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The Future Metropolitan Landscape

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The beginning of the millennium marked a turning point: for the first time in human civilization the majority of the world's population lives in urbanized areas. In countries of the developed world, however, the term "urbanized area" does not necessarily mean cities in the traditional sense. It refers rather to an urbanized landscape with multiple centers, connected by corridors of movement, and represented by multiple political institutions and economic activities. Furthermore, this landscape is rarely shaped by the collective will of the community contained within its borders, but by forces of growth, decline and waste, and only sometimes by individual aspiration.

People who live in urbanized regions travel large distances on a daily basis, but they generally transport

themselves through only a relatively small segment of any given region. Since individuals are likely to know only certain routes, much of the metropolis is unknown territory.

Seen through the windshield of a car, the landscape also appears accidental, not planned or willfully designed. Only a view from space can fully explain how its many components relate to each other. Such satellite images reveal the original landform, the presence or absence of water, the routing of highways, the distribution of centers and subcenters.

In such a view, nature appears as an important component, but it is largely a constructed nature. Still subject to natural processes, the metropolis has mutated climate, landform, water and vegetation. A more thoughtful integration of the urbanized landscape in the natural cycles remains an admirable goal.

The view from space, however, cannot explain social segregations that are associated with the metropolitan structure.

Above: Aerial views of the San Francisco metropolitan landscape in the 1960s. Photos by Mel Scott.

The Conference

This issue of *Places* presents a selection of essays, initial versions of which were presented at a two-day conference in March of 2005 at the University of California, Berkeley. The conference examined the complex phenomenon of “The Future Metropolitan Landscape.” No single event could comprehensively address all issues related to this topic, and so the organizers had to concentrate on a few selected aspects. They chose, for example, to focus on the metropolitan landscapes of the developed world, and leave the rapidly urbanizing city regions of the developing world for another event. In the end, 21 speakers from Europe, Japan, the U.S., and Canada addressed four themes: the reclaimed landscape, the wasted landscape, the landscape of capital, and the contested landscape of ecological systems.

In organizing the event, the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning intended both to collect interdisciplinary perspectives and inform the mission of a new Global Metropolitan Studies Center. This center has now been inaugurated through the College of Environmental Design and related research groups in Natural Resources, Engineering, Geography and Social Sciences. It is housed inside the Institute of Urban and Regional Development at UC Berkeley.

Like all interdisciplinary work, the study of the metropolitan landscape requires a productive tolerance and mutual interest in a variety of research traditions. There is more than one truth, more than one legitimate way to describe complex phenomena. This point was underscored by Thomas Sieverts, who visited Berkeley as a Regents Lecturer, and whose visit provided the impetus for the conference. His paper, concluding Part One of this collection, ends with very specific advice to those who will conduct research at the Global Metropolitan Studies Center.

The future metropolitan landscape conference and the publication of selected essays here involved substantial work by students and colleagues from all three departments in the College of Environmental Design. Louise Mazingo, Jennifer Brooke, Tim Duane, and Michael Southworth deserve special thanks for helping to conceive its themes and select the contributors. Funding came from the Geraldine Knight Scott Landscape Architecture History Fund and the Beatrix Farrand Fund. Additional funding came from the Global Metropolitan Studies Center.

We would like to thank all who presented papers at the original conference and who reviewed them for pos-

sible inclusion here. We would also like to thank those authors whose work appears here for revising their original work in response to reviewer comments, and in some cases for condensing it significantly to fit the format of this journal. We regret it has not been possible to include all the work presented at the conference. Some excellent contributions were left out of these pages.

Challenges for Environmental Designers

Twenty-five years have elapsed since the publication of Kevin Lynch’s *Managing the Sense of a Region*. Today, research into the meaning and significance of the metropolitan landscape has become an international concern.

Following Thomas Sieverts’s advice, and echoed by others, we believe the metropolitan landscape should be treated as a “learning region.” In particular, we need to develop a broad philosophical basis that acknowledges the metropolitan landscape as a system shaped by socioeconomic and cultural forces as much as by geography and ecology.

At the conference, references to a new era of enlightenment were made by contributors from diverse cultural backgrounds. When the metropolitan landscape in the developed world is seen in the context of industrial closures, demilitarization, demographic shrinkage, dispersion of population, and major threats to ecological systems, nothing short of enlightenment will suffice to create the conditions for a *renewato urbis*. There was agreement, however, such a reformation could not be imposed upon a region from above and at the same time be democratic.

Instead, the most inspiring suggestion was that we look at the metropolitan landscape as a regional commons—or many connected commons, where local responsibility can develop more forcefully. How else can a community understand the interrelatedness of health and survival for all life forms, if these are not applied to the concept of a commons? The conference participants suggested that we approach our new urban environments not with resignation, or a sense of inevitability, but with a high level of care for the design of this landscape, for its water, air, animals, food, transport, education and economy—to create a true life space.