

Spanning the Rural Urban Divide: Toward an Expanded Theory of Landscape Architecture

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Landscape Architecture

University of Washington

2012

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Department of Landscape Architecture

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Introduction

There is currently a dominant *urban narrative* in contemporary landscape architectural theory that tends to situate landscape architectural theory in a metropolitan context. Landscape architecture theorists references “urban” with far more frequency than “rural,” and typically use the words as antonyms to one another. Landscape architecture’s current urban narrative represents a missed opportunity for the profession to introduce sustainable processes and practices to areas that are rapidly developing but lie at or beyond what is formally defined as the metropolitan edge. This thesis argues that in order to construct a discourse of the North American landscape that is capable of moving development beyond destructive patterns of sprawl, we must refine and problematize both professional and popular understandings of “rural.” Rural cannot remain the static and bucolic antithesis to urban wherein turn of the century farm associations are linked to the word “rural” and serve to celebrate an idealized historical era and obfuscate the present spatial realities of industrial agriculture.

This thesis aims to highlight the lack of written work by landscape architects that is not contextualized within the realm of the “urban.” Although individual practitioners are working on projects in all manner of places, landscape architectural theory remains silent in challenging the urban vs. rural stereotype and continues to align professional theory and discourse with metropolitan landscapes. Archival research confirms the existence of a dominant narrative in landscape architecture that is disproportionately focused on the “urban” landscape. This thesis examines and considers the value and role of “rural” in landscape architecture’s written discourse, noting its relative lack of importance in the profession’s contemporary theory.

Meanwhile, discussions about landscape change in the United States are dominated by language that polarizes growth into “either/ or” categories of “rural” versus “urban.” Landscape designers must make a conscious effort to break down these dichotomies. We must move beyond the binary language of “urban” or the “rural” if we are to successfully design landscapes along a “spatial continuum that unites, not the solid line that divides concepts into binary opposites” (Meyer, “The Expanded Field” 74). Instead, the words “urban” and “rural” should be located along a “spatial continuum” that reflects various stages of human intervention in the landscape. Designers must insist that the discourse makes equal space for discussion of “urban,” “rural,” and all spaces that lie along the continuum of development.

Chapter 1: Critical Stance

Current popular usage of the term “urban” positions it against the concept of “rural” as if they represent distant ends of an orderly development paradigm. However, contemporary designers must challenge the primacy of “urban” centric language in order to construct a more accurate narrative of the forces shaping the North American landscape in the 21st century. A more balanced discourse is critical if we are to design the myriad typologies in between, along, and around the fringes of “urban” and “rural.” Non-metropolitan settlements have greater access to higher functioning landscapes with more ecological integrity than large cities. As the global population burgeons and resource demands increase, the question is not *whether* rural landscapes will urbanize but *how sustainably* they will urbanize. It is therefore urgent that practitioners of landscape architecture be proactive in clearly articulating the profession’s role in the physical, political, and social growth of small cities. In my view, ideally the profession’s role is one of integration and education where the principles of sustainable urbanism are introduced early in the growth cycle of small cities. An expanded theory is important if we are to challenge the assumptions of planning colleagues, private organizations and political agencies that limit the role of landscape architects to that of specialists in ecological restoration who work to retrofit metropolitan cities with sustainable infrastructure. We can do more than heal the wounds that separatist planning practices have inflicted on the urban fabric of already grown, great cities.

In this thesis, I argue for an expanded landscape architecture theory that challenges the dominant urban discourse to addresses how rural communities can work with designers to set and reach mutual goals for livability and sustainability. A fundamental challenge to the sustainability of urban development is the lack of value placed on the potential of both rural landscapes and small cities to grow or develop in healthier ways. The assumption is often that big ideas happen in big cities—that metropolitan centers are the engines of change and should remain that way. This expectation is limiting and does not acknowledge the potential for rural communities to lead the way in innovation and adaptation as humans struggle to shift the development paradigm away from one of destructive consumption to sustainable settlement.

As I will show in this thesis, the ongoing, population-driven categorization of urban vs. rural helps to perpetuate a dangerous myth; that expanding metropolitan cities are the primary engines of change. Urbanization data actually describe shifts in population statistics rather than the physical characteristics of the landscape. This urban centrism is especially problematic when applied to what is perhaps the most important movement of our age: sustainability. Doug Farr

writes that “sustainable urbanism” draws attention to the “enormous opportunity to redesign the built environment in a manner that supports a higher quality of life and promotes a healthy and sustainable American Lifestyle” (28). However, I would add that it is within the rapidly urbanizing non-metropolitan landscape that there appears the greatest opportunity to sustainably re-design the built environment because such places have not achieved the footprint of ecological disruption of cities. In such places there is still a tangible emotional and physical link between human settlement and, at least, partially functioning ecological processes that have not been reduced to remnants.

In contrast, many metropolitan cities contain what urban ecologists call “remnants”; fragments of once-whole ecosystems that occupied the land before the city developed on it (Low et al. 29). Whereas many large metropolitan cities are now working toward re-inventing or re-establishing a connection to ecology, small cities and other traditionally rural communities have an opportunity to protect the connections that already exist along their urbanizing periphery or fringe. This is a challenge for growing communities, in part, because residents may not understand the full breadth of consequences and trade-offs implicit in decisions to sacrifice functioning ecological processes in the name of short-term economic gain.

Toward this end, one of the tasks of this thesis is to show how definitions of urban and rural have changed in the literature over time and in response to changing conditions. One critical example of this examined in this chapter is the U.S. Census’ expanded definition of “urban” which now includes areas that were once considered “rural.” This expanded definition of “urban” is problematic as people and land are subsumed by the category of “urban” based on population numbers rather than spatial, cultural, or historic features. I argue that the discourse on physical development in the North American landscape is limited by concurrent phenomena; a design theory that disproportionately favors “urban” topics, case studies, and innovation; and U.S. census data that ultimately delimit landscapes as either “rural” or “urban.” Both serve to perpetuate stereotypes that collapse an entire spectrum of landscape typologies into its farthest endpoints.

I. A Closer Look at Critical Terms

At the heart of current discourse are the two terms couched as antonyms: “urban” and “rural.” A third term “suburban,” is employed to discuss sprawl at the perimeter of large cities. The oldest of the terms, “rural,” appears in late Middle English 1375–1425 and comes from the Latin root *rūrālis* (stem of *rūs*), which was used to signify the country, lands, or fields (Perseus, *Latin Word Study Tool*). Although the type of development that “suburban” commonly refers to is

a modern phenomena in North America, the word originates from the Latin *suburbium* meaning “an outlying part of the city.” “Urban” originates from Latin *urbānus*, equivalent to *urb-* (stem of *urbs*), meaning “of or pertaining to a city or city life,” as a noun, “city dweller,” from *urbs* (gen. *urbis*)” walled city” (Perseus, *Latin Word Study Tool*). “Urban” appears in English as early as 1619 but was rare before the 1830s when it began to replace “urbane” which was becoming restricted to manners and styles of expression. As European settlers moved west, displacing and systematically eradicating native populations and colonizing the landscape of North America, “rural” became associated with agricultural communities and developed a relationship with the synonyms “rustic,” “unsophisticated,” or “rough.” Meanwhile, “urban” became synonymous with “metropolitan,” “polished,” or “city.” Meanwhile, “suburban” has become a catch-all term for sprawl.

Development results in peri-urban, exurban, suburban typologies, which derive from physical space that was once classified as “rural.” The unique spatial configurations represented by peri-urban, exurban, and suburban are subsumed by the classification of “urban”; a classification under which the potential of rural communities for sustainable innovation is unrecognized. Statistically these areas are embedded within the classification of “urban.” The terms themselves all share the root *urbānus* which, based on the etymology of the words, implies activity at the edges of “urban” spaces (Figure 1)

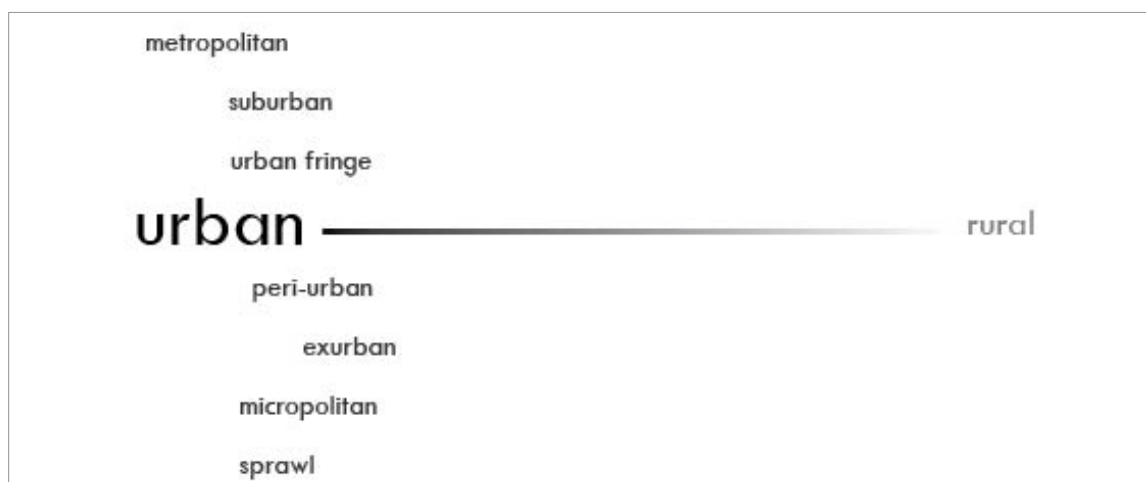


Figure 1: Linear continuum with “urban” and “rural” presented at either extreme end.

I would argue that development activity should also be critiqued as a force affecting the “rural”—a force that therefore necessitates the intervention of spatial professionals. A more balanced discourse would include landscape architectural theory that problematizes the conversion of “rural” cores, edges, and peripheries with the same urgency and advocacy for sustainability that is currently directed almost exclusively at “urban” growth. The language of landscape architecture theory would reflect the tapestry of interwoven spatial realities rather than binary opposites (Figure 2).

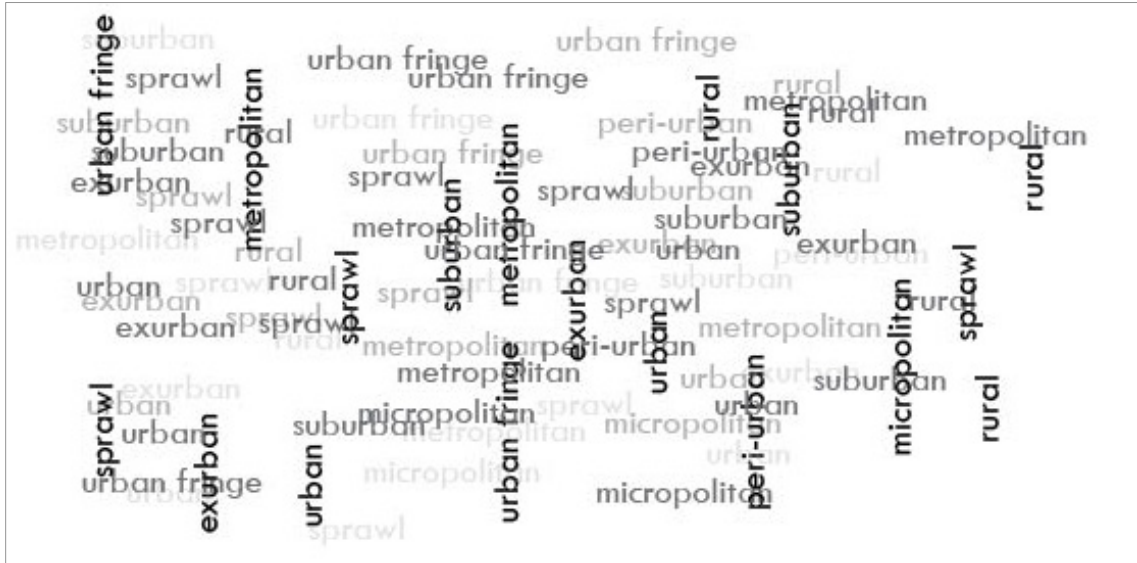


Figure 2: Exploded binary with tapestry of terms offered in contrast to linear conception of development paradigm.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This literature review first examines landscape architectural theory and its role in guiding the profession. Next, it examines discussions concerning “rural” and “urban” in the scholarly discourse of landscape architecture. It then reviews by whom landscape is classified, how classification is undertaken, and the cultural, socio-political, and economic implications of these classifications. In addition, in this chapter I examine U.S. census data. The United States Census is one of the primary tools used by the U.S. government to track changes in both population and land use and it is referenced heavily by both popular and professional discourses. Other federally mandated tools include the National Resources Inventory (NRI), conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture every five years and The Census of Agriculture, also conducted every five years. Although the NRI and the Census of Agriculture are also important tools, the aim of this thesis is to introduce a critique of the impact of statistically driven definitions on popular discourse by focusing specifically on the U.S. census data. This literature review examines the language used to describe landscape in addition to the terms “rural” and “urban” such as exurban, peri-urban, and suburban. In acknowledging that language itself has important implications for the social production of ideas, I reviewed literature that insists that there should be a reconciling of the notions of urban and rural, and the fundamental spatiality that they are supposed to represent. The final section of this literature review introduces discourse analysis as a possible tool to analyze the theory of landscape architecture.

I. Theory and Landscape Architecture: Why expanded theory?

Modern landscape architecture discourse, particularly the academic literature, thoroughly establishes the importance of theory. In a collection of essays titled *Theory in Landscape Architecture*, Simon Swaffield suggests that “there is indeed a distinctive field of theoretical knowledge upon which a discipline of landscape architecture is grounded” (xii). Moreover, he offers a tripartite conceptual framework for the role of theory. In particular, he argues that theory is instrumental, interpretive and critical. First, theory is instrumental in that it is a record of social experience derived from empirical observation. Second, theory is interpretive in that it helps the profession to better understand a given situation. Finally, theory is critical; it “resists and challenges taken-for-granted ways of thinking, and puts forward alternatives” (Swaffield 1). Critical theory serves an important catalytic function because “theoretical work that critiques current knowledge disrupts and destabilizes the discipline, stimulating a search for new forms of

knowledge and new ways of working” (Swaffield 1). Swaffield argues that most critical theory is undertaken in the form of reflection and argument rather than deductive observation. Elizabeth Meyer explains: “...landscape architectural theory is situational—it is explicitly historical, contingent, pragmatic, and ad hoc. It is not about idealist absolute universals” (Meyer, “The Expanded Field” 71). Space and form are at the heart of much of landscape architectural theory. In addition to the three types of theory, Swaffield notes that three themes appear in landscape architecture theory throughout the past 50 years in North America. The first theme asks “...what form should theoretical knowledge in our discipline take?; second, what is the process of design in landscape architecture?; and third, what are the qualities of space and form, meaning and experience that the discipline seeks to create?” (Swaffield 3).

In contemporary landscape architecture theory there exists a disjunction between the intent of emerging theory’s to critically examine relationships among society, language, and landscape architectural knowledge with the proportion of theory dedicated to historical analysis that exceeds that literature published on the critical social and environmental problems implicit in design practice. Interestingly, a recent series of studies of *Landscape Journal (LJ)*, a top publication for landscape architectural theory in the United States, report an increase in historical studies and a simultaneous decrease in articles addressing environmental management and landscape planning (Gobster 54). In 2008, Elen Deming, then editor of *Landscape Journal*, also noted the trend and subsequently “challenged *Landscape Journal* contributors to concern themselves with the increasingly critical social and environmental problems related to design, planning, and management of the land” (Gobster 55).

In her article, “Situating Modern Landscape Architecture: Theory as a Bridging, Mediating, and Reconciling Practice,” Elizabeth Meyer warns that “...continued reliance on the interpretive lens of those fields which are not concerned with the integration of ecological thinking with physical form has limited our understanding of and appreciation for the complexity and form-fullness of the nineteenth century *urban* landscape in particular” [italics mine] (30). Meyer is careful to place her work in the “nineteenth century *urban* landscape” which seems to reflect the almost reflexive omission of the “rural” that plagues landscape architecture. The history of landscape architecture provides critical insight into how the profession began to automatically refer to itself in relation to the “urban.”

Why do landscape architects acquiesce to the dominant vocabulary of “urban” or “rural” rather than challenge this reductive status quo? Swaffield suggests that dichotomous theory has deep historical roots:

Earlier writers have tended to adopt relatively static, dualistic categories by which to explore questions of meaning: for example, nature and culture, or formal and informal. In recent decades there has been a shift to articulate meaning as part of a more dynamic set of relationships—either conceiving of meaning as part of a dialectic, evolving relationship between two poles, or, more subtly, by conceiving of a field of potential relationships (5).

It seems from the research conducted for this thesis that landscape architects have also adopted a static dualism of urban and rural as well.

The profession of landscape architecture in the United States emerged at a time when belief in the bounty of the United States landscape as a limitless, pristine wilderness framed the North American approach to growth. As landscape architecture historian Thaisa Way explains, “For nineteenth century writers, intellectuals, and artists, nature was at the core of who Americans were and who they might be” (12). The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) was founded in 1899 (Way 1), a time when 60% of settlement was considered “rural” with less than 2,000 settlements in the entire country reaching the Census Bureau’s current “urban” population threshold of 2,500 inhabitants. In fact, at the turn of the century less than 40 cities in the entire country had populations numbering over 100,000 inhabitants. One landscape architect writing in 1845 was eager to assure his readers that the wilderness was vast and that even though North Americans continued to develop the landscape, they had no chance of overwhelming it:

Nor need there be the least apprehension lest this tendency to rural retirement will reach excess. . .The characteristics of our people leave no chance of a hazard of that sort. They make such a feat altogether superfluous (“Landscape Gardening”).

Traditional usage and understanding of the word “rural” nested the concept deep in the American mind alongside ideas of bountiful nature, undeveloped resources, and a seemingless endless landscape.

In the early years, many practitioners concentrated on the art of gardening as the primary realm of landscape architects. Dense settlement areas were the exception rather than the rule; cities grew in sharp relief against a pristine landscape. Gardening was therefore an art that “civilized” wild nature and expressed human dignity, superiority, and education. During this period, unlike during the modernist years, landscape architects defended their work as *different* from that of architects. Architects made buildings and cities, while landscape architects were considered artists working with nature. Jens Jensen, a Danish-American landscape architect illustrates this distinction, “What comparison is there between the creating of a building, which fits narrow and limited space, and the creating of large pastoral meadows where the horizon is the

boundary?” (19). Jens Jensen’s writings provide a second important insight into the common understanding of rural at the time; it was closely associated with the picturesque: “Below us there stretched out toward the east a lovely valley of farmsteads and villages gay in the golden colors of the sugar maple. . . .this was one of the finest bits of rural landscaping I have seen in our country” (48). Even landscape architects like Frederick Law Olmsted, who sometimes worked in highly metropolitan contexts, attempted to bring the pastoral scenes of nature into the city itself. Olmsted’s masterpiece, Central Park in New York City, was seen as a natural oasis in the middle of the city.

Even as industrialization became a widespread phenomenon in the early 1900s and cities grew rapidly, nature remained the constant “other” to be sought out in rural villages or towns. North Americans who were uncomfortable in the industrial city dreamt of a return to picturesque, rural, nature. In his article, *The City of Dreadful Night*, Peter Hall explains that the city itself was seen as a problem: “The perception of it was the source of multiple social evils, possible biological decline and potential political insurrection” (44). Many landscape architects were mobilized to leave the estate garden and attempt to address the social and physical challenges of the industrial city although the profession still more closely aligned with rural nature. For example Warren Manning’s 1915 National Plan for America, and Patrick Geddes’ Survey for the Regional Planning Association of America in 1923, interpreted the role of a landscape architect as one that extended far beyond a site-specific response to post-industrial urban conditions.

a. 1930-1950 Modernism

In her book, *Unbounded Practice*, Thaisa Way explains, “American culture at the turn of the twentieth century was a society in search of a new order” (167). Between 1900 and 1945 the United States population nearly doubled (“*Urban Areas*”). There were suddenly more than enough people to fill the great cities, populate the agricultural countryside, and spill out into the in-between. During this time landscape architecture witnessed major cultural shifts that coincided with new scientific knowledge, technological advances, and the influence of major social movements such as the Progressive Era. Yet the linguistic and conceptual duality of “urban” and “rural” persisted even as changes to the landscape demanded an expanded vocabulary.

Modernism marks one of two key shifts in landscape architecture’s professional identity that have contributed to a dichotomous understanding of “urban” or “rural.” During this period, practitioners shifted their emphasis from the design of wealthy estates to the design of middle-class dwellings. Here for the first time, landscape architects began to align themselves with

architectural theory and discourse. In the article, “Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture,” Marc Treib writes, “with urging from architectural thought, space became the central element of modern landscape thinking” (44). Space, rather than nature, became the dominant realm of landscape architects. The modernist movement in landscape attempted to create order through regularity of forms that was certainly “...not the picturesque, it was not the classical...” (Treib 51). In reality, Modernism was a movement defined by conflicting interpretations; it was a conglomeration of ideas and practice that was neither geographically unified nor intellectually universal.

The proliferation of modernist construction either resulted from, or was the cause of what Christopher Tunnard called a “changed attitude” toward nature that came about in the theory of landscape architecture. This change is fundamental to understanding how and why landscape architecture came to be an “urban” profession. In his 1942 article for *Landscape Architecture* titled, “Modern Gardens for Modern Houses,” Tunnard wrote that “men (sic) had finally gotten over their fear of wild nature” (163). He believed that this fundamental shift in consciousness related to “nature” was directly linked to the growth of modernist ideas and was at least partly responsible for “some of the changes that have been taking place in gardens since the advent of the new architecture and the consequent modern approach to its surroundings” (161).

Christopher Tunnard identified three important impacts of this new approach to “nature” on landscape architecture. The first was a professional attitude that prompted landscape architecture to control nature but “not impose on the natural scene an unproductive or wasteful design” (163). Rather landscape architects aimed to create a “humanized landscape” (163). The second change was that the modern garden “need no longer... attempt at show or picturesque composition” (163). Tunnard’s final and perhaps most powerful assertion involved new attitudes toward the city itself, “With the changed attitude to nature, which has banished fear, there need no longer be any dislike for the urban view” (163). At last the city was worthy of a window view and this heralded the beginnings of an urban focus in landscape architecture.

North Americans were no longer frightened of nature and the city was not only worthy of a window view, it quickly became worthy of celebration as architects expanded their material palates and imaginations. “The plaza, as much as the park, increasingly became the landscape architect’s hallmark...what had once been deemed ugly became the most exciting prospect” (Helphand 84). As the profession of landscape architecture continued to grow, “Practitioners, writers, and educators soon described landscape architecture as the sister to architecture, more

akin to artful engineering than a practice intimately engaged with the environment, nature, and the land” (Way 2).

The dichotomy of “urban” or “rural” was strengthened by this shift. Whereas a city dweller used to be an unfortunate soul trapped in the city and dreaming of the countryside, modernism gave rise to the “urbanite.” The urbanite was a hitherto unknown species of North American that actually *preferred* the city and was refined rather than deranged because of city life. So while A.J. Downing insisted in 1859 that “all sensible men (sic) gladly escape, earlier or later, and partially or wholly, from the turmoil of the cities” (111), some 70 years later in 1939, modernist landscape architects Eckbo, Kiley, and Rose wrote that “first and foremost the country be designed for country people—i.e., neither from the viewpoint of, nor for the benefit of the urbanite” (70). Not only was the undeveloped landscape different, the people living there were something entirely different and perhaps needed special accommodation. This idea, that urbanites are fundamentally different than rural inhabitants, persists today.

b. 1960-1980 Introduction of Ecological Practice

For the purposes of the arguments relevant to this thesis, I will now focus on the second iconic moment in North American landscape architecture’s short history. In the 1960s the realization dawned that nature was not an infinitely resilient background to human exploits. This realization was hastened by Rachel Carson’s publishing of *Silent Spring* in 1962. *Silent Spring*, often seen as a turning point in environmental history, opened a much stronger national dialogue about the relationship between people and nature. Ian McHarg’s 1969 *Design with Nature* marked the first time a landscape architect *successfully* demand that landscape architecture unapologetically align with ecology and the environmental movement. Ian McHarg presided over what Elizabeth Meyer calls “the great divide” between ecology and design and between science and art that characterized the profession in the 1970s (“Post-Earth Day” 187).

McHarg was not the first landscape architect to call for the pairing of environmental responsibility with design. Thirty-six years prior to *Design with Nature*, Elsa Rehmann’s article, “*An Ecological Approach*,” contained an early argument for the importance of a “keener appreciation of the relationship inherent between native vegetation and the landscape” (240). She called on “all those who are doing work in the landscape...to be instructed in elementary ecology at least...” (Rehmann 239). It took over thirty years for the science of ecology and the cultural movement of environmentalism to mature to a point that landscape architecture theory took heed.

McHarg's work was as much a strategy for breaking free of modernist form as it was a strategy for applying ecological environmental values to design. According to Elizabeth Meyer, "its primary contribution to the design process was to structure the pre-conceptual design phase according to more defensible, scientific method" (Meyer 189). MCHarg's students were encouraged to reject the modernist ideas of landscapes as objects, as isolated, bounded form or gallery floors. *Design with Nature* advocated a systematic, scientific approach to site analysis. Maps were championed as the penultimate tool for landscape architecture, including maps of unique sites, the location of economic minerals, the location of water resources, a slope and exposure map, a map of agricultural suitabilities by types, a similar map for forestry, one each for recreation and urbanization (McHarg, "An Ecological Approach" 106). Not everyone agreed that "ecology offer(ed) emancipation to landscape architecture" (McHarg, "An Ecological Approach" 105). MCHarg's insistence that landscape architecture be responsible to, even reverent of, natural processes made many designers uncomfortable. It seemed to suggest that the role of a landscape architect was simply to develop a method which would reveal the forms intrinsic to nature itself ("An Ecological Approach" 105).

McHarg's work was perhaps most threatening when applied in the rural context, where nature is intact enough to make demands and supersede the artistic creativity of the designer. In an agricultural field or the small town, art is too easily confused with frivolous ornamentation. In its quest to avoid what MCHarg derided as the arbitrary, capricious, and inconsequential, landscape architecture may have barricaded itself in the city. In the rural landscape it was too difficult to resist a universal litany of historical geology, climate, physiography, the water regimen, plants, animals and land use (McHarg, "An Ecological Approach" 106). The city was the only place where one was not required to follow the guidance of natural process: "I say that any project save a small garden or the raddled heart of a city where nature has long gone, which is undertaken without a full comprehension and employment of natural process as form—giver is suspect at best and capriciously irrelevant at worst" (McHarg, "An Ecological Approach" 106).

Contemporary landscape architecture theory has a rich and diverse history. It is time to bridge the gap between planning and design in the unique context of rapidly urbanizing landscapes. In the words of Simon Swaffield, "...theoretical work that critiques current knowledge disrupts and destabilizes the discipline, stimulating a search for new forms of knowledge and new ways of working" (1).

Randy Hester's work in Manteo, North Carolina affirms the potential importance of a design presence in "rural" areas: "when we understood that local people were somewhat

ashamed of the places to which they were so attached we knew that we, as outside designers, needed to say that these places were fine and worthy of preservation” (281). In turn, Richard Weller explains that “any landscape architect knows the landscape itself is a medium through which all ecological transactions must pass, it is the infrastructure of the future and therefore of structural significance” (74). This broader view of landscape as something both cultural and physical that transcends architect or engineer scales is a unique and important contribution of landscape architectural theory that must be extended to include all landscapes along the continuum of development.

II. Design in the Rural Landscape

Few articles or books published by landscape architects or landscape architecture scholars directly address design in the rural landscape. However, since these writings are central to my main argument, it is critical to examine how rural landscapes are treated and discussed in the landscape architecture literature. In this section I will more closely examine the content of the literature on rural landscapes in an effort to understand the counter narrative to the dominant “urban” narrative.

In May of 1987, two years after the American Society of Landscape Architects published its first Policy on the Rural Landscape, an important publication appeared. The publication, titled *Landscape Architecture in the Rural Landscape*, was edited by ASLA members Duane Coen, Joan Nassauer, and Ron Tuttle and published via the ASLA’s Landscape Architecture Technical Information Series (LATIS). Papers in ASLA’s peer-reviewed LATIS series provide practicing landscape architects with technical information about new and evolving practices and products and are considered to be a way for members to share their expertise. This volume of LATIS is the only writing I have found by landscape architecture scholars that directly situates the profession of landscape architecture in the rural landscape.

The editors acknowledge the importance of the ASLA Policy on the Rural Landscape as an inspiration for the volume and explain, “This policy marked a significant return to the concern for stewardship in the rural landscape that so characterized our profession in its earliest days” (Coen et al.). *Landscape Architecture in the Rural Landscape* is a call to action and a call for expansion of landscape architecture’s professional responsibility to include the rural landscape (13). The editors explain,

Although a rural perspective has not characterized landscape architectural practice in the last several decades a pervasive interest but nearly hidden involvement has remained since those early days and now appears to be burgeoning (12).

The editors present work by various contributors working in rural landscapes and consider the non-traditional possibilities of a rural design process. According to the editors, the opportunity for landscape architects to be involved and become a major influence in rural landscapes is only limited by the profession's own way of thinking and willingness to accept the challenge (40).

The role of landscape architects in rural lands during the next century can be nonexistent or extensive. Our roles will depend on the profession's desire to balance its preoccupation with urban environments and become equally concerned with the rural environment (41).

The thin LATIS volume is rare in many respects not the least of which is the sense of urgency that the authors convey and their desire for landscape architecture to assume a leadership role in development of non-urban land (24).

A more recent writing on design in rural landscapes is Dewey Thorbeck's newly published book, *Rural Design: A New Design Discipline*. Although Dewey Thorbeck is an architect and not a landscape architect, the book is important for two reasons. First, as it was published in 2012, its publication coincides with the writing of this thesis. The timing is interesting because in his book, Dewey asserts that: "Rural design is a *new discipline* that currently does not exist in any academic program in the United States or around the world" (1). A second reason this book is relevant to this thesis is Dewey's suggestion that landscape architecture could have the strongest connection to rural design of all the place-making professions: "Landscape architecture *may have* the strongest connection to rural design because it is so closely linked with cultural and natural landscapes and their ecosystems [*italics mine*]" (2). This is an explicit recognition of landscape architecture's expected and logical role in rural design and yet it also implies that such a role is currently lacking.

Thorbeck's assertion that rural design has hitherto been unaddressed and is now a new interdisciplinary design discipline is startling in its implications. Is it true that Thorbeck's *Rural Design* is the first attempt to bring the methodology of design to rural issues? Thorbeck explains that the timing of this new discipline's emergence is motivated by the enormous changes impacting the quality of rural life over the past fifty years:

It is a methodology to bring design as a problem-solving process to rural regions to nurture human ingenuity, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation. It provides an opportunity to reflect upon and integrate human and natural systems into a viable, sustainable design process to improve quality of life (1).

With the world changing so rapidly, design thinking and rural design, as a community based problem-solving process, is becoming more and more important as a means to manage and shape rural features” (2).

Dewey Thorbeck states that “rural design” is the spatial arrangement of rural landscapes and the buildings within them. He provides four guiding ethics of rural design:

“Provide the tools, information, and support that rural communities need to address their problems; 2. Help rural citizens manage change caused by economic, cultural, or environmental reasons; 3. Assist in connecting the dots to create synergy for environmental wellbeing, rural prosperity, and quality of life; 4. clearly envision and help citizens achieve the quality of rural future for their community that they deserve” (6).

Thorbeck pointedly notes that other disciplines are disproportionately preoccupied with “urban” subjects: “There are other design and research disciplines with different points of view from a cultural, social, economic, and environmental perspective, however most respond from an *urban point of view*” [italics mine] (2). He continues, “Rural citizens were looking for a way to manage change, and it was apparent that design schools and the design professions had generally ignored rural issues and rural America” (7). This thesis does not respond to Thorbeck’s claim that he is the founder of rural design, but it is noteworthy that he is the first placemaking professional to make this claim. In the history of landscape architectural theory there has been no other assertion made by landscape architecture theorists since the discipline was founded in 1910.

Eighteen years before Dewey Thorbeck declared the invention of rural design, the American Planning Association published *Rural By Design: Maintaining Small Town Character*. The book, cosponsored by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Environmental Law Foundation, and Center for Rural Massachusetts, was applauded by Ian McHarg as “an ideal complement to *Design With Nature*.” It is notable that McHarg found *Rural Design* to be an ideal complement to his formative work yet a review of the literature suggests that few, if any, have followed up on this connection, including McHarg.

Randall Arendt, who co-authored the book with a team that included two licensed landscape architects, notes that the book is written “as a reference work to which planners, developers, conservationists, local officials, and concerned residents may turn for detailed information about specific topics, or for examples of well-designed projects to show to landowners and/or intending developers” (xix). It is notable that the intended audience of the manual is planning professionals not landscape architects. This provides another example of the reflexive assumption that landscape architecture isn’t the profession that deals with rural design. Arendt explains in his preface, “This volume represents an effort to write the kind of book I wish

had been available for me to consult fifteen years ago, as a young planner facing the special challenges of working in those outlying parts of metropolitan regions” (preface xx).

III. Urban or Rural: A dichotomous discourse and the U.S. Census

For the spatial professions, the United States Census is an important source of data and is responsible for much of the popular discourse regarding changes to the U.S. population and landscape. The Census contributes to the dominant urban narrative in both professional and popular discourse. The United States, landscapes, and residents are presumed to be either “urban” or “rural” and the two categories are presumed to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The idea that every person and piece of land in the nation can be assigned to exactly one category or the other is persistent and yet, erroneous. Take for instance the following statement released in 2012 by the Geography Division of The U.S. Census Bureau: “The urban population of the United States increased from 79% in 2000 to 80.7% in 2010 (“Urban Area Delineation Results”). The statement has far-reaching implications for both political decisions relating to the distribution of resources and for our everyday understanding of surrounding landscapes. A wide spectrum of landscape types and development typologies remain implicit, but are subsumed by the designation of “urban.”

The United States Census perpetuates problematic binaries of “urban” vs. “rural” language. Statistics have been split into urban and rural categories in decennial census publications for over a century. It also represents one of three important government agencies whose definitions are in wide use in the United States: the U.S. Census Bureau, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). All three agencies produce information used by various professionals to understand the social, economic, and spatial changes in the United States. The definition of the word “urban” by all three has changed dramatically over the last one hundred years but all continue to juxtapose “urban” against “non-metropolitan” or “rural” areas.¹

In the last one hundred years, the Census Bureau has attempted to expand the category of “urban” to make it more functional in a post-industrial United States. This resulted in the

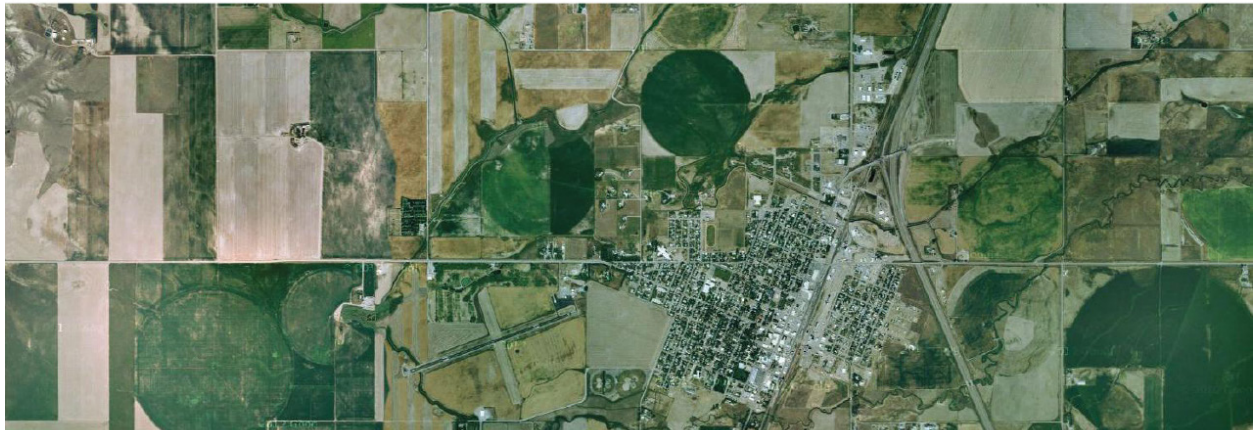
¹ “Researchers and others who discuss conditions in ‘rural’ America most often refer to conditions in nonmetropolitan areas. Metropolitan (metro) and nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas are defined on the basis of counties. Counties are typically active political jurisdictions, usually have programmatic importance at the Federal and State level, and estimates of population, employment, and income are available for them annually. They are also frequently used as basic building blocks for areas of economic and social integration” (“OMB Definition”).

modification of the existing definition of “urban” to encompass areas that would have previously been classified as “rural.” The 1880, 1890, and 1900 censuses designated an area “urban” if it met minimum population sizes of 8,000, 4,000, and 2,500 inhabitants, respectively. The 1920 census marked the first time in which over 50 percent of the U.S. population was defined as “urban.” The Census Bureau continued to define “urban” as any population, housing, and territory located within incorporated places with a population of 2,500 or more (“Urban Area Delineation Results”). That definition was already becoming inadequate as North Americans no longer lived either out in the open country or in a town settlement. Consequently, the Census Bureau revised the definition of urban for the 1950 census by adopting the concept of an “urbanized area” (UA) concept to better account for increased growth in metropolitan areas outside the central city. At the time of the 1950 census, an urbanized area was defined as an area containing 50,000 or more people. Then, beginning with the 2000 census, the Census Bureau adopted the “urban cluster” (UC) concept, defined as an area with a population between 2,500 and 50,000 people (“Urban Area Delineation Results”). As a result, the most recent 2010 census contained two rather different types of areas that were each still considered “urban” in some fashion: urbanized areas of 50,000 or more people and urban clusters, areas with as few as 2,500 people.

This broad application of the term “urban” to places with vastly differing population sizes and densities begs the question of, what really is urban? Does a settlement of 2,500 people represent what the average North American imagines as “urban”? According to preliminary census data, the United States is now more “urban” than ever before. In the 2010 census, 80.7 percent of the U.S. population lived in “urban areas”; “urban areas” is the general census classification that includes all population, housing, and territory not classified as “rural.” This classification includes urbanized areas and urban clusters. Keeping in mind that “urban” no longer means, “walled city,” as it did in 1486, we realize that the new “urban” statistics represent the population in urbanized Areas or urban clusters. For Census 2010, The Census Bureau has defined 487 urbanized areas in the U.S., which contain 71.2 percent of the national population (“Urban Area Delineation Results”). The 3,087 urban clusters that were identified in the same census only account for 9.5 percent of the U.S. population, but they make up the overwhelming majority of the 3,573 urban areas in the United States (“Urban Area Delineation Results”). For example, Conrad, Montana, with a population of 2,578, is an urban cluster while Seattle, Washington, with a population of 3,059,393, is considered an urbanized area—both are classified as “urban areas.” Population densities in areas considered urban can range from 363 residents per square mile in Centre, Alabama, 4,525 residents per square mile in Las Vegas,

Nevada and up to 10,016 residents per square mile in Richgrove, California. This broad range of landscape types is considered equally “urban” because of nuances in the classification language (Figures 3-7)(“A National 2012 urban area file”).

URBAN

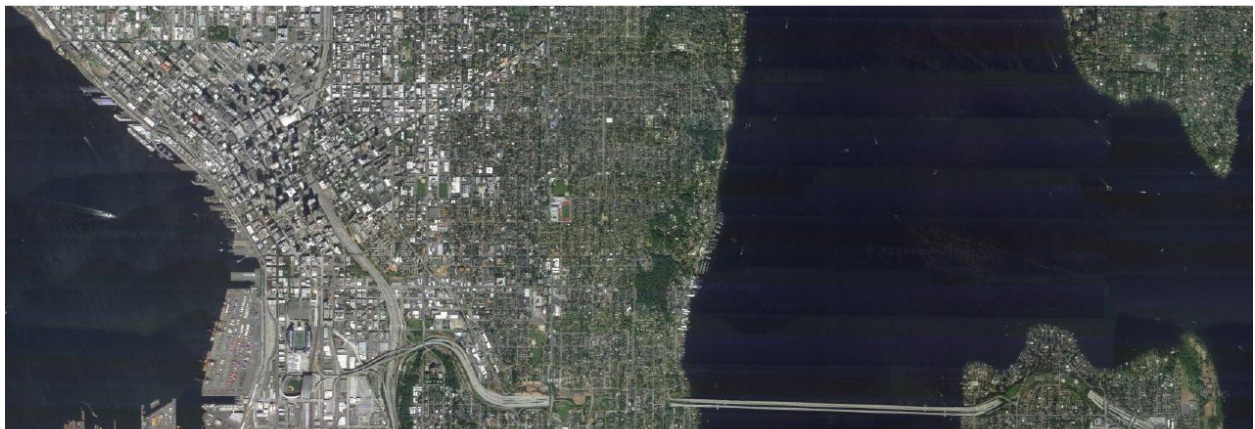


Conrad, MT

Figure 3. Image Source: Google Earth, scale 1" = 2,000'

2012 Census Population: **2,578**

URBAN



Seattle, WA

Figure 4. Image Source: Google Earth, scale 1" = 2,000'

2012 Census Population: **3,059,393**

URBAN

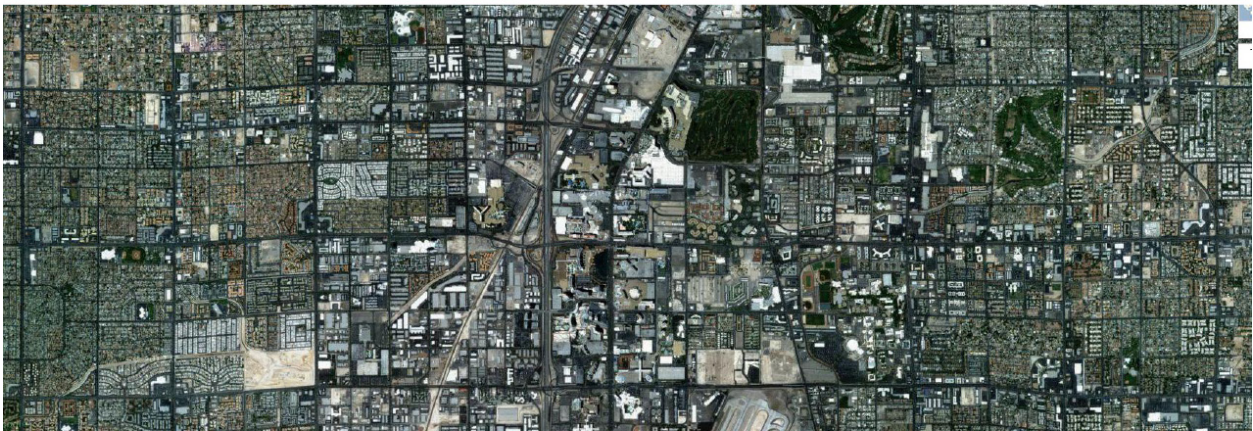


Richgrove, CA

2012 Census Pop. Density: **10,016/sq.mi.**

Figure 5. Image Source: Google Earth, scale 1" = 2,000'

URBAN



Las Vegas, NV

2012 Census Pop. Density: **4525/sq.mi.**

Figure 6. Image Source: Google Earth, scale 1" = 2,000'

Popular understanding of landscapes defined as “urban” or “rural” does not reflect changes to the definition of “urban” for technical classification purposes. Consider that the “urban” population growth between 2000 and 2010 was 12.1%, which exceeded the total U.S. population growth of 9.7% for the same period (“Urban Areas”). Interestingly, this growth occurred primarily in urbanized areas, rather than in urban clusters. For any given urbanized area, population increase may be attributed to a combination of internal growth, outward expansion to include new growth, and outward expansion encompassing existing communities that previously were outside the urbanized area, e.g., there are 36 new urbanized areas for the 2010 census (“Urban Areas”). Thirty-five of these new urbanized areas were formerly designated as urban clusters (“Urban Areas”).

However, the release of census statistics is heralded with popular headlines that oversimplify the data and which demonstrate the disconnect between popular usage and official categorization; take, for example, the following new headlines: “Americans Are Almost All City Mice—Urban Areas Grow While Rural Population’s Share Dwindles” (*Adweek.com*); “Census: 8 of 10 Americans Now Urbanites” (*MSN.com*); “America’s romance with sprawl may be over” (Haya and Overberg). These headlines make claims about where North Americans live and how the landscape is being developed based entirely on statistical data released by the Census Bureau. Such proclamations overemphasize the general notion that “urban areas” are growing—when in fact urban clusters, a classification that encompasses people living in areas with as few as 2,500 inhabitants, are included in the statistics. Interpretation of these data is confounded by the similarity in language between the specific designation of “urbanized area,” which represents a population threshold of 50,000 or more, and the general classification of “urban area”, which includes *all* areas considered urban by the U.S. Census Bureau. These headlines mischaracterize *all* people residing in urban areas as “city mice” and “urbanites”, characterizations that, by unknowingly including communities as small as 2,500 inhabitants, are hardly representative of all communities bearing the designation of “urban area.”

Various data collected by government agencies are used to make decisions that enact real, physical, changes to the landscape including planning decisions about what community services to provide, including services for the elderly and where to build new roads and schools. Census data are used to distribute more than \$400 billion in federal funds to local, state, and tribal governments each year (“About What We Do”). Census data also affect how funding is allocated to communities for neighborhood improvements, public health, education, and transportation. Given the magnitude of its influence, it is important to recognize that the census

itself is not appropriately geared for critical spatial analysis. The United States Census data actually describe shifts in population statistics rather than the physical characteristics of the landscape. As it tries to more accurately reflect changes in development patterns, the Census Bureau criteria have become increasingly complex to maintain the division between urban and rural populations.

The linguistic and statistical definitions of “rural” remain desperately inadequate; this is due, in part, to the extremely constricted classification of “rural” as noted earlier. The Census Bureau has continued to define “rural” as all territory, persons, and housing units not defined as urban: “For instance, a rural place is any incorporated place or census-designated place (CDP) with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants that is located outside of a UA” (GARM 12-1). A “place” is either entirely urban or entirely rural.² Increasingly, dissatisfaction with the current classification schemes is an important topic for the U.S Census Bureau. Bureau Director Robert Groves explains:

Treating rural as ‘everything else’ begs the question of what purposes need to be fulfilled by attention to rural areas. The problems that seemed most important to those at the conference were poverty, jobs, health service access, education, and community support. Census Bureau statistics show that there are more gasoline stations and museums per capita in nonurban areas, but fewer physicians and dentists. How many more gasoline stations and how many fewer physicians depend on how you define “rural” (Groves, “Rural and Suburban America”).

The most recent changes in classification for the 2010 census indicate an increasing awareness that categories based almost entirely on population statistics are inadequate. The requirements have expanded to include relative distance requirements, and for the first time, in 2010, included impervious surface as criteria for an “urban” designation in non-residential areas. Specifically, groups of census blocks with a high degree of impervious surface that were within 0.25 miles of an urban area are now considered “additional nonresidential urban territory” (“Differences Between”). The U.S Census Bureau is not equipped to lead the conversation however, as its primary function is a statistical one. Landscape architects, architects, and other spatial designers cannot take for granted the importance of accurate definitions and should not unthinkingly accept current definitions. As Director Groves explains, “When definitions of terms matter, then the challenge of the statistical agencies is to bring to bear all the input from the diverse possible uses of statistics involved (attempting to maximize their fitness for as many uses as possible)” (Groves, “Rural and Suburban America”).

² One exception is granted for those designated as an “extended city.” An extended city is an incorporated place that contains large expanses of sparsely populated territory for which the Census Bureau provides separate urban and rural population counts and land area figures.

IV. Understanding Urbanization: Beyond population numbers

Common perceptions of urbanization are heavily influenced by data that are driven by two main factors. The first factor is the preeminence of census data driven by population numbers. Using census data, one could erroneously assume that rural areas are less impacted by growth because a majority of the population lives in areas classified as “urban” (Figure 7). The second factor driving our misunderstanding of urbanization is that the evolving definition of “urban” does not fit with the stagnant definition of “rural.”

Traditionally, urbanization has been characterized by the movement of people *into* cities. Urbanization was often described as a migration of people searching for better economic opportunities. When understood in this manner, one imagines farmers leaving agricultural land and moving to cities. Today, however, the latest census data shows a relatively static (not shrinking) rural population (Figure 8). This suggests that urban growth is not contingent upon a rural migration. Additionally, population numbers do not describe the degree to which a landscape is changing as a result of human activity. For example, from 1950 to 1990, St. Louis experienced a 355-percent growth in developed land even though the population increased by just 35 percent (From 1950 to 1980, the population in the Chesapeake Bay watershed increased by 50 percent, while land used for commercial and residential activity climbed to 180 percent (Heimlich and Anderson 9)). It is possible to map general locations of increasing populations but we must then make general assumptions about the implications of population growth for conversion of forest, farm, and other lands for housing, transportation, and commercial purposes.

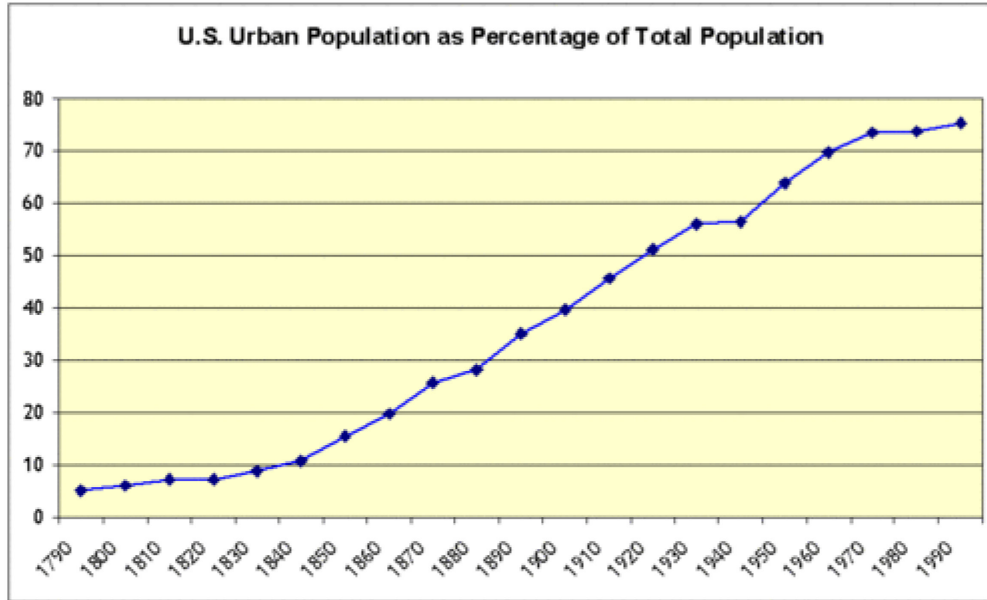


Figure 7: This graph, based entirely on population statistics, is misleading. It appears that only urban centers are growing because the urban population is far greater than the rural population (Source: <http://www.austincontrarian.com/U.S. Census>).

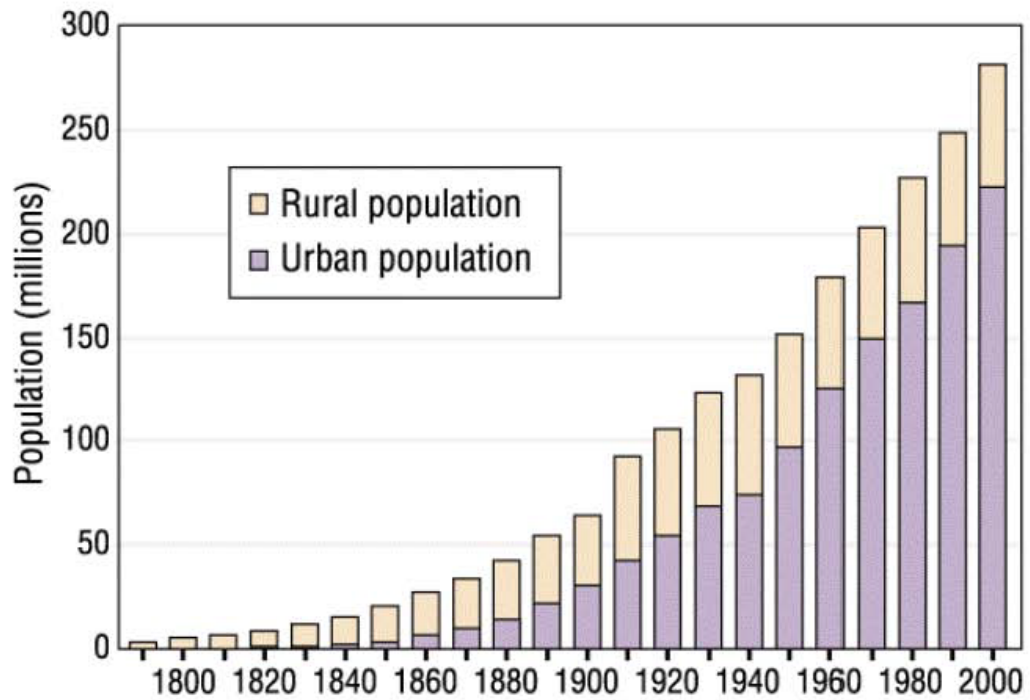


Figure 8: Coverage: 50 states and the District of Columbia
 Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1993, 2004

Although large metropolitan areas are physically growing and spreading population growth is also occurring in areas traditionally considered rural. What becomes apparent from analysis of the data is that urbanization can take place as the result of an out-migration of city residents into less developed landscapes. When individuals move to towns or villages, they increase the population of those areas. Before long, those “rural” areas have reached or surpassed the population thresholds required for categorization as “urban.” The increase of urban population can therefore represent the rapid conversion of rural settlements into areas that are newly classified as “urban.” This designation can conflict with the cultural identity of the actual communities and does not accurately portray the spectrum of landscape typologies both present and still emerging (Figures 9-10).

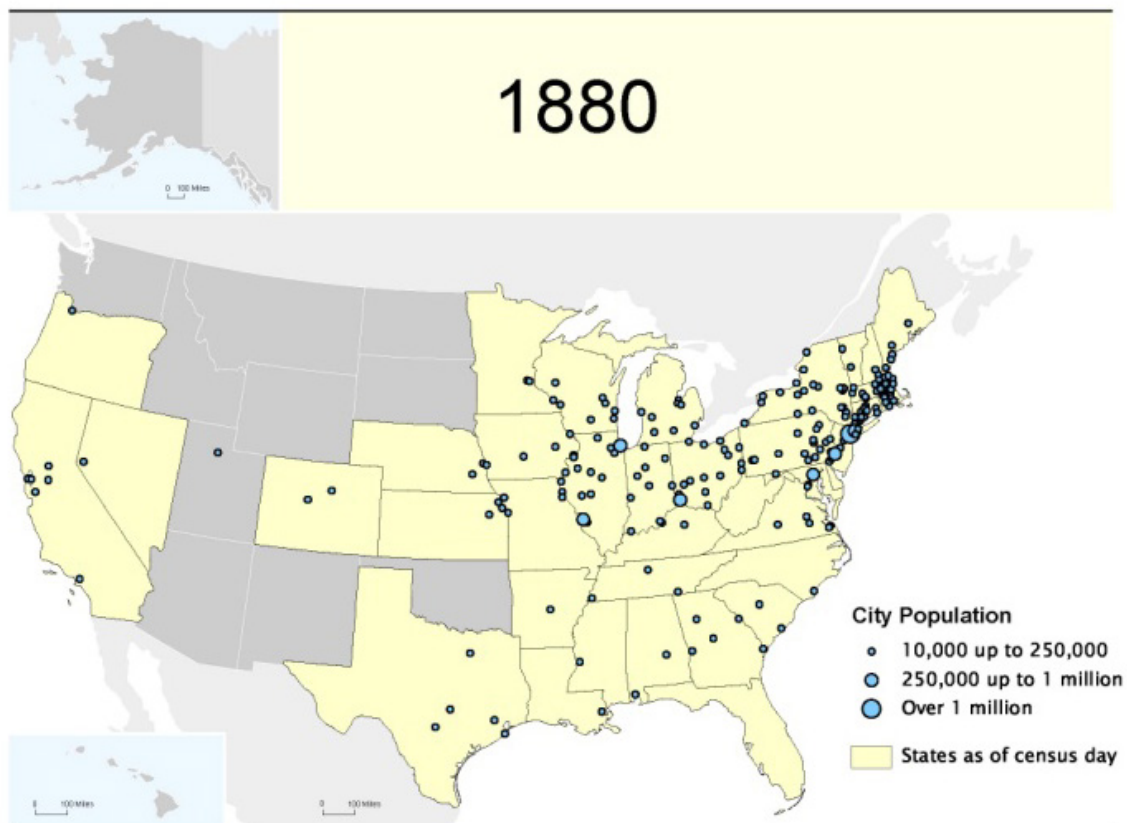


Figure 9: Census maps show an increase in population centers. According to the census, all areas shown are “urban” because they exceed the threshold of 2,500 people (Source: U.S. Census, Growth & Distribution of Cities 1790-2000).

Developed land, i.e., land shaped to meet residential, commercial, industrial, and transportation uses, is increasing at nearly twice the rate of population growth (EPA 4-19). Between 1982 and 2003, the amount of developed land in the U.S. grew by more than 35 million acres; a cumulative increase of more than 48 percent. The Census Bureau estimates that during the same period, the population of the 48 states grew by nearly 58 million people, or just over 25 percent (EPA 4-20).

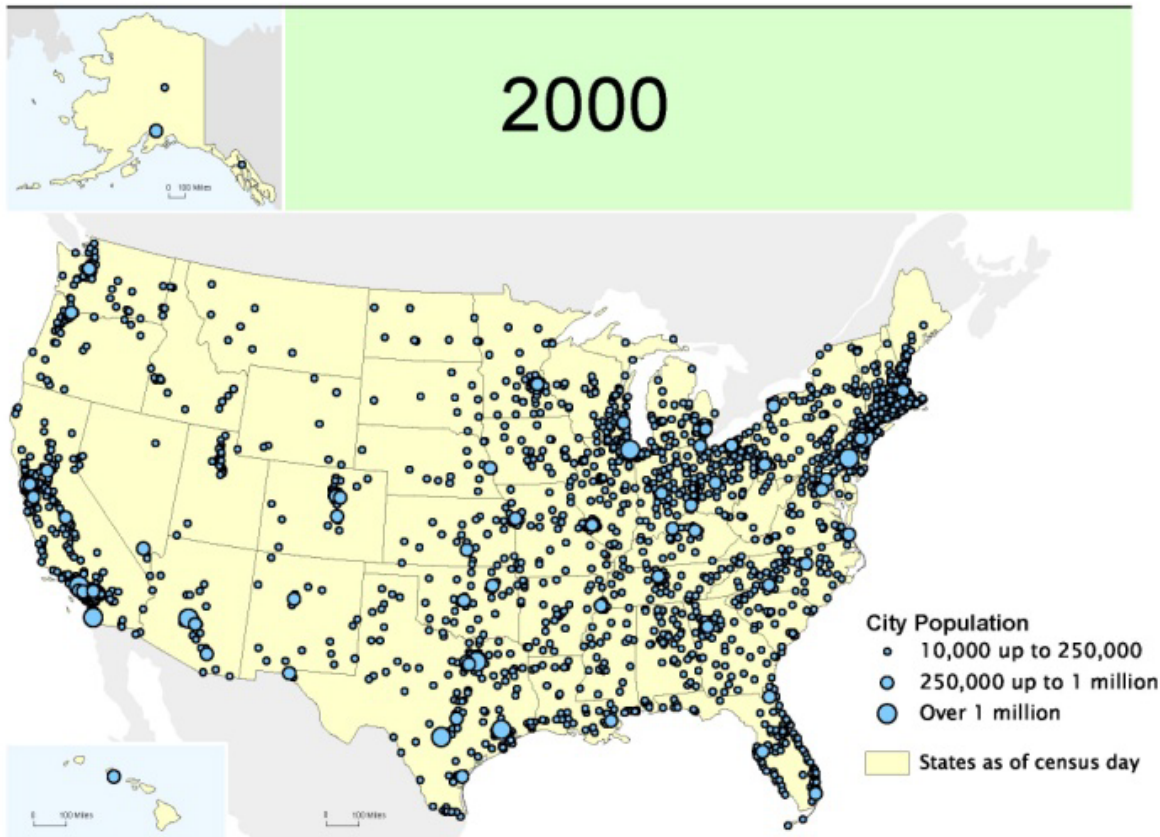


Figure 10: When compared to the 1880 City Population Map, it is apparent that “urban growth” indicates the proliferation of new, smaller cities. (Source: U.S. Census, Growth & Distribution of Cities 1790-2000).

V. Considering Terms: The exurban, peri-urban, and fringe

The disciplines of geography and planning more consistently utilize a language that recognizes a continuum of spatial realities that includes the peri-urban, exurban, and suburban.. The reality of rural areas has changed significantly as a consequence of industrial agriculture (arguably a kind of unrecognized urbanization), but the definition of “rural,” in popular and design conversations, often belies a stagnant understanding of the term as a kind of pastoral “other” to the swelling category of “urban.”

Mattias Qviström, Director of the School for Integrated Peri-Urban Landscape Development at the Swedish University for Agricultural Studies (SLU), further develops rural typologies with his work on the “urban fringe.” Qviström emphasizes the importance of vernacular landscapes, including the rural, peri-urban, and urban fringe. The perimeter area of cities, known as the “urban fringe,” is defined by Qviström as:

Land in the advanced stages of transition from rural to urban uses—land under construction, land for which subdivision plans have been approved...land where there is little doubt over much of its area about its urban oriented function... (269).

The landscape of the small city is an area even less addressed than urban fringe within the theory of landscape architecture. Small cities are an important part of the fabric of “rural landscapes,” but they are not rural small towns, nor do they comprise the suburban-sprawl footprint of a larger city. A small city has several definable characteristics that are more helpful for understanding what it is than simple population statistics. First, the small city contains a mechanism for growth such as a University or a currently functioning industry. A small city is not in stasis or decline; it is expanding to accommodate growth. Second, a small city is physically autonomous and is not the satellite sprawl of a greater metropolis. Finally, a general size approximation for a small city (although not absolute) is helpful. Small cities are generally the size of a neighborhood in a great city and are “place(s) that have defined center and edges, are walkable, and are diverse in terms of building types, people and uses.”³

A great diversity of development typologies and growth conditions affect rapidly growing small cities that are often subsumed by the “urban” designation. Three categories are used to organize types of small cities in planning literature: exurban, production, and gateway. *Exurban Cities* exist on the fringe of most urban areas across the United States. Many of these communities have shifted from a traditional reliance on a local economic base to a level of dependence on jobs in the larger metropolis to which they are attached. Exurban Cities are growing at an above-average rate of 5 percent per year (Twaddel and Emerine 1). A second classification of “rural city,” as defined by planning/transportation professionals, is a *production city*. Production cities are typically found in remote areas such as the Great Plains, the Corn Belt, Mississippi Delta, and Appalachia. These communities depend on a single industry in decline, such as agriculture, manufacturing, or mining. They have not diversified their job base and are isolated

³ I am using the new urbanist’s definition of a “neighborhood” found in *Sustainable Urbanism* by Douglas Farr.

to the extent that they cannot depend on surrounding job centers. This leads to a below-average growth rate of two percent per year and a loss of jobs (Twaddel and Emerine 1). Within the planning lexicon, a third category of city is called *destination* or *gateway cities* (Twaddel and Emerine 2). They are situated in locations featuring natural amenities such as mountains, lakes, or beaches and they attract seasonal residents, retirees, and tourists. Located primarily in the West, the Upper Great Lakes, and New England, the economic base of these communities has shifted from traditional, rural industries (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, or mining) to a service-based economies built around providing access to natural amenities and support of a recreational or leisure culture. These communities are growing at an above average rate both demographically and economically.

An interdisciplinary team of geographers, geoscientists, and sociologists address the rise of gateway cities in the western United States. They note the rising popularity of the concept of the “New West” over the past decade and investigate the socio-ecological forces driving the “New West” phenomenon. The eleven westernmost states of the continental United States, including Montana and Nevada, are considered to be the “New West.” The in-migration growth rates in the 11 westernmost states increased by 20 percent compared to a national average of 13.2 percent (Robbins 358). The authors investigate trends of population growth, economic shifts, and land-use changes in the region and suggest that the changes are neither unique nor unprecedented in the history of the New West areas.

Rural geographers have made robust attempts to understand “rural.” For example, Michael Woods examines the definition and conceptualization of rural space, arriving at three theoretical framings of rurality: (1) a functional perspective, which identifies the distinctive functional characteristics of rural areas; (2) a politico-economic perspective, which discusses rural as the product of broader social, economic and political processes; and (3) a socially constructed perspective, which does not contain the idea of rural spatially, instead emphasizes the social, cultural and moral values associated with these places (849-853). The three framings of “rural” come down to a spatial versus conceptual understanding of rurality. But at the same time, Woods acknowledges that the critique of social constructivist perspectives neglect the material dimension of the rural condition. In doing so, he highlights current work by rural geographers to rematerialize rurality. A first attempt to return to a definition of “rural” that is grounded in space, is one that examines the material and discursive conditions associated with the geographical context of rural localities. A second attempt at re-materialization is found in attempts to statistically define rurality and categorize rural space using geo-referencing tools like

Geographic Information Systems. Wood explains that, “Governments have responded to the mobilization of rural interest groups...by seeking mechanisms through which they can ‘fix’ rural space and ‘objectively’ evaluate rural needs” (851).

The American Association of Landscape Architects also offers a definition of “rural” in relation to “landscape” in a policy statement first adopted in 1985:

The term ‘rural landscape’ describes the diverse portion of the nation’s land area not densely populated or intensively developed, and not set aside for preservation in a natural state. The rural landscape includes a variety of geological and geographic features such as cropland, forests, deserts, swamps, grasslands, pastures, rivers and lakes.

This definition is clearly a spatially referenced understanding of the term, although there exists little additional discussion by landscape architects on the conceptualization of the two terms “rural” + “landscape.”

VI. The Importance of Spatial Definitions

It took nearly 100 years for the ASLA to adopt a policy statement that defines “rural” in relation to, and with the language of, design.⁴ Many theorists insist that the fundamental spatial qualities of human existence must be revitalized and incorporated in all conversations about human society. Edward Soja, the postmodern political geographer and urban planner, recalls the efforts of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault in the late 1960’s and 1970’s to expand ways of understanding space and their efforts to challenge the epistemological privileging of historical over spatial thinking (101).

Spatial thinking is not limited to a discussion of the physical and philosophical features of a space, a tendency that dominated historical discourse on space for over a century (Soja 17). Instead, Soja emphasizes the importance of *lived space* which Soja identifies as an idea central to Lefebvre’s 1974 book, *La Production de L’Espace* (102). *Lived space* recognizes the active, in-flux nature of space by challenging the assumption that space is an absolute substance with fixed material dimensions that provides a static backdrop upon which historical or social events are written. Lived space is “a complex social product, a collectively created and purposeful configuration and socialization of space that defines our contextual habitat, the human and humanized geography in which we all live our lives” (Soja 18). Popular usage of statistical classifications that denies the complexity of lived space in both “urban” and “rural” landscapes

⁴ The ASLA first published its policy statement, “Rural Landscapes” in 1985.

denies the fact that physical and natural spatial forms intertwine with our socialized emotional and mental lives to create our biographies and, what Soja calls, our “geo-histories” (18).

VII. Discourse Analysis as a Tool to Examine Trends

For this thesis, I conducted a discourse analysis of written work in landscape architecture to challenge the classifications of urban and rural that I have discussed thus far. Discourse Analysis is a way to examine language in-use. It is a structured methodology that systematically examines language for particular trends, or patterns (Johnstone 3). It is distinct from linguistic analysis in that it is not focused on language as an abstract system but instead focuses on “what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language, based on their memories of things they have said, heard, seen, or written before, to do things in the world: exchange information, express feelings, make things happen, create beauty, entertain themselves and others, and so on” (Johnstone 3).

“What distinguishes discourse analysis from other sorts of study that bear on human language and communication lies not in the questions discourse analysts ask but in the ways they try to answer them: by examining the aspects of the structure and function of language in use” (Johnstone 4). Discourse analysis is not as much a discipline (or as a sub-discipline of linguistics) as it is a systematic, rigorous way of analyzing any form of written or spoken language, such as a conversation, a magazine article, or an essay on theory.

The main topic of interest is the underlying social structures, which may be assumed or played out within the conversation or text. In this thesis I conduct discourse analysis to examine treatments of rural in the landscape architecture discourse to understand how the urban bias evolved and what it means for landscape architecture theory and practice today. So, as I describe in the next chapter on Methods, I identify categories, or themes of ideas, views, and perceived roles of urban and rural within certain critical texts as is congruent with the methods of discourse analysis. The aim is to identify commonly shared patterns of talking. The investigator strives to answer questions such as how the discourse helps us understand the issue under study, how people construct their own version of an event, and how people use discourse to maintain or construct their own identity. Discourse analysis endeavors to access to the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a project, a statement, a method of research, or a system of classification.

Of central importance to the practice of discourse analysis is a proper understanding of what “discourse” is. To a discourse analyst, “discourse” usually means “actual instances of

communication in the medium of language” (Johnstone 2). Discourse is both the source of this knowledge (one’s generalizations about language are made on the basis of the discourse in which one participates) and the result of it (one applies what one already knows in creating and interpreting new discourse) (Johnstone 3). James Paul Gee describes discourse as a dance of coordinated patterns of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools object, times and places (36). He warns that the “dance” is ever changing and often determined by “what the ‘masters of the dance’ (those who inhabit the discourse) will allow to be recognized or will be forced to recognize...” (36). He concludes that discourses are social practices, mental entities, and material realities (39).

Gee differentiates between two main approaches to conducting discourse analysis: *descriptive* or *critical*. Descriptive discourse analysis is more concerned with how language-in-use functions, in order to better understand language itself. In descriptive discourse analysis the discourse analyst is not concerned with the practical application of their work in the world (Gee 9). A critical discourse analyst on the other hand, wants to address and perhaps intervene in some problem in the world (Gee 9). If descriptive discourse could be thought of as more scientific, then critical discourse analysis might be understood as more socially and politically responsive. Gee argues that because language itself is political, and that any use of language must deal with politics, that all discourse analysis needs to be critical (9). Critical discourse analysis “argues that language-in-use is always part and parcel of, and constitutive of, specific social practices and that social practices always have implications for inherently political things like status, solidarity, and the distribution of social goods and power” (Gee 68).

A subsequent distinction between types of discourse analysis involves the methodology of the analysis itself. What Gee calls “utterance type meaning task” refers to prioritizing language form itself as a tool to carry out communicative functions. This tool essentially “comes down to choosing and defending a particular grammatical theory...and offering correct grammatical and semantic descriptions of ones data” (67). A second “tool of inquiry” for discourse analysis is the “situated meaning task.” This is what Gee calls the “real action” where one analyzes the particular meaning of a given piece of language in specific contexts of use (65). Put another way, the situated meaning task is the art of discovering and relating context to meaning. Such will be my method of analysis in examining the use of the word “rural” within the theory of landscape architecture. A third tool involves social practices. This task is primarily associated with critical discourse analysis because it specifically involves investigating social practices to discover their implications for things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power.

Context, it turns out, is a tricky element of discourse analysis. How do we put boundaries around context to determine if we have considered enough or even too much context? Gee explains that context is “indefinitely large,” ranging from immediate factors like eye gaze and tone of voice to entire historical, institutional, and cultural settings (67). The challenge is that an interpretation of discourse is limited to the contextual factors that the analyst chooses to consider: there will always be additional, alternative aspects of context one *could* consider. Gee calls this the “frame problem” and explains that one “cannot really argue that an analysis is valid unless we keep widening the context in which we consider a piece of language until the widening appears to make no difference to our interpretation” (68). The “frame problem,” although sometimes difficult to manage, is also a useful tool. The tool’s usefulness is related to the demand it makes of researchers to continually and thoughtfully widen the context of analysis; in doing so researchers can also see what information and values are being left unsaid or ignored in pieces of language. These issues of frame and context were particularly relevant to this thesis. As I endeavored to identify themes across the field of North American landscape architecture theory, I struggled with selecting a manageable and yet comprehensively representative sample of this discourse to analyze. In my research I decide to utilize critical discourse analysis over descriptive discourse analysis because critical discourse analysis is structured to address and provide insight into social context and social issues.

Chapter 3. Methodology

To ascertain trends, patterns, and possible biases in the published discourse of landscape architecture theory regarding urban and rural landscapes, I conducted archival research. I selected two prominent landscape architecture journals in which to conduct searches for articles that could illuminate these potential trends, patterns, and biases. Then, I selected a sample of articles that are focused on rural landscapes and conducted a discourse analysis to examine these texts with the goal of understanding how, within landscape architecture theory, rural landscapes are conceptualized, studied and treated. In this chapter, I will explain each of these methods in greater detail.

I began my investigation by identifying two major publications distributed by and for landscape architecture professionals and academics: *Landscape Architecture Magazine (LAM)* and *Landscape Journal (LJ)*. Both publications are prominent sources for both theory and practice in the profession. To determine the degree to which urban and rural landscapes are addressed in this particular published discourse, I conducted searches for the terms “urban” and “rural” using both the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals and the University of Wisconsin’s complete index of *Landscape Journal*. The aim of this method was to use strategic search queries to understand better how often, if at all, the keywords appear in important publications of landscape architecture. I employed a broad archival research searching strategy in order to search for and quantify the emphasis on “urban” conversations versus rural. I then isolated a sample of texts on rural landscapes and conducted a more involved discourse analysis of these. More specifically, in this phase, I analyzed the twelve articles ever published in *Landscape Journal* containing the word “rural” in the title.

I. Literature Sampling and Archival Analysis

To identify patterns and dominant trends in the discourse of landscape architecture theory, I turned to two prominent periodicals representing the discipline: *Landscape Journal* and *Landscape Architecture Magazine*. I selected *Landscape Architecture Magazine* because it is the official publication of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the profession’s longest running magazine, launched in 1910. According to LAM’s official website, the publication reaches more than 60,000 readers who plan and design projects valued at over \$140 billion each year (“About Us”). I identified LAM as the more practice-oriented magazine with a readership of licensed professionals whose broad range of contributors range from academics to practitioners. I used the Avery Index of Architectural Periodicals to query the archives of LAM. Avery is a

database which queries articles in 2,863 journals in the fields of architecture and design, archaeology, city planning, interior design, and historic preservation— including *Landscape Architecture Magazine*. I determined that Avery Index has in its database 4,344 records from LAM beginning in 1910 and extending through 2010.

Landscape Journal, a much more recent publication launched in 1982, was selected because it is arguably the most theory-oriented of the scholarly journals dedicated to issues shaping the field of landscape architecture. *Landscape Journal* is the official journal of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA). It was started “in response to the increasing perception of educators in landscape architecture that the profession, to grow as a discipline, must take responsibility for generating its own knowledge base of research and other scholarly inquiry” (Gobster 52). One of *Landscape Journal*’s five strategic goals is to “relate scholarship to the practice of landscape architecture” (CELA 2008). For this reason, *Landscape Journal* seemed the most appropriate place to explore the discourse of “rural” and “urban.” Researchers report “the proportion of landscape architecture authorship in *Landscape Journal* to be high in comparison to other landscape-related journals and higher than any other disciplinary affiliation of authors to journals within their own disciplines (Gobster 62). In a 2010 study conducted to analyze the performance of *Landscape Journal* after its 25th year of publication, researchers reported that 70 percent of all authors and co-authors published in *Landscape Journal* “were teaching in a landscape architecture department or had a terminal degree in landscape architecture” (Gobster 62). These are the voices of landscape architecture educators and educators are the keepers of professional theory. As such, we would expect the main theoretical positions, dilemmas, and discussions of the profession to be taking place in the pages of this journal.

I began with a simple search for the frequency with which the words “urban” and “rural” appeared in the title of the two publications sampled. To do this, I searched all editions of the magazine beginning with the first issue published to better understand the relative importance of usage, and relative dominance of terms and focus, I searched to identify articles published with either or both of the words “rural” and “urban.”

II. Conducting a Discourse Analysis

To conduct my discourse analysis, I used the search results from the archival research to identify a second sample of articles to read more closely. This sample was comprised of all articles that were published with the term “rural” in the title from *Landscape Journal*. This decision

was influenced by the quality of the search results, which were more reliable and more thoroughly indexed in the search engine for *Landscape Journal*. Also, because there were relatively few articles in *Landscape Journal* with “rural” in the title, I chose to analyze all twelve articles. Moreover, because the definition of rural is often limited to “that which is not urban,” the twelve articles promised to include at least a minimal reference to the relationship between “rural” and “urban.” The inclusion of a specific term in an article’s title implies a very deliberate choice and often reflects the focus of a piece. I would argue that when an author chooses words for the title, s/he does so with particular attention and intention. Therefore, while I used keywords in searching for trends in the literature during the archival research portion of my analysis, for the deeper discourse analysis, I focused instead on those articles that had “rural” in the title.

Database searches of *Landscape Journal* and *Landscape Architecture Magazine* produced a snapshot of keyword usage that indicated patterns and dominant trends in the discourse. *LAM* articles published before 1934 are not fully searchable, thus data returned does not absolutely confirm or negate a word’s appearance in the text. Consequently, I decided to limit the scope of my review to sample results from the peer edited, academic reviewed, *Landscape Journal* because of the database’s capacity for a complete search. “Rural” appeared in the titles of only 18 articles in the entire collection of *Landscape Journal* issues ever published. These 18 articles served as the pool of articles from which to begin a discourse analysis. Of the 18 articles returned with “rural” in the title, six were either book reviews or conference reviews. I chose as my sample the twelve articles that were examples of original work rather than pieces reviewing or summarizing the books or conferences. All twelve articles sampled were written or at least co-authored by landscape architects.

Having identified the sample, I developed a methodology for a detailed discourse analysis to guide my reading of the selected articles. I first created an open coding method based on the question, “What is the story of rural and urban in this article?” I modeled this process after the open coding process outlined in a grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss). According to Barbara Johnstone, the basic overarching goal in discourse analysis is about discerning patterns in the discourse, identifying dominant narratives and possible counter-narratives and understanding how concepts are treated in the discourse— i.e., how they are discussed, what terms, concepts and symbolism are attached to particular terms. As in all discourse analysis, it was important to create a systematic approach, a “heuristic,” before reading and analyzing the articles which were written over a span of 28 years. According to Johnstone, “A heuristic is a discovery procedure, a systematic way of exploring a topic to see what is

particularly interesting or problematic or puzzling about it...” (229). I read and coded each article conceptually to isolate the following four themes:

1. Who is referenced for authority in the article?
2. Who is the subject of the article?
3. How is rural defined by the author?
4. Is rural related to urban or vice versa, and if so, how?

I then reread each article looking for repeated or notable concepts. By the third reading, I was able to detect specific terms and language patterns that were used by multiple authors across various topics. Persistent ideas, revealed both in the arrangement of language itself and in the points made by authors, emerged as themes throughout the sampled literature. Discourse analysis is not a rigid procedure but a means of inquiry “that uncovers more specific, focused questions and possible answers for them” (Johnstone 229). I identified themes in order to question assumptions about the roles and responsibilities of the profession beyond the dominant urban narrative.

Chapter 4. Findings

In this chapter, I present the results of both the archival research I conducted in *Landscape Architecture Magazine* and *Landscape Journal* as well as the results of a discourse analysis of literature on rural landscapes that I sampled from *Landscape Journal*.

I. Archival Search Results

The results of archival analysis indicate a disproportionate emphasis on the word “urban” in two important sources of both scholarly and professional literature (*Figures 11-12*). The findings also reveal the existence of a pervasive *Zeitgeist* where the bias is toward urban case studies, urban design critiques, and historical projects completed in metropolitan areas. In this case, “*Zeitgeist*” is understood as the general cultural, intellectual, ethical, spiritual, or political climate within the profession of landscape architecture during any given era. In both *Landscape Architecture Magazine* and *Landscape Journal*, the word “urban” was used far more frequently (*Figures 11-12*) revealing a larger trend and emphasis on urban landscapes over rural and suggesting an urban-centric *Zeitgeist*. The relative lack of importance placed on rural themes is evidenced by the lack of articles published on the subject. Precisely because the conversation is limited or marginalized we must ask, what is being said by landscape architects about the “rural”?

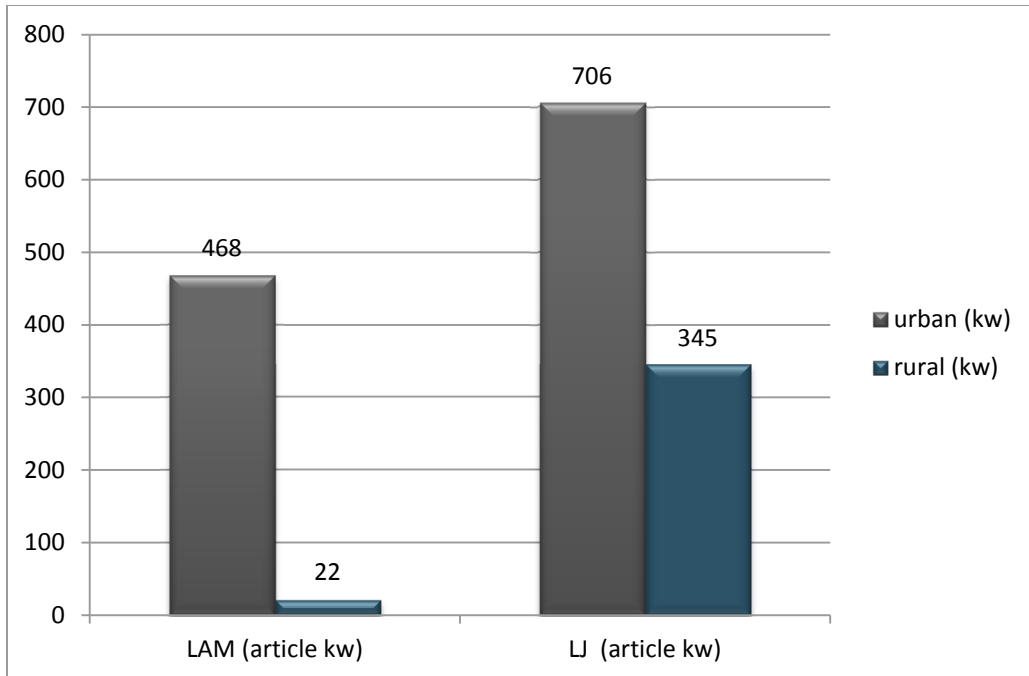


Figure 11: The usage of the keywords “urban” or “rural” in the body text of articles published in *Landscape Architecture Magazine (LAM)* and *Landscape Journal (LJ)*

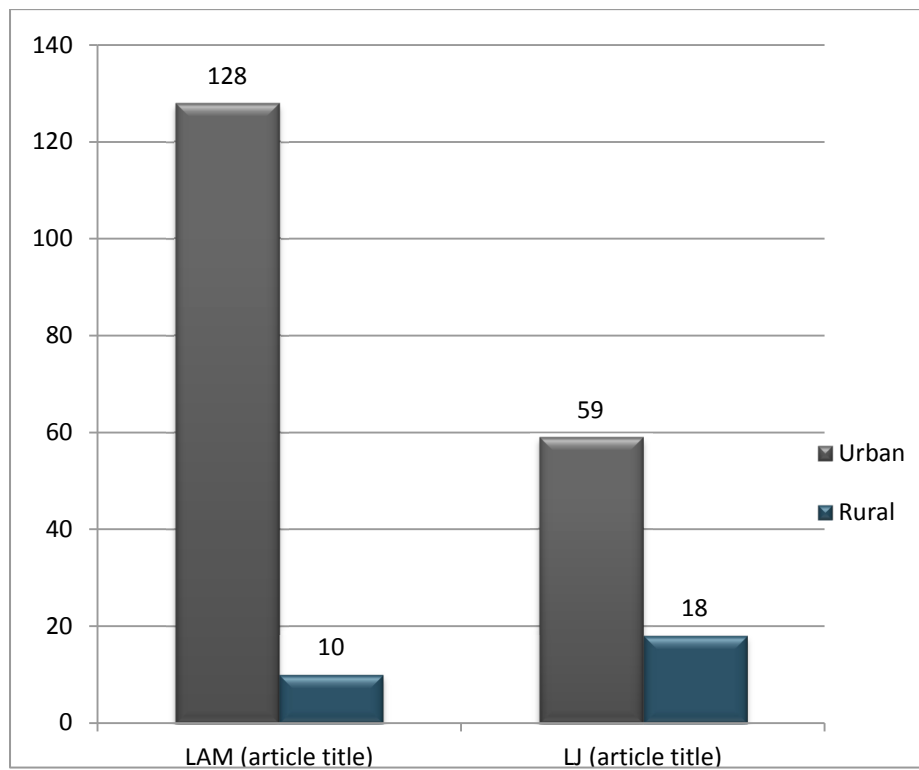


Figure 12: Instances of “urban” or “rural” in the title of articles published in *Landscape Architecture Magazine (LAM)* and *Landscape Journal (LJ)*

In *LAM*, the word “urban” was 12.8 times more likely to appear in the title of an article than the word “rural.” Similarly, in the 29 year history of *Landscape Journal* only 18 of these articles have the word “rural” in their titles. Comparatively, during the same period, 59 articles featuring the word “urban” in the title were published in *Landscape Journal*. There does not appear to be any significant historical increase or decrease in usage frequency suggesting there were no particular fads or shorter-term trends in the urban focus, rather the dominance of “urban” centered papers is relatively consistent throughout all years of publication. In contrast, an article focused on some component of “rural” scholarship appeared in *Landscape Journal* only once every one to five years (*Table 1*).

Archival search results clearly indicate a general preference for “urban” topics. However, raw data alone, do not address the meaning of these trends or show us how these terms are used and understood. Below is a complete list of all 18 articles that include the term “rural” in the title from *Landscape Journal* (*Table 1*).

	DATE	AUTHOR	TITLE
1	1983	Melnick, Robert	"Protecting Rural Cultural Landscapes: Finding Value in the Countryside."
2	1985	Sutton, Richard K.	"Relict Rural Plantings in Eastern Nebraska."
3	1986	Watson, Elizabeth	"Rural land uses and planning: a comparative study of the Netherlands and the United States and protecting farmland [conference]."
4	1987	Junko, Goto and Arnold R. Alanen	"The Conservation of Historic and Cultural Resources in Rural Japan."
5	1989	Keith, Walter M.	"Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines for Urban and Rural America: A Planting Design Manual for Environmental Designers [book review]."
6	1990	Wilkin, D.C. and D.R. Iams	"Characteristics and Attitudes of Pima County Residents Related to Urban Expansion into Rural Areas."
7	1990	Scarfo, Robert	"Saving America's Countryside: A Guide to Rural Conservation [book review]."
8	1991	Westmacott, Richard	"Pattern and Practice in Traditional African-American Gardens in Rural Georgia."
9	1993	Conan, Michel	"The Urban Invasion of Rural Culture: a Review of Landscape Sociological Research in France, 1970-1987."
10	1995	Haswell, Susan O. and Arnold R. Alanen	"Colonizing the Cutover: Wisconsin's Progressive-Era Experiments in Rural Planning."
11	1996	Steiner, Frederick R. and Randall Arendt	"Rural by Design: Maintaining Small Town Character, by Randall Arendt [book review]."
12	1996	Dahl, Bernard, and David H. Capps	"Views from the Road: a Community Guide for Assessing Rural Historic Landscapes [book review]."
13	1998	Westmacott, Richard	"A Garden Apart: An Agricultural And Settlement History Of Michigan's Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Region And Farming At The Water's Edge [book review]."
14	2000	Smith, George R. and James R. Taylor	"Achieving Sustainability: Exploring Links between Sustainability Indicators and Public Involvement for Rural Communities."
15	2003	Crewe, Katherine	"The Rural Landscapes of Frank Waugh."
16	2007	Shanken, Andrew	"Confederates on the Fairway: a Civil War Themed Subdivision in Rural Ohio."
17	2009	Crankshaw, Ned	"Plowing or Mowing? Rural Sprawl in Nelson County, Kentucky."
18	2011	Bowns, Caru	"Advancing Transdisciplinary Action Research In Rural Pennsylvania: The Case For Plural Design In The Susquehanna River Towns."

Table 1: All articles published in *Landscape Journal* with the word "rural" in the title

To address the deeper questions of meaning that are at the heart of this thesis, I chose a smaller sample of twelve articles from which to conduct a discourse analysis. Because the writings about rural topics were so few, I chose to undertake a detailed analysis of all of the existent texts to determine how the term “rural” was being treated within the literature—that is, how authors defined rural, if at all, how it related it to urban, if at all, what symbolism was attached to rural landscapes, and what the main argument said about rural landscapes.

II. Discourse Analysis Results

In the following section I present the results of a detailed discourse analysis conducted using a sample of writing by landscape architects published in *Landscape Journal*. The sample, all complete articles published in *Landscape Journal* with the word “rural” in the title (excluding book reviews and conference summaries), was chosen after the archival research revealed a significant preference for using the term “urban” over “rural” in both the body of articles and the published article titles (Fig. 2). The purpose of this discourse analysis is to better understand how landscape designers understand and use the word “rural.” This is particularly instructive in light of findings which indicate that landscape architecture discourse places a disproportionate emphasis on “urban” subjects. In conducting a this discourse analysis of the use of the term “rural” in landscape architecture literature, I aimed to answer the questions central to this thesis and gain insight into the values and biases of the profession. Assumptions about the roles and responsibilities of the profession of landscape architecture were also revealed in the ways landscape architects understood and use the term “rural” in relation to the term “urban.”

Writing on the subject of “rural” by landscape architects, although not frequent or plentiful, is diverse. The analysis of discourse, or language in use, revealed several key themes that were consistent throughout multiple articles regardless of whether they were written in 1983 or in 2011. Some work identifies and explores a classist relationship between “cultivated elite urban populations” and “working class rural society”, as in the piece by Michel Conan. The term “elite” is used multiple times in the article itself, which concerns the widespread “urban assault against the spoils of rural society” (38). Some writings on “rural” landscapes focus on the kinds of “large lot exurban development” that make the “traditional concepts” of urban, suburban, and rural “misleading” as in the article by Ned Crankshaw (Crankshaw 218). Other pieces concern themselves with the historical attempts by earlier landscape architects to practice in “rural landscapes”, despite the negative impact such a rural focus had on one’s career (Crewe 126). Pieces like Robert Melnick’s conclude that historic preservation in the landscape is the

management strategy best suited to dealing with ordinary rural landscapes. In the following section I more closely examine these themes that emerged as a result of discourse analysis of these articles: (1) antagonism between “urban” and “rural” populations; (2) inadequate vocabulary available to discuss landscape change; (3) disempowered rural populations; and (4) landscape architects as urban practitioners.

a. Antagonism

The city sits like a parasite, running out its roots into the open country and draining it of its substance.

Liberty Hyde Bailey

The most immediate and pervasive theme that emerged during the discourse analysis was that of *antagonism*. Writers were likely to speak of “urban populations” as antagonistic to or imposing upon, “rural communities.” The presentation of “urban” and “rural” as dichotomous concepts, which is common in popular discourse and census data classifications, also appeared throughout the articles published in *Landscape Journal*. This negative imposition of “urban” priorities and desires upon “rural” communities was predominantly called out as a spatial change to the landscape itself, although authors touched on economic and cultural imposition as well.

Some articles focus on and reflect more of an antagonistic relationship between rural and urban than others. The aggressive language in Michel Conan’s article is a particularly good example. Even the title, “The Urban Invasion of Rural Culture: a Review of Landscape Sociological Research in France, 1970-1987,” reflects an analysis that frames landscape representation as a class conflict; “*control over landscape production opposes urban and rural class interests* [italics mine] (138)”. Conan examined work by a number of French sociologists to suggest that social representations of landscape tend to benefit *urban populations* – specifically wealthy, well-educated, urban populations that were alternately referred to as “crusaders of bourgeois taste,” “patronizing groups,” or “cultivated elite” (135). Conan explains, “Implicitly, landscape culture is a domination tool used by outsiders to invade local territories having no better alternative than to actively seek cultural compromise” (140). He uses such terms as *domination* and *invasion*, *assimilation* and *appropriation* to describe the social interactions of “urban” and “rural” communities throughout the article.

Language employed by the other authors writing about “rural” subjects varied greatly but inevitably a similar antagonism bubbled to the surface in sentences and throughout paragraphs.

In another example, Richard Westmacott examines traditional African American gardens and concludes that “Like most rural people, the gardeners in this study *did not like cities*” [italics mine] (102). This is a subjective assertion of judgment by Westmacott that “rural people” are united in a common dislike of the city. Similarly, Haswell and Alanen, in their exploration of landscape architecture’s historical roots in “Colonizing the Cutover: Wisconsin’s Progressive-Era Experiments in Rural Planning,” remember Theodore Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission and speculate that reform efforts “occasionally appeared to the rural mind to be both urban and condescending” (184). The encapsulation of distinct individuals with unique experiences as being part of a collective, “rural mind” is noteworthy, as is the speculation that Progressive Era attempts to raise standards in planning and design within rural settings were unsuccessful because efforts were associated with urban condescension (171).

b. Inadequate Definitions

A second, prominent theme emerged as the writers themselves began to criticize the effectiveness of words they used, citing vocabulary constraints as problematic. In three separate articles, researchers directly address the inadequate definitions of terms such as “urban,” “rural,” “suburban,” or “exurban”—words critical to the discussion of landscape change as a result of urbanization and development. Additionally, as landscape architects wrote about non-metropolitan case studies and “rural” research, they began to expand the definition of “rural” by insisting that spatial qualities of the landscape be incorporated in the definition.

In 1990, Wilkin and Iams launched a study of the attitudes, and perceptions of Tucson, Arizona area residents and their decisions about whether to live in high-density or low-density settings. The authors found their research efforts hindered as they “searched in vain for usable definitions that distinguished urban, suburban, and rural” (43). Wilkin and Iams thus relied on residents’ subjective perceptions of their living situation and asked the study participants to self-report their residence as either urban, suburban, or rural. Wilkin and Iams subsequently identified two characteristics that they suggest might improve upon usable definitions of the terms urban, suburban or rural: lot size and driving distances (43).

Nineteen years later in 2009, Ned Crankshaw explores the spatial features of the fastest growing type of development in the United States at the time: *exurban* development. In his article, “Plowing or mowing? Rural Sprawl in Nelson County, Kentucky,” Crankshaw warns readers of the inadequacy of traditional terms and over-reliance on census categories:

large lot exurban development...creates a fragmented landscape different enough from the traditional concepts of urban, suburban, and rural that the 'existing censal categories are misleading because they present a vision of the United States as a territory tiled with convex, continuous, mutually exclusive types of regions, while the reality is one of a great deal of interpenetration, much of it rather fine grained (218).

The majority of the article is dedicated to exploring the physical characteristics of exurban development because, as Crankshaw points out, the physical characteristics of exurban development blurs land-use distinctions and makes it indistinguishable from surrounding agricultural lands (218). He argues that although his study area in Nelson County, Kentucky was extensively exurban, if the same area was classified using census data, the study area would *not* be identified as exurban (229). Crankshaw is also explicit in his intention to expand “the small but developing body of work describing rural residential development with a more fine-scaled depiction of cultural landscape patterns” (220). His attempts to describe rural in a more robust or “fine-scaled” manner was echoed by other authors in the sample.

In their efforts to describe the “rural,” landscape architecture scholars prove adept at expanding the word itself by associating it with spatial or cultural characteristics rather than survey data. In Robert Melnick’s article, “Protecting Rural Cultural Landscapes: Finding Value in the Countryside,” Melnick’s discussion challenges the idea of a linear development paradigm with either extreme end represented by “urban” or “rural”. Instead he suggests the existence of landscapes along a continuum from “natural” to “cultural,” where *natural landscapes* are maintained in a manner which replicates and supports natural ecological systems and *cultural landscapes* are “made up of material components which show the results of human occupancy” (88). The challenge of cultural preservation “In a rural setting (where) natural features often dominate the cultural components” is also a great opportunity (88). The opportunity, as proposed by Melnick, is that historic preservation in the rural landscape could bridge the divide between natural resource preservationists and cultural resource preservationists who traditionally “seemed to stake out distinctive territories and to guard those territories at all costs” (85). The role of the rural landscape as one of reconciliation is made possible because of the physical composition of the rural landscape itself. George Smith and James Taylor, authors of “Achieving Sustainability: Exploring Links Between Sustainability Indicators and Public Involvement for Rural Communities,” also call upon readers to consider the “rural” in expanded terms:

Rural community cannot be defined simply in terms of geographic location or population but must be considered in the broader sense to address the experience of 'rural,' as well as issues of economy, society, and the related attachments of rural (181).

Robust descriptions often take the form of generalizations or speculations about *rural life* as a unique phenomenon. Authors explore the habits and characteristics of inhabitants based upon settlement typology. For example, Richard Westmacott in his study “Pattern and Practice in Traditional African-American Gardens in Rural Georgia,” defines rural populations as “self-sufficient” and oriented toward function. “Self-reliance,” he writes, “is an agrarian value that is held by both white and black rural families” (102). Westmacott also identifies “rural” practices and attributes them to preferences for particular landscape features such as hedges in urban neighborhoods. He also notes different priorities given to privacy:

Because rural families like to see who is passing by, places for sitting and talking often face towards the road. This may differentiate rural from urban and suburban yards where leisure activities are often to the rear of the dwelling for the sake of privacy (92).

Richard Westmacott, like other landscape architecture scholars, expands the word “rural” by linking it with spatial or cultural characteristics rather than survey data.

c. Un-empowered “Rural” Communities: Vulnerability and Loss

Discourse analysis revealed that language used to describe “rural” populations is often sympathetic, creating a narrative where underserved, unprepared, rural communities “lacked the capacity” to manage the “sophisticated forms of planning and environmental monitoring” necessary to support sustainable development solutions (Smith and Taylor 183). This vulnerable position is identified, at least partially, as a result of disproportionate emphasis on “urban” efforts. Smith and Taylor, in their article “Achieving Sustainability: Exploring Links Between Sustainability Indicators and Public Involvement for Rural Communities,” explain that while “extensive research has been undertaken in recent years to develop sustainability indicators for urban communities, relatively little of this activity has focused on rural communities” (188). They cite lack of attention as a primary hurdle to positive development in communities not traditionally viewed as “urban:”

Efforts (activity focusing on research, development, and implementation of indicators of sustainable development) have been at the regional and urban governmental levels although fewer efforts are evident at a rural community level (179).

Goto and Alanen echo the idea of urban dominance and suggest that unempowered rural areas are not considered worthy of consideration, this time in the field of historic and cultural preservation in Japan explaining that, “Historical preservation in the rural context [...] has not yet achieved the same level of enthusiasm that is exhibited by several urban areas” (46). In her

article, “Advancing Transdisciplinary Action Research in Rural Pennsylvania,” Caru Bowns calls on landscape architects to pursue plural design but acknowledges that rural communities are not often considered by landscape architects. Bowns explains that “embedded research sites are usually urban in geography” (90). Additionally, Bowns argues that although landscape architecture academics are often dedicated to the ecological and social aspects of the discipline, “the thousands of participatory/plural design research projects executed in studio courses across the country remain primarily obscure and discrete ‘feel good’ cases” (90). The historical roots of this sympathetic attitude are confirmed by Haswell and Alanen as they explore Progressive Era efforts to “uplift the rural population” (173). The idea that people living in rural areas need uplifting is noteworthy in so far as it suggests that rural landscapes and the people who dwell in them are unempowered. Michel Conan also observes the existence of an urban bias that extends to bureaucratic and legal levels as well:

Because the planning law rests upon an abstract representation of society derived from bureaucratic experience of urban growth regulation, it carries urban growth values into rural areas (138).

This comment suggests that rural landscapes are viewed as blank canvases without distinction of their own, on which urban values can and must be written.

The urban bias creates an implicit conceptualization of rural landscapes as disempowered and in need of help from urban values. The writers sampled offer an alternative view of rural landscapes as vulnerable and at risk of losing their intrinsic value; value, the writers argue, that is inherent in a landscape’s cultural memory and, I would add, ecological capacity. Authors argue that something is in jeopardy as a result of current development trends in the “rural” landscape. In the writings “value” was variously identified as “amenity value inherent in rural settings” (Crankshaw 219), “local knowledge” (Smith and Taylor 187), “self-sufficiency” (Westmacott 102), or the authenticity of the “rural scene” (Crewe 133), landscape architects insisted that there was something uniquely valuable in the “rural.” The language of vulnerability is evident in Caru Bowns’ article, “Advancing Transdisciplinary Action Research in Rural Pennsylvania.” Bowns writes of rural communities’ natural assets becoming “*targets for unregulated development, a threat undermining the essence of Pennsylvania’s rural character and small town economies*” [italics mine] (93). She also describes the geographic region in which her case study is located as jeopardized by a force akin to a tornado in strength and form:

*One of six geographic regions designated by The Center for Rural Pennsylvania (TCRP), the Central Region counties **lies in the path of sprawl development spiraling from [...] metro centers** [emphasis mine] (93).*

Richard K. Sutton, in his work on the legacy of plantings from pioneer settlers in Eastern Nebraska, also warns of a risk of loss related to rural landscapes. His article, "Relict Rural Plantings in Eastern Nebraska," was written on a very specific subject in a limited geographic region, yet his language was ominous:

*Large-scale farming has begun to **erode** the existing pattern in these rural landscapes [...] the **danger** is the speed and scale of that change, and the **impoverishment** of what we are able to see of how humans have interacted with the rural Great Plains [emphasis mine] (115).*

For Sutton, cultural memory imprinted on the physical landscape is of great value and can be lost, a sentiment shared by Goto and Alanen in their article about Japan's rural landscapes:

*Many historical and cultural features, once abundant throughout the country, also are **threatened**; such **threats** occur either through **destruction** for new construction or via the **decay** that takes place when proper maintenance and repair are not practiced [emphasis mine] (43).*

Andrew Shanken's article on "theming," or attributing a fictional history or bond to a place, discusses patterns of suburban development including development of the *rural fringe*. He too notes the at-risk condition of rural communities as a result of post-industrial urban transformation (288). Shanken uses a familiar vocabulary of vulnerability to explain the disempowerment of rural dwellers:

*Older industries are often failing or dead, farms are foreclosed, the demographics are rapidly shifting, and the local citizenry tend to be **desperate for development but disempowered to direct that development as they wish** [emphasis mine] (296).*

According to Shanken, as formerly productive agricultural or resource oriented communities are transformed by exurban or suburban development, the relationship between place and identity deforms, leaving both the landscape and its inhabitants in flux (288). "Theming," although not limited to "rural" or exurban communities, is a result of developer's "failed but creative compensation for the utter devastation of towns" (287).

d. Urban Tradition of Landscape Architects

The theme of landscape architecture as an “urban” profession was directly affirmed in several articles, despite their focus on rural landscapes. A 2003 article by Katherine Crew provided a snapshot of the landscape architect practicing outside of the urban environment, as the profession’s “other.” The article titled “The Rural Landscapes of Frank Waugh”, explains that Frank Waugh, a contemporary of Frederick Law Olmsted, Warren Manning, and Jens Jensen, “stands out among his contemporary landscape architects as one who functioned most independently of the city” (137). Crew elaborates that Waugh was “unique in adapting what he saw as ‘the best work of landscape architecture to the country’s rural districts’” (126). The language of the article consistently portrays Waugh as “unique,” someone who “stands apart,” from other landscape architects because of his “strong preoccupation with small rural towns, villages and farms” (Crew Abstract). The language itself tends to exoticize Waugh as a man living on the edge of ridicule because of his professional emphasis on the rural. Crew explains that Waugh was “suspicious of urban politics and urban imperialistic expansion into the countryside” which, she speculates, “prompted him to attack the RPAA” (130).

Words like “suspicion,” “imperialism,” and “attack” frame the relationship between rural practitioners and urban practitioners as combative at worst and dismissive at best. The adjectives used to describe Waugh locate him outside the traditional discourse of landscape architecture. Haswell and Alanen affirm the primacy of urban practitioners. In their study of Progressive-Era rural advocates, “prominent landscape architects and planners” are presented as “those who focused primarily upon the improvement of urban environments” (Haswell and Alanen 172). In sharp relief are “their lesser-known peers”—those practitioners “almost forgotten today” who worked toward raising the standards of planning and design in rural settings (172).

One of the more conspicuous elements revealed during the discourse analysis on the subject of “rural” areas is a lack of reference to landscape architecture’s most important tool: design. I noted a pattern of *not* including landscape architecture as one of the professions considered critical in the discourse of “rural.” There were no calls to action, no invocation of design as an important tool. One article, by D.C. Wilkin and D.R. Iams written in 1990, includes a specific but not emboldened charge to landscape architecture. The authors write that landscape architects and planners are presented with a “clear challenge in these findings” to discover to what extent innovative design and planning can create (positive) perceptions in higher density settings (46). In other words, landscape architects and planners must find design criteria that could “make higher density housing not only more palatable, but more affordable as well” (46).

Likewise in Robert Melnick's article on cultural resource preservation, he goes so far as to acknowledge that "landscape architects have their stake in the landscape" (86), but he does not incite the profession to greater participation or action.

In conducting the discourse analysis I encountered several critical themes: antagonism between "urban" and "rural" populations; (2) inadequate vocabulary available to discuss landscape change; (3) disempowered rural populations; and (4) landscape architects as urban practitioners. The presence of these themes reinforced the results of my archival research—that the urban bias in landscape architecture is a regrettable oversight not only of the richness, depth and value of rural landscapes but an almost reflexive tendency to dissociate rural landscapes from design itself.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I ask if there is a bias in the theory of landscape architecture toward the “urban.” What I have found is an overwhelming preference, to the point of exclusion, for case studies, design critiques, and historical celebrations of projects completed in highly metropolitan areas—areas always described as “urban.” As a result of this discovery I conducted a discourse analysis of the counter-narrative to urban. I examined the use of the term “rural” in landscape architecture literature to investigate the values and biases of the profession regarding the non-metropolitan landscape. I also considered the historical development of an urban narrative within landscape architecture theory to imagine the roles and responsibilities of landscape architecture in an expanded discourse.

It became apparent in the process of this research that several subsidiary questions had to be addressed. The first of these questions concerned the definitions of “urban” and “rural.” The language I encountered in my research is inadequate to address the complex issues of ecological degradation and loss of cultural resources unfolding across the United States landscape. The second issue concerned settlement typologies and the oversimplification of those diverse communities that fall somewhere beyond the “urban or rural” discourse.

I. Discussion

Is it cause for alarm that landscape architecture has become an urban centric profession? If we believe Elizabeth Meyer, a prominent scholar of landscape architectural theory, the answer is yes. Meyer writes that “landscape architectural theory and practice are contingent endeavors; they give form to and illuminate the particulars of a time and place” (Situating 21). If landscape architecture is preoccupied with the urban, who is illuminating the particulars of time and place for the myriad landscapes lying somewhere distant from metropolitan centers along the continuum of different North American landscapes? Planners and zoning laws cannot lead the way to sustainable development; I would argue that the challenge of urbanization demands the presence of landscape architects. There must be an increased sense of urgency in demanding that landscape architectural theory address non-metropolitan areas particularly because development in these areas tends to be exploitative, unsustainable, environmentally degrading, and culturally excising.

A sense of urgency is a productive and necessary response to the manifestation of urbanization in service of growth and expansion that is pervasive across the country. When

applied to a community and a landscape that heretofore has not been exposed to high levels of urbanization, it wreaks havoc on the culture, environment, and our understanding of the landscape itself. This kind of development manifests a preference for distinct uses where industry is separated from commercial which is separate from residential. This development strategy, though developed intentionally by designers, planners and developers, is often viewed as a blight or an accident. In fact, destructive tendencies of separation and sprawl are promoted by policy, guided by zoning regulation, and they are also, I am arguing, a consequence of a limited scope in landscape architecture theory.

The current discourse regarding typologies of settlement and trends of development ignores the dangers of an unchallenged popular assumption that the North American landscape is either “rural” or “urban”—and that we live in a predominately “rural” nation where “rural” is synonymous with “natural” or “farmland.” “Natural” is problematic, as the majority of the North American landscape bears indelible marks of human development. The language of “farmland” calls forth pastoral images of pre-industrial farms and does nothing to update the North American consciousness with images of the new agricultural landscape: factory farming and corporate seed monopolies. Words like “rural” and its familiars such as “country” or “small town” are weak in their vagueness, particularly in regard to what they might imply about the kinds of physical changes taking place in the landscape as a result of development. Perhaps to account for those vague edges, “rural” is often defined by what it is not: “urban.” Unfortunately the definition of “urban” is dominated by census data classifications that are not spatially oriented and therefore not particularly accurate when discussing physical changes to the landscape. Participants in this unchallenged popular discourse maintain and reinforce an oversimplified vision by using terms that are not spatially referenced.

Landscape architects are critical contributors to any discourse about the North American landscape—we are after all, designers of the landscape. Within the contemporary theoretical literature of North American landscape architecture, “urban” and “rural” appear as a binary; they are dichotomous, opposing terms, representing an outdated perception of the North American landscape as either natural or settled. Landscape architects have contributed to the creation of a linear continuum with urban representing one extreme end and rural the other; the in-between is sometimes carelessly referred to as “suburban” or areas of “sprawl.” In order to maintain the dichotomous linear perspective, all emerging landscape typologies are nested under the category of “urban” which I have shown earlier is supported by the ways that census data are organized. The pastoral “rural,” as other, remains unchanged in our imaginations—it has been left

in the pristine state that captures the imaginations of European settlers as an alternative, as a respite, to the urban.

II. Conclusion

The rediscovery of the space between the binaries—the space of hybrids, relationships, and tensions—allows us to see the received histories of the modern landscape as the ideologically motivated social constructs that they are (Meyer, “The Expanded Field” 51).

In conducting this thesis I set out to document what North American landscape architecture theory is saying about non-metropolitan or “rural” landscapes; areas with the greatest potential for sustainable development. What I found was a notable oversight, even neglect of, landscapes outside of the urban. Consequently, I encourage both theorists and practitioners to recognize the opportunity for landscape architects, as experts in landscape *design*, to proactively help growing communities leverage the pace and pattern of development in ways that realize the vast potential for sustainable innovation that is inherent in less-developed landscapes. I echo Edward Soja’s assertion that practice is neither inherently better than theory, nor is theory better than ontology (68). Rather, it is the “...movement from theory building through empirical application to actual practice and social action...” that advances the profession of landscape architecture (Soja 68).

A more accurate understanding of what is happening to the North American landscape is contingent upon an expanded discourse. Our vocabularies and usage of particular terms in conversations must expand to include the entire spatial continuum, which is not reflected by reliance on population statistics. Instead, we must speak of a continuum, a spectrum of landscapes based upon relative manifestations of settlement density, road placement, degree of impervious service, and potential for sustainable infrastructure. We must focus on what is happening to the land itself and explicitly acknowledge that the way these spatial characteristics relate to one another is anything but linear or classifiable in simple dichotomies. As evidenced through earlier discussions of census data, population growth may begin to suggest trends but it does not represent or accurately capture changes in the landscape even when they are related to that growth.

To imagine urban growth as simply metropolitan growth or densification of large cities is misleading. Closer inspection of census data indicates that growth is contingent upon consumption of land. Nationwide density in major metropolitan centers has dropped—what has happened instead is a rapid conversion of landscapes to a more developed state. Not only are city boundaries pushing outward, areas that we imagine to be “rural” such as Conrad, Montana and

Richgrove, California are growing until they reach a low urban threshold.

Unless we are able to see the bounds, the limits of our landscapes, we will continue to devour them. The key to sustainable landscapes is introducing the concepts of sustainable development to populations that are still surrounded by ecologies that work... and horizons where city lights are still overshadowed by sky and ridge-tops; places where darkness still reveals the pinprick of starlight rather than the ruddy blankness city lights. The problem is that the process of development is still kept invisible, its progression is slow and gradual—if nothing else it is expected and thought to be inevitable. Given this reality, landscape architecture is uniquely capable of leading the movement of sustainable development in small cities and rural areas. I propose a hybrid of theory and engagement that better articulates a role for the disciplinary expertise of landscape architecture within an expanded narrative of small, quickly expanding cities and areas traditionally thought of as “rural” but statistically defined as “urban.”

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