21). Newness, originality and challenge are virtues, and these values do not sit comfortably with those which surround the notion of heritage, where oldness, authenticity and the need to safeguard would be elevated. It is possible to recognise this, even while acknowledging that heritage too is fluid and socially constructed. There is a vast literature, scholarly as well as sentimental, about attachment to place and Landscape Urbanism's sweeping statements about liberating the binary opposition of town and country seem threatening because of the weight of semantic associations we have with the countryside. In most of Europe, with the possible exception of the Dutch polders, landscapes are palimpsests with many layers of reinscription. The situation has been different in North America, where the existence of large sparsely populated spaces led to the valorisation of wildernesses, and it is only comparatively recently that more perceptive examination of the history of such places has revealed them to be

the cultural landscapes of Native Americans, who were often removed to reservations in order to create the 'uninhabited wildernesses' of the National Parks (Cronon, 1995).

In Britain, where the depth of the history inscribed in the landscape is easier to read, there are organisations, such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England, which are dedicated to preventing these traces from being obliterated. While not wishing to suggest that heritage values should always prevail over cultural innovation—for there must always be the means to create new heritage—Landscape Urbanism has not, so far as I can see, demonstrated how it would approach this issue at all and yet it is advocating change—and at a very large scale.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to raise questions rather than to answer them. The fact that after a decade of scholarly and professional discussion, a high profile review such as *Topos* thinks that it is worth devoting an issue to Landscape Urbanism, shows that it is more than a fad. Nor is it just landscape architecture under a different guise, though it draws upon many shared historical precedents, including Haussmann's boulevards, Olmsted's connected park systems and Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities. Waldheim is surely right when he says that its discourse is now being absorbed into the global discussion about the future of cities, but, at the same time, the series of questions raised above indicates contradictions, theoretical shortcomings and practical lacunae which participants in the discourse could usefully address. Waldheim is also honest enough to acknowledge that, even after a decade, the "urban form promised by landscape urbanism has not yet arrived" (Waldheim, 2010, p. 24). At the time of writing, Landscape Urbanism is on the verge of transforming itself into Ecological Urbanism, indeed a conference on that theme was held at Harvard in 2009, out of which a publication has already emerged (Mostafavi & Doherty, 2010). Whether the environmental design professions are ready for a new -*ism* before the old one has been adequately digested is moot. Nevertheless, there are ideas within the Landscape Urbanism discourse which have great merit, among which I would include the breaking down of professional distinctions, the integration of ecological thinking, the foregrounding of infra-structure, the interest in the positive use of waste materials and the emphasis upon functionality rather than mere appearance.

There is also a quantity of dubious philosophy, unhelpful imagery and obscurantist language that Landscape Urbanism ought to dump. The attack on the rural–urban binary is misguided, and in any case doomed to failure beyond the academy because of the persistence of ordinary ways of talking. Larding the case for Landscape Urbanism with Deleuzian and Derridean references was a mistake, since it was done principally to impress an academic elite, and it has even left large sections of its intended audience bemused. Couched in such language, Landscape Urbanism (or its successors) has little prospect of conveying its better ideas to a larger public, including politicians, activists, professionals and citizens. However, if Ecological Urbanism can develop a critique of Landscape Urbanism, resolving some of its inherent contradictions, and can pay more attention to the social and political realities of city conditions, giving more voice to citizens and finding ways to involve

them in the creation of the new imaginaries which are surely needed, then it deserves at least a cautious welcome.

Acknowledgement

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