In the middle years of the last century, Jose Luis Sert summoned designers and critics to Harvard with the intention of defining a discipline to be called urban design. Records of the annual meetings show reams of tentative disquisition.¹ That no conclusions were drawn, even though the gatherings took place in the presence of the exemplary urbanism of Cambridge, signaled from the outset that empirical evidence was to be held outside the discourse.

Not until 2010, with the semicentennial proceedings commemorating Sert’s quest, did it become clear that his legacy to urban design, at least in the academy, had been a consensus to avoid consensus. This clarification arrived by way of contrast, as a replacement paradigm became visible: the highly focused academic agenda called Landscape Urbanism.

Meanwhile, outside the academy, another consensus had become dominant, this one based specifically on the empirical observation of places like Cambridge. It was called the New Urbanism.²

By the end of the century, the practicing design professions had come to support the principles of the New Urbanism (by its several names) with remarkable unanimity: Americans should drive less and live more compactly because of concerns related to pollution, health, economics, social equity, and energy use.³

The particulars were still in debate, but that basic outline of the
human habitat had largely been settled. The instruments to achieve it would be based on the pedestrian shed, an urban pattern in which the basic needs of daily life are within walking distance. These would be integrated to regional and transportation patterns for access to the complete repertoire of special needs. The buildings would not be megastructures, but multiple and compatible and designed sequentially in response to evolving circumstances, under the guidance of the existing administrative protocol of codes — which would be re-written accordingly. From this model would ensue what was then known to be sustainable for both the human and the natural habitat.

The New Urbanism was close to supplanting the tenacious paradigm of suburban sprawl, which had been the unintended consequence of a century’s search for the “true synthesis” of the social and natural realms. The original proposition, called the Garden City, had dissipated long before — when geographic discipline was made unnecessary by the ubiquity of the automobile. But the New Urbanism, especially through Transect-based codes and LEED-ND (for Neighborhood Development), was poised to become a new standard. Rather than administering protection of nature, the new strategy would be projective, enabling an urbanism that humans needed and desired, and would therefore be loath to abandon. And it was to be market-oriented: those who could choose would not want to inhabit suburban sprawl.

As the Congress for the New Urbanism conceived the campaign, the effort seemed to provide enough intellectual content to support research, stimulate debate, and keep reform-minded designers well occupied: How much compactness should be expected, with development driven also by market expectations? To what extent could natural processes be accommodated without undermining human prerogatives? How could the socioeconomic segregation enabled by the automobile be reversed? Should urban growth be bounded as conceived by Howard, or channeled as proposed by McKaye? How to incorporate food production, energy sourcing, and the inevitable impoverishment into an urbanism adapted to the twenty-first century? These proposals would have to be implemented within then-current bureaucracies, through the friction of an angry and confused public, a venal political system, a development industry programmed for simplistic solutions, and — as it turned out — the opposition of the design academy.
At the turn of the century it became clear that the more intellectually compelling debate was no longer against conventional suburbia, but between the New Urbanism and Landscape Urbanism, two paradigms with differing visions of nature and society. Landscape Urbanism had managed to overcome the reflex that had kept the academy uncommitted for half a century — not by challenging Sert’s discourse, but by unifying the academies against an opponent: explicitly taking on the threat of New Urbanism and proposing to “undermine its certainties, explode its limits, ridicule its preoccupations.”

The New Urbanists did not initially engage the challenge. Ann Spirn’s early critique in *The Granite Garden* — that there had been “a fundamental lack of understanding of how natural processes shape cities, towns and regions” — was dismissed with the facile retort that Commonwealth Avenue, which appeared on the cover of her book, could not be built following the prescriptions of the text within.

In retrospect, the New Urbanists’ failure to assimilate Spirn’s prescient and reasonable message was a strategic blunder. Years of practice complying with mandatory federal standards had coarsened their ecological sensibility. The natural processes, which were accommodated only as required by law, had not been *polemicized*. A withering emphasis on socially determined designs for public space opened New Urbanism to the accusation that it was dismissive of nature. New Urbanists, responding to the architectural critiques of Jane Jacobs, William White, Jan Gehl, and Oscar Newman, were both socially and environmentally responsible, yet did not appear to be so.

For years, the emergent challenge had been overshadowed by a distracting debate over architectural style. It seemed that academic architects would not go along with a New Urbanist standard of a contextual architecture cooperating toward spatial definition. The *discipline* was seen as an intrinsic constraint on their creativity. New Urbanism had underestimated their profound discontent. Not even the spectacular success of modernist buildings within a New Urbanist discipline, of HafenCity in Hamburg (opened in 2015), could assuage the avant-garde architect’s prerogative of unfettered innovation.

In strategic contrast, Landscape Urbanism sought favor within the architectural academy by providing refuge from urban *discipline*. Nature’s “indeterminacy and flux” was understood to allow freely designed
buildings as freestanding objects within a landscape both buffering and unifying their individualism. A brilliantly argued and lavishly illustrated agenda to restore unconstrained form-making was on offer — in exchange for the dominant position within Sert’s old Urban Design triad of architecture, urban planning, and landscape architecture, where landscape architecture had been the junior partner.

Rather than an urban fabric based on the spatial definition by buildings, landscape would be the “structuring medium.” “The look and shape of the city” was to be a matter of “open space within which buildings are set.” When Stan Allen stated that “designers can activate space and produce urban effects without the weighty apparatus of traditional space making,” it was a radical proposition only against the then-consensus that a disciplined building frontage was the primary component of a successful urban outcome — and its absence a catalyst for failure.

Fig. 1.1: The New Town of Sénart (formerly Melun-Sénart), France by OMA/Rem Koolhaas is a vaguely-acknowledged precedent to Landscape Urbanism. The diagrams illustrate what Koolhaas refers to as the “irrigation of possibilities.” This refers to the loosely parametric, sequential process that Landscape Urbanism aspires to — for which they have no protocols since they must eschew codes (which are associated with New Urbanism). The current method of subsidiarity is the personal selection by the planner of sympathetic architects for the buildings. This constrains Landscape Urbanism to competitions and high-profile civic work as it is unable to permeate the operating system of the 27,000 planning departments that actually administer development in the United States. It is a fatal flaw, for a 21st century urbanism must be responsive to Gideon’s “problem of large numbers.”
This “critical” position forced Landscape Urbanism to discard all the constituent elements of the dominant paradigm, leading to a deformation professionelle. With an aplomb unique to the academy, there would be an exploration of density, without reference to “traditional” models. This was simply hors le discours.

As Landscape Urbanists had transcended Harvard’s 50 years of dithering by systematically asserting whatever positions were contrary to the New Urbanism, the design syntax was backed into the categorical rejection of grids, blocks, sidewalks directly associated to building frontages, primary ground planes, standard-issue pavement, trees coinciding with paths, multiple buildings accreting to define public space, and any of those design techniques (even typology) that could promote and reconcile the super-adjacency of disparate social and functional programs.

This position was, at least, unambiguous — far from Sert’s stance between coveting the forbidden traditional city, a self-imposed distance from the exhausted CIAM, and reluctant avoidance of the glamorous but non-Harvard brand of Team 10. The continuity with Sert was the prerogative of high design. Indeed, the exceptional quality of Landscape Urbanism’s obscure designs would for decades mitigate the evidence that attracting free-willed pedestrians required disciplined frontages. Until it was proven otherwise by the built projects, trust would be placed in the swarms of Photoshopped pedestrians.

Given the decisive failure of espace vague in the last half of the twentieth century, the belief that street frontages were dispensable required a kind of deliberate amnesia that could be effected only within a delimited academic discourse. Evidence was buried that the attempts at a non-spatial, landscaped, public realms at the earlier touchstone urbanisms of Vallingby, Stevenage, Toulouse-le-Mirail, Firminy-Vert, Don Mills, Brasilia, Pruitt-Igoe, Tyson’s Corner, Columbia and Hansaviertel, without exception, had failed to support pedestrian activity at levels approaching those of the nearby corridor streets, which — unless they had been economically undermined or demolished — stood as their permanent indictment.

New Urbanists believed that walkability was the essential element that made urbanism intrinsically sustainable — and that, conveniently enough, it was also urbanism’s greatest competitive advantage. Why would one choose to live in higher density if not for the street life? The
compensation for the absence of a private yard out the back door was to be the vitality teeming out the front door. Even the omni-skeptical New York critic Michael Sorkin could not deny the delights of the spatially defined street. In his autobiographical *Twenty Minutes in Manhattan*, there was nothing but the *rue corridor* to salve his quasi-penitential apartment.13

The discourse of the Landscape Urbanists was unusual in excluding Manhattan, otherwise the *maison mère* of the architectural avant-garde. But...Manhattan’s urbanism was a model for New Urbanism. A list of its differences from Landscape Urbanist principles would be quite long. Proportionally (height to width), Manhattan’s streets were the opposite of *espace vague* and — above all — the natural and the urban were radically juxtaposed as in Central Park — and not in the least interspersed. Indeed, in those years, when a modernist object-building within Manhattan (or any other historic core) was seen to support pedestrian life, it was predictably embedded into and braced by the pre-existing urban fabric. This had been the case with the Seagram Building and Foster’s Gherkin, neither of which had exterminated pedestrian activity. This was a reason that the “starchitects” increasingly *demanded* inclusion in the historic urban areas of London, Milan, St. Petersburg, Washington, and Paris — rather than accept sites in such then-new enclaves as La Defense and Crystal City. Modernist buildings succeeded only when they were parasitic on traditional urban fabric. Among other object-buildings, they coalesced into a *strada comica*, as Rem Koolhaas eventually demonstrated with his Starchitect Collage.14

Just as CIAM (and Team 10) had done previously, Landscape Urbanists banned the *rue corridor* for ideological reasons, and the result eventually proved to be the same. Proscribed from emulating the world’s stock of functioning urbanism, only the dreary social housing and suburban sprawl would have remained as the models. The disinterment of the unverifiable projects like Usonia and Hilbersheimer had necessarily to follow.

Besides, as modernist housing schemes were demolished or gentri-fied, the evidence of failure was fortuitously eliminated. The demolition of the Robin Hood Gardens at the turn of the century was not permitted to have the devastating effect on Landscape Urbanism that Pruitt-Igoe had on CIAM’s legacy. A new justification, *environmentalism*, was
Fig. 1.2: Vallingby, Sweden, 1957: In crude terms, Landscape Urbanism is a revival of 1950’s planning now updated by a very superior theoretical apparatus based on natural rather than human prerogatives. The human interface has been judiciously avoided, as it did not perform according to plan. The historic phenomenon of social failure is today held outside the discourse. Source: Harvard Design Magazine

Figs. 1.3 and 1.4: Two additional examples of Team 10 precedent: Bochum University by Candilis, Jossic & Woods, and the Smithson’s plan for Berlin 1958, both equipped with walkways as surrogate ground-planes and “organic” geometries. Team 10 is now riding into full revival coincident with Landscape Urbanism’s ascendancy. Source: Team 10 Primer by Alison Smithson
brought into the avant-garde discourse for the first time, replacing the failed social commitment. The high proportion of *espace vague* became justified, not as social space: Landscape Urbanism never succeeded in conceptualizing an *integral* social agenda (see Talen: “The Social Apathy of Landscape Urbanism,” *Landscape Urbanism and Its Discontents*, 2013), but as the locus of environmental mitigation through bucolic implantations. Surrogate hill and dale, prairie, woodland, and stream embalmed the residue between buildings. The result was highly appealing visually, and endowed Landscape Urbanism with the appearance of superior environmental performance.

These audacious and untested propositions were dissimulated by an attack on the New Urbanists’ purported inability to deal with the realities of practice. Thus James Corner defined Landscape Urbanism as “a response to the failure of traditional urban design and planning to operate effectively in the contemporary city.” The “out of control” metropolis was “not a weakness but its strength.” A crossover vocabulary of “indeterminacy,” “openness,” and “flux” was developed to affirm the unwillingness to engage the American planning system, contradicting the ideal of predictable outcomes through codes and standards because the New Urbanists had done so. The incompletion and temporality of nature became the “antidote to the implicit finitude” of New Urbanist planning tools, not acknowledging similarities with the successional and parametric technology of the widely used Rural-to-Urban Transect, which was the basis for the SmartCode freeware.

While the social agenda was elusive, the treatment of the “ecological” landscaping was curiously honest: there would be no pretending that the plantings were natural. Landscape Urbanism’s design tropes were careful to signal that even the layout of “native species” would be on the artificial order of a plant nursery. Naturalistic planting, when unavoidable, would be as quotation — to be framed literally and physically. Anything that might be confused with the natural was proscribed. Olmsted’s successful replicants were ignored in general and avoided in detail.

A greater difference permeates the ethos of both movements. For Landscape Urbanism the environmental crisis was not a scientific reality to be mitigated, but an incubator of metaphor. As an example, one proposal presented at a conference on Ecological Urbanism held at Harvard in 2010 involved the replacement of a street intersection in downtown
Berkeley by a plug of landscape. That this intervention clipped the street grid, reducing transportation capacity and thereby density, was an externality. The concept was to provide an explicit allusion to a coastal wetland some miles distant. This was understood as a “critical” position by the cognoscenti present, but taken as effective environmentalism by the trusting elsewhere.

Figs. 1.5 and 1.6: Smithson Robin Hood Gardens, London, 1972: One Team 10 precedent for Landscape Urbanism is Robin Hood Gardens, one of the world’s most admired projects in the 1970s, now subject to demolition. It predicts four Landscape Urbanist tropes: 1. Artificially shaped topography (not to be confused with nature— as with “Dread” Olmsted), 2. Thin, flooding, streamform buildings (with the characteristic skew), 3. “Streets in the air” dissipating the primacy of the ground plane, and 4. The carefully random composition of the façade, as visual surrogate for the absence of programmatic complexity.
James Corner dismissed even McHarg’s foundational overlay maps because they attempted to impose measures. In the absence of metrics, the kind of technical arguments deployed by New Urbanism in favor of compact urbanism could be ignored. There would be no accounting for suburbia’s dismal ecological performance. Only one metric was retained for its scientific gloss: hydrology. Water filtered to the aquifer was elevated to a rhetorical position whose merits were beyond verification. Eventually hydrology came to be mandated — ironically, for those disapproving of fixed standards — by federal policy.

The perverse implications of hydrological privilege gradually became evident. Manhattan and Charleston emerged as polemical counterexamples. What would the effect be on Manhattan’s transportation network if the nearly 3,000 streams and wetlands then in pipes were to have remained “riparian corridors” as per Landscape Urbanist praxis? How much street connectivity would be interrupted, thereby severely reducing density? How many thousands of square miles of actual, functioning, wilderness would have been consumed by the dwellings, stores, and offices of the millions of consequently dispersed Manhattanites — all adding their lower-density carbon footprints to the global crisis?

But this argument failed to have an effect — as it missed the point of Landscape Urbanism. An ethical commitment — even to ecology — could not alone provide a decisive argument within the then-current relativistic discourse — where power would be the only objective verification. Landscape Urbanism could not be successfully analyzed as a design movement, or even an environmental reform strategy. Its peculiar combination of agendas would be finally understood as a campaign to amass power.

Landscape Urbanism had enlisted the support of constituencies that the New Urbanists had either ignored, annoyed, or anathemized. Among them were: 1. The profession of Landscape Architecture, whose design concerns had been made subordinate to social determinants; 2. Environmentalists, specifically those seduced by the visual foregrounding of “nature”; 3. Academic faculty, otherwise constrained by New Urbanism’s research agenda which privileged proof over speculation; 4. Architects, who would be able to retain their prerogatives to formal innovation; 5. Infrastructure purveyors, confronting NIMBYs, eager to underwrite the high cost of visual mitigations; and 6. Unpopular
suburban sprawl developers, who could be made to, literally, “look good.” These groups were strategically embraced by Landscape Urbanism.

First among these constituencies were the architects, to whom Landscape Urbanism offered a reprieve. They rediscovered that interspersed “nature” could provide the visual shock absorber between the mutually destructive shapes of their buildings. The New Urbanist proposition had required a collective discipline and a formal cooperation. Architects could retain the prerogatives of untrammeled formalism in exchange for ceding urban design to the Landscape Urbanists. This finally slipped the Beaux-Arts assumption that architecture was the master art. Furthermore, there was something to be gained by aligning with an agenda that was exclusively ecological — there would be no further need to sustain the tiresome CIAM/New Urbanist commitment to social equity.

In symbiotic relationship, architects supported the “ecological projection” of Landscape Urbanism by evolving a formal repertoire that provided an “urban” metaphor equivalent to the “natural” one. There was a look that identified the corresponding architecture: the quality of the carefully random — from arbitrarily complicated repertoire of materials and a diverse massing to a laborious misalignment of details such as walls, columns, openings, and mullions. This architectural syntax, which had previously emerged to express the uncertainty inherent in the relativist discourse, was re-framed as a surrogate for the complexity of urbanism. The visual multiplicity provided camouflage for what were in fact functionally homogenous buildings. The “critical” method privileged appearance as the expression of intention — and so representation trumped the evidence of an absent functional and social diversity.

The timing of the architectural alliance was fortuitous. By that time a generation of students had been educated having had no exposure to the necrotic European New Towns or the narcoleptic American Planned-Unit Developments, or to the social failure of H.U.D., which together had extinguished what was left of modernist planning’s reputation. All reference was lost of the mercy killing that had once come from every direction: Collage City, Delirious New York, Townscape, Architecture Rationelle, The Golden City, Jane Jacobs, the Krier brothers, Defensible Space, the Charter of the New Urbanism. There was only revulsion for the “postmodernist” episode, when the practitioners, the academy, the
publications had experienced the rare moment of consensus that whatever may still have been viable about modernist architecture, nothing could survive of modernist planning. But that consensus had occurred in the 1980s. A full generation of amnesia had since been stage-managed.

The trusty rue corridor, which was the one weapon the executioners all held in common, was slated once more for the trash heap of history (further proof of Jane Jacobs’ observation that the “pseudoscience of planning seems almost neurotic in its determination to imitate empiric failure and ignore empiric success”). Jacobs herself was replaced by her nemesis, Robert Moses — with reputation refurbished from a scourge of cities to the builder of infrastructure. His achievements would be tapped by Landscape Urbanists as another means of connecting to the infrastructure constituency. This became an important agenda, manifested in the aestheticizing of the arterials, highways, stormwater facilities, and parking lots. The traffic impact and carbon emissions that such auto-dependent transportation systems induced were statistical externalities to the ecological discourse. If there was a gloss of “science,” it was at the scale of advancing plant-bed technology in unnatural locations: on roofs, decks, walls, and high slopes.

“Cutting-edge” design was essential to Landscape Urbanism’s academic credentials, but it was a fiction that could not be maintained indefinitely, even within the highly edited history curriculum pioneered by Michael Hays at Harvard. One of the requirements of an avant-garde position, duly achieved, was the sidelining of the pioneers like Anne Whiston Spirn and Ian McHarg (while still alive and in academia!). But the enormous threat remained: the indisputable and ineradicable evidence of Olmsted’s success under a virtually identical agenda.

As the establishment of a suitable prehistory became a priority, Charles Waldheim, the eminence grise of Landscape Urbanism, put forth three decoys — Andrea Branzi’s Agronica, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonia, and Hilberheimer’s New Regional Pattern — taking recourse in three unbuilt concepts that could not therefore be challenged by objective measurement. But all three resisted resurrection until they were bundled with an emergent aspect of ecology — food self-sufficiency. This development coincided with an important New Urbanist initiative, becoming a first instance of agreement between the contending parties. The contemporary Theory and Practice of Agrarian Urbanism could have become
a Landscape Urbanist text had the illustrated buildings been flat-roofed. Yet another point of agreement became the hydrology agenda, not as metaphor but as the utilitarian, cost-effective Light Imprint technology formulated by the New Urbanist Tom Low.

When the national debt finally curtailed the infrastructure projects, the environmentalists became the principal Landscape Urbanist constituency. The seeds had been long-ago planted. A century and a half earlier, the American environmental movement had emerged from the campaign to create the National Parks. This agenda held wilderness as the ideal. Humans and their activities were thereby necessarily conceived as other
than nature (per Woody Allen: “Nature and I are two.”). As the toolbox limits the craft, Landscape Urbanism’s pervasive rustication of the city was recognizable, while New Urbanism, with its focus on density, connectivity, and contiguity, could not be conceived as anything but a clipper of green corridors, purveyor of impervious surfaces, and creator of heat islands.

The New Urbanist response was technical: that the application of visual greening de-tuned those attributes of urbanism that supported walkability and hence lowered the environmental performance by fostering vehicular traffic. This argument was forcefully engaged in the compendium *Landscape Urbanism and its Discontents* (2013). But it was too complex a discourse for the time — lacking the reflexive appeal of visual biophilia.

Besides, politically, the “green” aesthetics continued to provide the most effective vaccine against NIMBYism. The otherwise unpopular suburban sprawl could be re-packaged. Sprawl developers had long been adverse to New Urbanism, so the new alliance with Landscape Urbanists became a direct existential affront. Conventional development had been reduced by the thirty-year campaign of the New Urbanism — by government-administered protocols like the SmartCode and private ones associated with LEED-ND. But this kind of legalistic and technical progress was invisible to designers. The superb design associated with Landscape Urbanism managed to (somewhat) refurbish the reputation of suburbia, a pattern that had not only been failing economically and environmentally, but looked as if it were. The social, economic, and environmental consequences of the old “unprecedented typologies” such as big-box retail were camouflaged by green roofs, plant-laden screens, and porous-pavement parking lots. Landscape Urbanists were so skillful that most failed to recognize they were protracting the car-dominated, sociofugal places that few outside the then-ascendant Tea Party/Agenda 21 alliance could continue to condone.

Landscape Urbanism settled into arranging buildings that were urban in their statistical density, but not in their performance: “an expansive form of urbanism,” disaggregated, not only to accommodate the automobile but also to become “integrated with nature and agriculture,” dispersed under a “sustainable energy grid”.

And there was a further bonus for the architects: the elusive phenomenon of making modernism widely marketable. Landscape Urbanism
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had delivered at long last a connection to the *populus*. As any Visual Preference Study\textsuperscript{21} will show, human biophilia is such that an image of anything with leaves will tilt the selection in its favor. Americans accepted “green” modernism from the same stimulus that had enamored them to the original suburbia embedded in landscape. For managing acceptance by the middle class, as much as the ecological benefits claimed by its rhetoric, was the reason Landscape Urbanism first gained disciplinary preeminence *outside* the academy.

That other great constituency, the regulators of a scientific persuasion, principally at the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection, did not at first discern that the biophilic visuals of native plants, enhanced topography, and ground plane permeability had scant measurable effect on performance. They had been thoroughly seduced by the practice to re-present the metrics of their studies in gorgeous graphic formats, displayed as totems justifying the actions of the designers. Landscape Urbanists evolved a brilliant escalation in the representational quality of scientific analysis. The once-lugubrious environmental reports were aestheticized. Analytical drones had been promoted to protagonists, while the New Urbanists had done no more than follow their rules.

The Landscape Urbanists thus succeeded for a time in avoiding scientific verification. When the effective environmental performance was eventually revealed, the benefits proved to be paltry, and — because of the extremely high cost of producing natural effects where they did not naturally occur — counterproductive. Vignetted nature was expensive to install and maintain.

This problem had been obscured for a time by the propensity to apply Landscape Urbanist technique only to civic space — which justified the higher investment. But with both the economic and environmental crises becoming truly serious, the counter-doctrine emerged that ecology was effective only where natural systems were preserved or restored in substantial areas — not as implants between buildings. Ecology as a science could not validate Landscape Urbanist theories and techniques.

While Landscape Urbanism made a bucolic contribution to civic space, it was ultimately incapable of delivering ordinary urban fabric. The claim that it was a comprehensive theory of urbanism was more than it could bear. The fundamental rhetoric of “process” failed because there were no means of coordinating the sequence of urbanization. The
problem was technical and intrinsic: when an infrastructure of nature permeated between, above, below, and within, both private buildings and public spaces had to be designed and built simultaneously. There was no possibility of successional protocols. The coding that would have permitted the sequential generation of urbanism, by many, over time, belonged to the New Urbanism, and was therefore outside the Landscape Urbanists’ discourse. The avowed aspiration to flux and indeterminacy was reduced to the prerogative of choosing sympathetic architects to design the grey voids between the landscaped areas on the plan. A planning method based on the designer's and patron's personality could not be sustained in the long-running timeline of urbanism, which exceeds the human and the political.

The conceptualized “quotations” of implanted nature gradually became a physical necessity. The puritanism of “native species” rather than the exotic hardy urban ones required that the “frame” become actual railings and planters to keep humans from trashing the landscape by walking on it. The landscape could be gazed upon, but that was all. An enormous amount of urban open space was thereby removed from its primary recreational purpose — at the very center of cities where it was most necessary. After the first sections of the High Line were completed, a prophylaxis of “temporary” fencing and signage became necessary. Subsequent sections had to include the “exotic” common lawns that could actually be used by humans in the original, Olmstedian function.

Another well-known failure came out of Portland, Oregon, with the juxtaposition of New Urbanist Jamison Square from the 1990s and the Landscape Urbanist Tranner Springs Park, one block away and a decade later. Jamison is usually packed with people of all ages, while Tanner is virtually devoid of humans whose feet and posteriors would crush the prairie grasses. In yet another square in Portland, the restoration of “woodland” resulted in objections — not so much to the outdoor sexual activity enabled by the mask of dense landscape, but to the residue that dogs would find when they were walked in the mornings. The New Urbanist Transect would have prevented such misfits of human nature and Nature.

Slowly, the reputation of Landscape Urbanism would have eroded exactly like the ethanol initiative, which arose concurrently — both driven by elegant intention rather than practical effect — had it not been subjected to the Rural-to-Urban Transect. This taxonomic engine
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absorbed Landscape Urbanism’s techniques wherever they were contextually appropriate and effective. Not being ideologically proscribed, New Urbanists were able to assimilate Landscape Urbanism at the sub-urban end of the Transect. They refurbished those aspects of their own open space design where it had been weak. The Urban Center and Urban Core Transect Zones remained intact, as Landscape Urbanism had never really engaged either. The rue corridor survived after all.

New Urbanists absorbed the compelling polemical vocabulary as well. Using Lars Lerup’s “areas of stimulation,” or “stim,” within the “unfortunate economic residues,” or “dross,”22 was a more interesting than what New Urbanists had been calling “sprawl retrofit” and “districts.”

The Landscape Urbanist episode within the New Urbanist discourse became important, as it shared the fate of other intelligent alternatives: assimilation. The effective techniques were absorbed as a matter of pragmatism. The result was a truly Ecological Urbanism that dealt with a greater range of constituencies, wielding a more extensive design repertoire, cultural as well as natural.

The perennial avant-garde at Harvard, as expected, moved on. The demands of the times do not necessarily coincide with the interests of the academies — nor should they, despite the difficult century that is still upon us.

Endnotes


10 Ibid.


12 See Urban Design by Alex Krieger and William Saunders (2009, University of Minnesota Press). A passing dismissal of the New Urbanism is one of the few themes common among the 21 papers.


17 At a jury at SciArch, Duany mentioned the striking similarity between a student’s social housing project and Pruitt-Igoe. The hapless student asked, “What is a Pruitt go?”


21 See Anton Tony Nelessen, anelessen.com/.

An Album of Images

Andrés Duany
Among the opening acts of Landscape Urbanism was Ann Whiston Spirn's *The Granite Garden*, of 1984. Despite her professorial presence at Penn and Cambridge—the early and later incubators of Landscape Urbanism—she is not now acknowledged by the younger generation as a predecessor. Her contemporaries, the New Urbanists, ignored her propositions based on a perception of anti-urbanism, a claim they later retracted. 

**Fig. c-1:** Charleston, SC, under the two theories. Left: The actual urbanism of Charleston, with the urban network trumping the natural, thereby achieving the highest density: New Urbanist model. Right: Charleston according to Landscape Urbanism, with the natural network cauterizing the urban network. The population density would be reduced by three quarters — presumably sprawling in Landscape Urbanism elsewhere. **Source:** DPZ

**Fig. c-2:** Among the opening acts of Landscape Urbanism was Ann Whiston Spirn’s *The Granite Garden*, of 1984. Despite her professorial presence at Penn and Cambridge—the early and later incubators of Landscape Urbanism—she is not now acknowledged by the younger generation as a predecessor. Her contemporaries, the New Urbanists, ignored her propositions based on a perception of anti-urbanism, a claim they later retracted. 

**Source:** Anne Whiston Spirn
Fig. c-3: Villa Lante and Bagnaia: The gardens of the Villa Lante are a clear expression of Peterson’s idea of the garden as mediator between sacred nature and profane urbanism. 

Source: Google Earth

Fig. c-4: Chungcheongnam-do Province, South Korea, is a late example of Landscape Urbanist programming as a surrogate for successional protocols such as codes. The little graphic symbols describing activity to be expected are animistic tropes reminiscent of cave paintings — when drawing an antelope would assure the morrow’s hunt.

Source: SWA Landscape Infrastructure
Fig. c-5: Justified Landscape Urbanism. A girls school in Malawi by Markus Dochantschi. 
Source: StudioMDA

Fig. c-6: The raingarden of the Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC. The urban school could have better used its courtyard as playground rather than as an inaccessible demonstration of technically-assisted natural drainage. (Demolished and replaced by a playing field ca. 2022.)
Source: Kieran Timberlake Associates
Fig. c-7: Mission Bay, San Francisco. A brownfield retrofitted with coastal landscape. Pedestrians remain on the walkways to avoid damaging the grasses (note the children gazing rather than playing). The perennial problem with native planting was that the humans must be contained. But human activity on turf was not originally, conceptually, within the Landscape Urbanist discourse, although it eventually imposed itself in the later stages of the High Line and the New Urbanist Hybrids.

Source: UrbanLand, Sept 2009

Fig. c-8: Freshkills Landfill Remediation, Staten Island, NY. This was the appropriate application of highly skillful Landscape Urbanist technique, though it was not known whether a large park unsupported by enfronting buildings could encourage human activity and whether it could ever be made safe enough. This could not be verified as the project was not completed for lack of funds.

Source: James Corner Fields Operations
Fig. c-9: With captivating graphics, never had environmental analysis been so privileged by design attention. Mutual support was thus established between environmental consultants and Landscape Urbanists. Source: SWA, Landscape Infrastructure

Fig. c-10: Milton Street Park, Los Angeles, CA. As many photoshopped humans as trees provided superb propaganda. Nature could be induced with sufficient skill and budget, but not the presence of actual humans — their behavior patterns being even less compliant to Landscape Urbanist theory than nature herself. Source: SWA, Landscape Infrastructure

Fig. c-11: Landscape Urbanist presentations were incomparably superior to New Urbanist ones. Compare with those of the following page. Source: Sasaki & Associates, Intersection & Convergence
Fig. c-12: The Achilles Heel of New Urbanism was not the effective and cost-effective technology, but the mundane graphics and design. Shown: three options for handling rainwater in Transect-based contexts: T5, T4, and T3. Three contextually calibrated deployments of pervious paving, gutters leading to “rainways” providing bio retention, and planting strips.

At their best, the performance of such green streets could result in no further requirement for rainwater management outside of the public infrastructure (and maintenance) strata. There would be no requirement for private property to contribute to the mitigation. Private building configurations could retain urban discipline as a consequence, contributing to walkability and reducing VMT. New Urbanists had developed similar design techniques for dealing with hydrology, but Landscape Urbanists had superior techniques of representation.

Source: Crabtree Group, and Dreiling Terrones Architecture
Four tropes for dealing with the implantation of “nature,” careful to differentiate itself from Olmstedian precedent.

Fig. c-13: The National Aquarium, Baltimore, MD. Failing ecological justification, the design of pavement pattern became the surrogate for the flow of nature. Within the critical discourse of Landscape Urbanism, metaphor and mere intention — verbal and visual — enjoyed a very high credibility quotient.

Source: Rhodeside & Harwell, Landscape Architecture, Aug 2009

Fig. c-14: Planting in geometric layouts (the plant nursery).

Source: Page Southerland Page LLP

Fig. c-15: Naturalistic landscaping in “quotation marks” by the literal framing of planters. Source: Sasaki & Associates, Intersection & Convergence

Fig. c-16: Pathways and mounding that is not consistent with erosion by wind or water, nor with human trajectory.

Source: James Corner Fields Operations
Fig. c-17: Detail of a Green Roof System. Superb graphics polemicized what was usually mundane technical know-how. The high building cost of such installations was the consequence of the audacious technology necessary to induce plants to grow where they do not naturally do so. Maintenance is not factored into the equation. Belief systems were not then subject to standards of cost-effectiveness. **Source**: SWA, *Landscape Infrastructure*

Strategies for More Sustainable Exterior Solutions

From growing walls to glowing glass, professionals can choose sustainability through the use of exterior building products that will help conserve water resources, manage living systems and daylight.

Fig. c-18: A typical advertisement for building screens growing plants. The unpopularity of the modernist aesthetics was finally overcome by means presented as ecologically mandated visual biophilia. It was a brilliant strategic/technical solution of lasting value for the evolution of architecture. **Source**: *Architectural Record, Nov 2009*
Fig. c-19: Hongxin Community, Dalian, China, 2009, by Sasaki. The buildings flow in the streamform valley ecology that they replaced. The mythopoetics of Landscape Urbanism are literal, hence its popular success. Compelling graphics and superb design skill support the narrative. As always, humans, fascinated by the plantings, are photoshopped on to walkways and roofs. **Source:** Sasaki & Associates, Intersection & Convergence

Fig. c-20: This housing is for one of the “Carbon-Challenge” towns of Great Britain. Solar-oriented housing is strewn amongst naturalistic landscaping — at low suburban densities. Note the hapless photoshopped pedestrians communing with the brush. **Source:** ZeD Factory, UrbanLand June 2008
Fig. c-21: Camouflage for an intrinsically unecological development. This one is an office park on an arterial road. One of the more valued roles of Landscape Urbanism is disguising auto-dependent suburban typologies for public acceptance. The design is superb, but the ecological consequences are indistinguishable from those of conventional sprawl.  
**Source:** _Urban Spaces no. 6_

Fig. c-22: Civic Center Park, Seoul, South Korea. The artificiality of the walks and mounds is designed to differentiate from the nature replicants of Frederick Law Olmsted. The walkways — always as long radius curves, like rivers or highways — are not determined by the human ability to maneuver, but to achieve syntactic distance from the romantic landscapes of the prior generation, which were too successful to grant adequate space to the subsequent avant-garde. In Seoul, freestanding, sculpted towers with few streets supply the density without the urbanism. Landscape Urbanist designs were usually accomplished works of landscape architecture but fell short of being a comprehensive urban theory.  
**Source:** _James Corner Fields Operations_
Fig. c-23: Diana Balmori, Sejong, South Korea. This was an accomplished example of the refusal of a primary ground plane. The “mat” is one of the more interesting tropes of Landscape Urbanism, especially as promoted by Stan Allen: the roof, the ground, and the semi-basement of buildings were considered interchangeable as planes of movement, like the natural topography that prior Landscape Architects conventionally worked with. This project revealed one of the flaws intrinsic to Landscape Urbanism: as the infrastructure and the building structures could not be disentangled, the entire “urbanism” had to be designed and built in one campaign. Thus, despite claims of “process,” Landscape Urbanism was unable to deploy the successional protocols and the subsidiary decision-making that is the essence of urbanism — no less than scale and complexity.

Source: Diana Balmori, A Landscape Manifesto

Fig. c-24: Sculpture Park, Seattle. This early icon of Landscape Urbanism was a hybrid project combining public art, a cafe and artificial topography, assembled for the purpose of overcrossing a highway. The high cost of such projects was long obscured by the enormous budgets of the underlying highway infrastructure. The Sculpture Park was usually depopulated, except when attendance was induced by a festival. Note the straight line geometries: not to be confused with the Olmstedianism of New Urbanism. Source: Weiss/Manfredi, The Architectural Review, Feb 2008.
Fig. c-25: The New Town of Sénart, France by OMA/Rem Koolhaas was a lightly acknowledged precedent to Landscape Urbanism. The diagrams illustrate what Koolhaas refers to as the “irrigation of possibilities” — the loosely parametric, sequential process that the Landscape Urbanism aspired to, but for which there were no protocols, having eschewed codes, which were associated with New Urbanism.

Source: OMA

Fig. c-26: In the winning competition for Liberty Island by James Corner, the landscape is designed. But on the grey areas, the then-current method of subsidiarity was the selection of sympathetic architects for the buildings. This elite protocol constrained Landscape Urbanism to competitions and high-profile civic work, as it was unable to permeate the operating system of the 27,000 planning departments that — through codes — administered development in the United States. This protocol could not be responsive to Gideon’s modernist definition of the “problem of large numbers.”

Source: James Corner Fields Operations
Fig. c-27: Premier City, Almaty, Kazakhstan. While kitsch is difficult to achieve by means of natural plant material, it could be done. This version entailed green on the ground, the walls, the roof, and the indoors. Reduction was the fate of most design ideas exposed to modern culture. Landscape Urbanism was unusual in having been for a time resistant to this phenomenon. But the process was accelerated by contact with the wealth and insecurities of Asia. **Source:** Ken Yeang, EcoMasterPlanning

Fig. c-28: San Francisco Trans-bay Transit Center. Projects like these predicted the course of decay for Landscape Urbanism: Nature becomes kitsch...at enormous expense. **Source:** UrbanLand, Sept 2009.
Fig. c-29: Lewis Avenue Corridor, Las Vegas, NV, was a typical retrofitting of a street with porous landscape, at substantial cost. Instead of re-using the existing pipes, there was the “daylighting” of streams where they previously did not run. Nature and the ground plane were the protagonists; buildings and spatial definition were incidental. This toolbox was exactly the opposite of New Urbanism’s. It was possible to reconcile them at sub-urban Transect Zones, but not at the urban cores. **Source:** SWA, Landscape Infrastructure

Fig. c-30: Brooklyn Bridge Park of 2005. Highly skilled in the restoration of nature for urban parks, Valkenberg did not claim to possess a full urban theory. He was an old-line Landscape Architect — and thereby marginalized by the Landscape Urbanist discourse. **Source:** Michael van Valkenburg and Associates, Source Books in Landscape Architecture 1
Fig. c-31 and c-32: Costa Verbena, Brazilian Coast, 2012. The design of a new community respects and clarifies the site’s topography of dunes, drainage patterns and sensitive ecosystems. There was urbanism where appropriate at the town centers (upper image). This was an early example of beneficial Landscape Urbanist influence on New Urbanism.

Source: DPZ
Fig. c-33: Harvard’s New and Old Testaments: The “Red Book” of Landscape Urbanism (2010) and Rem Koolhaas’ “Silver Book” (1995). These joined the bibliography of New Urbanism, where “Delirious New York” (Koolhaas et. al.) and “Learning from Las Vegas” (Venturi et. al.) already resided.

Fig. c-34: East Fraserlands, Vancouver, Canada, 2005. Urban design is not tightly deterministic. There is always a range of possibilities to be studied, not just as a matter of aesthetics, but as an exploration of performance. After the absorption of Landscape Urbanism, alternatives were considered as a matter of course. Alternative A was determined primarily by social issues. B and C were responses to view and breeze orientation. D had agricultural potential. E had an enhanced hydrology. The first three schemes are New Urbanist, the latter two are Landscape Urbanist. Source: DPZ
Fig. bw-1: Vallingby, Sweden, 1957: In crude terms, Landscape Urbanism was a revival of 1950's planning, updated by a very superior theoretical apparatus, based this time on natural rather than human prerogatives. Discussion of the human interface was judiciously avoided in the academic discourse at the turn of the century, as it had not performed “according to plan.”

Fig. bw-2: Late in the evolution of Landscape Urbanism, Charles Waldheim acknowledged three precedents: Wright’s Usonia, Branzi’s Weak Metropolis, and Hilberheimer’s New Regional Planning. All were ideal for the purpose: formally neutral and intellectually problematizing. Other predecessors were denied acknowledgment: Team 10, Ann Whiston Spirn, Frederick Law Olmsted and Ian McHarg among them.
Figs. bw-3 and bw-4: Team 10 precedent: Bochum University by Candilis, Jossic & Woods, and the Smithson’s plan for Berlin 1958, both equipped with walkways as surrogate ground-planes and indeterminate geometries. Team 10 came up for its turn in the chronological sequence of revivals coincident with (and perhaps consequent to) Landscape Urbanism’s ascendancy.

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Figs. bw-5 and bw-6:
The principal Team 10 precedent for Landscape Urbanism was Robin Hood Gardens, one of the world’s most admired projects of 1962, 50 years later subject to a debate for demolition. It predicted four Landscape Urbanist tropes: 1. Artificially shaped topography (not to be confused with nature, 2. Thin, flowing, streamform buildings (with the characteristic skew), 3. “Streets in the air” dissipating the primacy of the ground plane, and 4. The carefully random composition of the façade, as visual surrogate for the absence of programmatic complexity.
Fig. bw-7: Robin Hood Gardens by the Smithsons of Team 10, in its heyday of 1962. By 2012 it was subject to a demolition order for its comprehensive social failure. The design could be mitigated only by repopulating it with high-income Londoners. The social housing reverted to the traditional urban typologies that the New Urbanists had vetted first in the United States with H.U.D.'s Hope IV program.

Fig. bw-8: The High Line in its early days, exactly 50 years after Robin Hood Gardens. This was designed for a high-income demographic from the outset.
Fig. bw-9: Absolute and per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) production in greater Chicago. The suburbs produce less GHG per acre but more per capita, which is the crux of the excellent environmental performance of cities. New Urbanism kept score by reducing carbon, Landscape Urbanism by hydrological performance. Two theologies in contention on the end of civilization: by drought or by flood.

Fig. bw-10: The Big Dig, Boston. The cover of this highway burial ended up being landscaped—an early instance of the emerging alliance between NIMBYism, environmentalism and biophilia, which came to be brokered by Landscape Urbanism. The replacement of the covered highway by additional buildings would have been much more effective environmentally than the token greening, as it would have reduced VMT (vehicle miles traveled), but the calculation of carbon was outside the discourse of Landscape Urbanism.
Fig. bw-11: The Town of Brambleton was designed in 1989 by Sasaki, at the time when New Urbanism was at the high point of acceptance by the academy — even Harvard's. The critical edge was subsequently to be lost by New Urbanism upon achieving hegemony in the middle-class market. The academy (and Sasaki) moved on to Landscape Urbanism. This was a common trajectory among design firms.

Fig. bw-12: Hongxin Community, Dalian China, 2009. Twenty years after Brambleton, Sasaki had mastered Landscape Urbanism. For this firm it was a particularly fortuitous evolution, as it had been founded by a Harvard Landscape Architect of the Gropius/Sert generation.