
Books

A section for the review of books is a regular feature of *Landscape Journal*. The opinions and ideas expressed in the reviews are those of the reviewers and do not necessarily depict the views of the Journal's editors or the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture.

Suggestions for books to be reviewed are always welcome, as are comments regarding the reviews published. All correspondence should be sent to the Book Review editor:

Donna L Erickson, Book Review Editor
Landscape Architecture Program
School of Natural Resources and Environment
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1115
e-mail: dle@umich.edu

MISSISSIPPI FLOODS: DESIGNING A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

by Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha. 2001. New Haven: Yale University Press. 224 pages, illustrated, \$45.00 clothbound. ISBN 0300084307

Reviewed by Charles Waldheim

How do You Draw a River?

Mississippi *Floods: Designing a Shifting Landscape* describes the lower basin of the Mississippi River as a dynamic field of ongoing negotiation between immense hydrological forces and provisional forms of cultural arrangement. In so doing, the publication offers both an approach to contemporary landscape representation and a case study in regional American landscape history.

Mississippi Floods postpones arriving at simplistic oppositions between the river as natural environment versus cultural construct, ecological process versus engineered artifact. The authors instead propose a much less obvious, much more difficult, and ultimately much more rewarding question of how this complex and ever-shifting field of hydrological forces and settlement patterns might best be drawn. Or more precisely, how it might be mapped, photographed, and represented—how it might be *measured*. Woven into their fieldwork is a wide range of representational evidence, including drawings, photographs, silk-screen prints,

and archival material that construct a remarkably rich and multilayered visual account of one of America's most distinct regional landscapes.

Philadelphia-based landscape architect Mathur and architect/planner da Cunha spent summers traveling the lower Mississippi and immersing themselves in the economic engines, political imbroglios, operational imperatives, and narrative traditions of this most American of places. Along the way, Mathur and da Cunha sampled and explored regional dialects, colonial settlement patterns, geological history, hydrological engineering, catfish farming, and the ceaseless slow-moving drift of muddy water toward the Gulf of Mexico. And, of course, the floods.

Native American inhabitants of the lower Mississippi basin had no conception of flood with its threat of periodic devastation. Their tentative and nomadic settlements were conceived of and built in relation to a territory that periodically grew and receded, season by season. The earliest European colonists in the region, the French, brought an understanding of political boundaries based on the watershed of the river, a vast territory spanning from the continental divide in the Rocky Mountains to the west to the Appalachian Mountains to the east. This conception of ownership was codified in the long-lot system of land division that split the

land into long strips or "pens" perpendicular to an equally dimensioned frontage along the river. The wealth of bottomland enriched by silt and sediment as well as the cost of its devastation by periodic flooding were distributed proportionally across all landowners. The subsequent overlay of the Jeffersonian grid rendered inhabitants of the basin differentially susceptible to devastation by flood, as the river's contents periodically overwhelmed its banks.

In the twentieth century, development of the Mississippi watershed depended on a regime of control exercised over the river by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The military engineering of the region has attempted to arrest its fluid dynamics in a steady state intended to preserve the river's navigational potential and frontage rights. The impossibility of this control (or at least its limits in the face of enormous geological and hydrological forces) is evidenced on a regular basis as the river finds its own level, in spite of continuously constructed constraints.

Ironically, for Mathur and da Cunha the only certainty in the midst of the Mississippi's shifts rests in its continual measurement. This regime of measure is founded upon an entire body of geopolitical boundaries, state and federal legislation, property rights, insurance, and commerce which, in turn, depend on an ability to represent, figure, and draw a regionally scaled landscape process. The grim calculus of the probability—

indeed, certainty—of general destruction and devastation is evident in the notational system of five-, ten-, fifty-, hundred-, and five-hundred-year floods. These notations of a “benchmark” Mississippi form the legal, political, economic, and operational boundaries within which settlement of the region is possible. Of course, the maps and charts made to measure the river are ideological documents, loaded with assumptions and implicit trade-offs for various competing constituencies (for example, fishing versus shipping, or tourism versus agriculture) lobbying for more (or less) water, at different times, toward different ends. Mathur and da Cunha reveal the ostensibly objective engineering of the river as a subjective process of land-use policy and landscape design operating in a political context. Questions such as who is drawing the map and to what end are of no small consequence to the inhabitants of the region.

But Mathur and da Cunha do not focus on the legacies of land-use policy and cultural-historical contexts documented elsewhere. Instead, the authors dwell at length on various forms of description, whether in the realm of sociology or ecology, engineering or anthropology. In fact, their work is at its best and most useful when it deliberately conflates the contents of the various disciplines, professions, and authorities implicated in the story of the Mississippi. Here Mathur and da Cunha engage in a form of what sociologist Clifford Geertz described as “thick description”: layering multiple contradictory means of representing a given condition. By overlaying multiple means of representation in a graphically rich and imaginative fashion, *Mississippi Floods* offers a rare glimpse of the complex and contradictory understandings of contemporary landscape. Mathur and da Cunha’s “thick” description of the lower Mississippi basin is constructed from historical documents (archival photos, maps, and drawings), photo-transects (photographic panoramas overlaid on maps), and an elaborate series of extraordinary silk-screen prints.

Equally important to the success of the book is the selection of

sites through which the story of the lower Mississippi is told. Following an introduction to their working method and an exegesis on the nineteenth century representational device of the landscape panorama, Mathur and da Cunha frame their description of the lower basin through the representational device of an enormous working model of the river. Constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers outside of Jackson, Mississippi by German prisoner of war laborers, the model is an enormous concrete construction at multiple horizontal and vertical scales. Until the practical use of computer models rendered it redundant, this model was the primary analytic tool available to study the effects of proposed interventions in the river system with various quantities of water. Referred

to as Site 0, the model forms ground zero for Mathur and da Cunha’s description of the region.

Site 1, *Meanders*, documents the snake-like bending of the river south of Cairo, Illinois where the slowly moving particulate matter carried from two Canadian provinces and much of the upper Midwest begins to be deposited in an inverse proportion to the speed of its flow. As the interior curve of a bend moves slightly more slowly than its outer bank, the inner bank accrues sediment more quickly, increasing the size of the bulge. This process continues day in and day out, until the river loops so completely back upon itself that it reconnects and leaves a semicircular arc of landlocked water. This particular geohydrological phenomenon is exquisitely rendered in a silk-screen

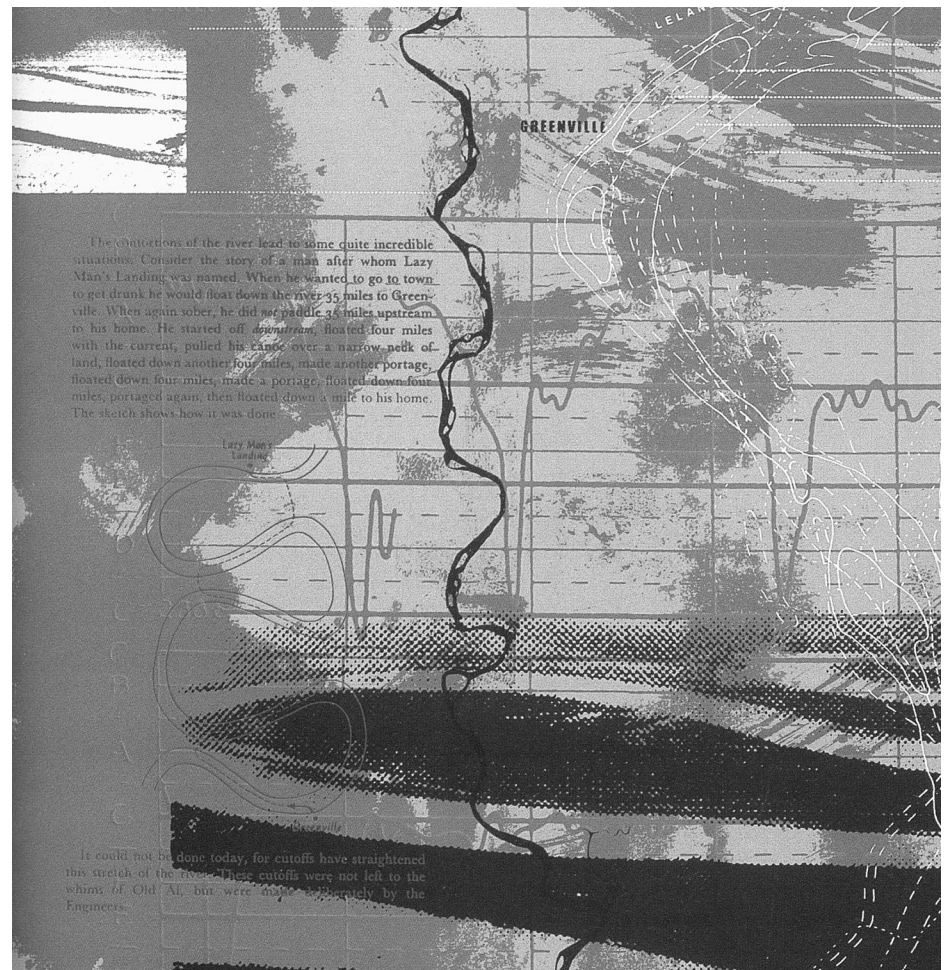


Figure 1. *Blues Meanders*, silk-screen print, Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha.

print titled “Blues Meanders” (Figure 1), alluding to the affinity between the pace of the river’s movements and the region’s indigenous music. Using this site, Mathur and da Cunha describe the Corps of Engineers’ controversial policy of short-cutting straight connections between the arcs of the meanders to shorten the distance required to navigate the river.

Site 2, *Flows*, describes the enormous engineering complex near Baton Rouge, Louisiana, designed to permanently distribute a fixed percentage of flow to the Mississippi River and to its first tributary, the Atchafalaya River (seventy percent and thirty percent, respectively). Until its volume was legislated by the U.S. Congress, the Atchafalaya periodically threatened to steal the majority of the Mississippi’s flow toward its own ends, away from the industries, shipping lanes, and tourist attractions of Louisiana that had come to depend upon the river being where it was. Site 3, *Banks*, explores the policy of levee construction in the southern portion of the basin beginning at New Orleans. Originally earthen berms only a few feet in height, the levee system has grown to more than forty feet in height at points, encasing much of the lower river in an elevated canal well above the surrounding industrial and agricultural landscapes.

Site 4, *Beds*, deals with the mouth of the river at the Gulf of Mexico and the system of self-dredging developed to facilitate commercial navigation of the river. This site reveals the complexity of operational systems at work in maintaining precise navigational positions and depths in the face of a shifting landscape. One of the more compelling stories told in this final section of the book details the U.S. Supreme Court ruling over the ownership of an otherwise unremarkable mound of mud called Stack Island. The states of Louisiana and Mississippi, sharing a common border at the centerline of the river, disputed ownership of the island as the course of the river shifted so greatly that the political boundary moved from one side of the island to the other.

That these diverse stories can be told so seamlessly in one book is both a testament to the authors’ editorial acumen and graphic virtuosity and an indicator of their understanding of landscape as a diverse form of cultural production. The synthesis of the book is enhanced greatly by the silk-screen prints that organize a range of information including reprints of newspaper articles, engineering diagrams, aerial photographs, navigational charts, blues lyrics, and any number of untold histories. These prints are at once an example and the result of a critical redefinition of landscape representation. Mathur and da Cunha’s drawings of the Mississippi are an extension and elaboration of the various means of measurement by which an otherwise immeasurable, unpredictable, and unruly force is rendered legible. Their work in photo-collages over maps and many-layered silk-screen prints give a shape and face to the otherwise illegible set of social occupations, hydrological interventions, and geological processes that form the Mississippi landscape.

Perhaps the most important contribution this book has to offer is an alternative to both the overly simplistic modernist faith in engineering solutions to complex environmental forces and the equally uncritical faith in a return to a virgin condition devoid of human settlement. Instead, *Mississippi Floods* presents a new, post-modern paradigm for contemporary landscape in which the built and natural environments, the ecological and the engineered, cultural history and human agency, are conflated with one another as they inform human interventions at the regional scale. This distinction allows landscape to be understood primarily as an operational art, rather than a pictorial one.

In this regard, *Mississippi Floods* benefits from a shared lineage with James Corner’s *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape* and offers Corner’s general theory of landscape

representation its first specific regional application. Like Corner’s *Taking Measures*, Mathur and da Cunha’s work first presented itself in the form of an eponymous traveling exhibition, funded by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and the University of Pennsylvania Research Foundation. Both draw from Ian McHarg’s work in regional landscape and environmental science using the aerial view as a form of synthetic analysis at the regional scale. Unlike many of McHarg’s students, however, Corner and Mathur (herself a former student of Corner) reject the simplistic opposition of environmental science and urbanization. Rather, their work argues for the renewal of landscape as a medium through a reification of its origins as a diverse and complex cultural form. In *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, Corner developed a new working method for the representation of landscape, using the planometric or synoptic view in aerial photographs, maps, and collage-drawings to represent the operational imperatives of the American milieu. This emphasis on the operational over the pictorial in American landscape comes from a critique of much contemporary landscape practice, and the poverty of landscape architecture narrowly defined as a kind of decorative work. Rather, Corner’s *Taking Measures* reconceived American landscape representation as a form of cultural production. In this regard, the Mississippi basin offers an extraordinary legible example of human agency in the design and engineering of an enormous landscape at the scale of the region. In the hands of Mathur and da Cunha, the specific application of Corner’s method affords more accessible reading than the method itself and will most likely draw attention to these important issues for a different, perhaps more diverse, audience.

One deficiency evident in *Mississippi Floods* is the consistently small size of key graphic components. Many of the maps, photographs, and historical materials tend to overwhelm in number rather than impress by relevance. This probably has more to do with graphic design deci-

sions (otherwise admirably accomplished by Henk van Assen of New York) about page size and number rather than the content of the work. Yet one senses that some editorial choices could have been made that would have offered fewer, more significant, and more legible evidence of this incredible story.

But while *Mississippi Floods* occasionally lacks the depth of background and context for each of its multifaceted subjects, it compensates with extensive notations, references, bibliographies, and documentary evidence. In fact, it is the book's refusal to be confined to any one of the familiar genres of landscape research that recommends it. Mathur and da Cunha consistently reiterate the renewed importance of landscape as a category of cultural production by gathering together the thick, complex, and contradictory significations present in the identity of the landscape region that is the Mississippi. This book offers new ways of reading the American landscape through an understanding of the region as a complex amalgam of environmental forces, cultural history, and continuously negotiated regimes of operational management. The research it embodies does much to reconceive landscape as relevant to questions about how and where we live.

Charles Waldheim is Chair of the Landscape Urbanism Program and Director of Graduate Studies in the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

ON THE NATURE OF THINGS:
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
by Gavin Keeney, with forewords by
John Dixon Hunt and Allen S. Weiss.
2000. Basel, Boston, Berlin:
Birkhauser. 184 pages, color and
black and white illustrations and
photographs, hardcover, \$70.00.
ISBN 3-7643-6192-1

Reviewed by Marcella Eaton

Gavin Keeney has produced in *On the Nature of Things* a descriptive account of thirteen practitioners of landscape architecture in the United States, a volume that will become an important text for those interested in the development of landscape architecture in the United States. It suggests that there has been a fundamental shift in the theoretical approach to the practice of landscape architecture and that much can be learned from this work. This expose of contemporary practice is not critical; it is simply a positive description. Keeney saves his critical interpretation for the two-part essay, "The Language of the World," in the middle of the book.

Keeney offers no introduction to *On the Nature of Things*, and John Dixon Hunt and Allan Weiss provide forewords that do little to prepare one for the writing that follows. An explanation of how practitioners were included is missing, which leads to a reading that asks the participant to blindly trust the author's intentions, which leads one to believe that soon all will be revealed. But it isn't.

Hunt suggests in his foreword, "Significance Within The Ordinary," that the book will be intellectually challenging, confronting the reader with dialogic concerns of poetry and prose, of averageness and the uncommon, and of imagery and description. Weiss in "A Landscape Manifesto" then suggests that Keeney is provoking a crisis between theory and practice. But is this what the book is about?

A quick gaze over Keeney's text promotes a sigh of relief. Finally, a survey of contemporary American practice—a valuable resource for practitioners, educators and students to understand how landscape architecture has shifted with changing world views. The range of work among the thirteen firms is diverse and includes both built and proposed schemes. Keeney introduces the designers first by describing their theoretical approach and then discusses projects in relation to how their theoretical construct influenced the design. Photographs and graphic representations illustrate the work.

The explicit nature of this type of approach—describing theoretical constructs and how they are implemented—is lacking in the literature on landscape architecture. As an example, in a discussion of Andrew Spurlock Martin Poirier, Keeney writes, "Spurlock Poirier is concerned with 'character'—qualities in and of existing places—that transcends the borrowed identities typical of classic urbanism and picturesque resort planning. Design, according to this perspective, can only reflect an inherent order and beauty" (p. 118). What Keeney seems to be doing is weaving architectural theory through the work of landscape architects to illustrate how practitioners respond to ideas about the world. For instance, following the example of Spurlock Poirier, he notes of practitioners, that "sensitive to urban context, they have collaboratively designed small-scale urban housing—an idiom often marked by neo-conservative or new urbanist fantasy versus community-based intertextuality—working with a small group of regional architects. Some of these same regionalists—valorized in Kenneth Frampton's critique of 'critical regionalism'—in the late 1980s jumped ship and formed the Congress for New Urbanism, effectively overwriting idiomatic regional design vocabularies with a more ideological anti-modern rhetoric" (p. 118). This results in a history lesson woven through theory and practice that might benefit many students of landscape architecture.

There are, however, fundamental problems with this text—as there are with many academic approaches. There is a tendency for writing on theory to become impenetrable due to use of extravagant language. Many philosophical texts suggest that an advanced university course in linguistics be required to simply get through initial chapters, but for a discipline to become “intellectually” theoretical, clarity and rigor are required. Without clarity, most practitioners and students will not bother wading through the verbiage. Without rigor, the text loses its authority as valued reflection on its subject. Not using primary sources is also problematic in *On the Nature of Things*. The benefit of peer-reviewed publications such as *Landscape Journal* is that problems of accuracy are screened out—for example, the fact that Chicago is on Lake Michigan, not Lake Superior (see p. 75). Such inaccuracies lead to deeper questions about the author’s credibility and, by inference, the scholarship of the work. This is regrettable. Otherwise, *On the Nature of Things* has much to offer.

Once it has been unearthed, the essay in the middle of the book gives the reader an insight to the author’s views. Keeney discusses issues he believes have contributed to the development of landscape architecture. In the piece titled “The Language of the World,” Keeney organizes his work through “Path One: Geometrism; Abstraction and Metaphor, Towards a Grammar of Natural Landscape, Accepting the Incommensurable, Veiled Systems, and The Open Secret; Path Two: Leaping Ahead; Outside the Paradigmatic.” He weaves the works of Artaud, Benjamin, Agamben, Wittgenstein, Kant, Leibniz, Dante, Thoreau, Emerson, Deleuze, Heidegger, Bergson, Pascal, Zizek, Cavell, Richter, the composers Bruckner and Mahler, Helene Cixous, and others, into a dense, but brief journey through influences on landscape architecture. This could be expanded into a very important text itself. As Hunt, Weiss and Keeney all suggest, landscape architecture needs more critical dialogue on both theory and practice. The essay seems to be about being free—freeing land-

scape architecture from the culture or from society’s “hang-ups” and epistemological trappings. However, because the work is presented in such an entanglement of language and philosophical rhetoric, the essence of the liberation that Keeney appears to be proposing is inaccessible to most who will read it: “De-racinating forms of knowledge liberates the profound intertextual field of signifying subjects and the animated network of subconscious forms and forces that subsidize both the natural and man-made world” (p. 88). “Landscapes of resistance are formulated, against this vertical integration of publicness, on the horizontal, syntagmatic axis of difference and signification—literally on the horizon” (p. 92–93). The language distances the reader. The language is used as an instrument of power rather than as a vehicle for sharing knowledge and ideas. This is quite unfortunate, because beneath the rhetoric, Keeney has many relevant reflections on the general state of landscape architecture.

Keeney’s book is a fine contribution to the body of written work in landscape architecture. The discipline would benefit from more texts in this subject area that attempt to explicitly and critically unveil the current relationship between theory and practice. *On the Nature of Things* would be a worthy addition to the library of all who are interested in the constant shift of practice and theory; landscape architecture must participate in the important discussion of how we shape the world. Gavin Keeney has let his voice be heard.

Marcella Eaton is Assistant Professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg.

CONSTRUCTED GROUND: THE MILLENNIUM GARDEN DESIGN COMPETITION

by Charles Waldheim. 2001. Urbana and Chicago: Illinois Press. 44 pages; illustrated, \$20.00 paperback. ISBN 0-252-07001-1

Reviewed by Alan Berger and Gale Fulton

With the publication of *Constructed Ground: The Millennium Garden Design Competition*, Charles Waldheim unpacks the baggage of a major landscape design competition in Chicago. *Constructed Ground* offers the reader generous descriptions along with a variety of drawings of the winning design. Rather than just making the book into a complex visual montage or seamless “flow” of graphics of the competitors’ works, Waldheim cleverly maintains a simple, if not modest, graphic layout and explanation of the process. Refreshingly, one finds a clear display of the competitors’ drawings along with a descriptive text written by each designer (presumably submitted with the drawings). The inclusion of narratives and drawings by each competitor gives the reader an opportunity to critique the verbal and visual languages used to represent landscape.

By publishing all the entries, Waldheim provides a rare and necessary reading of the languages used by designers to convey the value of their work. Closer readings of the competitors’ drawings, many of which are produced by nationally recognized landscape architects, reveal that the language used is sadly entombed in nostalgic and sentimental constructs of landscape ideas. This reveals a deep paradox in the words and images used by some of the competitors. For example, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates’ proposal calls for an “experience like Monet’s tunnels of flowers at Giverny,” Peter Walker and Partners’ design tries to “re-create prairie landscape,” and the Olin Partnership’s entry is “conceived as...three subsidiary gardens (representing) the natural landscape of Chicago.” These words hardly

match anyone's expectations for a "Millennium Garden," leaving one to wonder about which millennium the designers intend to celebrate. Through the language of America's so-called "stars" in landscape architecture, concepts of "nature" seem more like clichés than real attempts to deal with Modernist paradigms separating nature and culture.¹

Constructed Ground and the new garden it documents is part of Chicago's Millennium Park Project. It focuses on the reconstruction and addition of culturally significant park space to Chicago's Grant Park. According to Waldheim, Grant Park was "initially formed in the nineteenth century as artificially constructed ground reclaimed from Lake Michigan." The "contested ground" of the lakefront underwent various pressures from private industry and railroad interests to post-World War II planning for accommodating automobiles. Waldheim stresses the necessary role of civic and cultural leaders to fight to maintain the public realm during the twentieth century, as many similar spaces across the United States were lost to private interests. In the past twenty-five years, however, public "parks" lost status as vital cultural projects.

The winning entry of the design competition—*The Shoulder Garden*, by landscape architect Kathryn Gustafson, Dutch plant expert Piet Oudolf, and theatrical producer Robert Israel—aims to reinstate Grant Park as an "international caliber destination landscape . . . unlike anything built in North America to date." In considering the twenty-first century landscape garden, Gustafson's entry demonstrates an eclipse of the scenic, pastoral notion of the landscape that has dominated landscape design for the last two centuries (but is still seen in a number of entries in this book). Instead, Gustafson proposes a temporal landscape of action and performance, adaptive to unforeseeable change in a complex urban environment. The park's significance as an activated open space—not just an empty container of "green" or "beautiful" land—is enhanced by two new landmark buildings: Frank Gehry's Music

Pavilion to the north, and Renzo Piano's addition to the Art Institute of Chicago to the south.

Unlike other competition publications, Waldheim's book reveals the often unseen workings of the competition: its winners and losers. From jury selection and short-listing, to descriptions of finalist projects and the typically forgotten nonplacing projects, the book gives the reader a comprehensive analysis of eleven projects. This book is organized in a hierarchy similar to the competition: It gives prominence to the highest-placing projects. The winning project is allocated ten color pages, the two finalist projects are displayed on two black & white pages, and the eight nonplacing competitors receive one black & white page each. Subsequently, the real winners of the competition are the connoisseurs of landscape—students, clients, horticulturists, and designers—as well as the city of Chicago, whose urban landscape infrastructure has deteriorated.

Finally, *Constructed Ground* furthers the role of criticism and the discourse of landscape studies. By deconstructing the verbal and visual language of the entries, the discerning reader gains a clearer understanding of landscape architecture to speculate about the potential of the landscape medium and, it is hoped, to further its capacity as a critical art form.

Waldheim is founder and chair of the Landscape Urbanism program at the University of Illinois at Chicago, one of the first of its kind in the United States. In the context of landscape urbanism, Waldheim reminds us that landscape is the significant infrastructure that extends the cultural and physical health of cities.

Alan Berger is Assistant Professor in Landscape Architecture at the University of Colorado/Denver. In January 2003, he will be Associate Professor at Harvard University Graduate School of Design. Gale Fulton practices landscape architecture and urban design with Civitas, Inc.

Notes

1. These opposing views of nature, as mechanical and organic, have been the subjects of many scholarly investigations. For a good understanding of the varying viewpoints of this issue see the following: Merchant, Carolyn. 1989. *Ecological Revolutions*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Oelschlaeger, Max. 1991. *The Idea of Wilderness*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 98–99. McKibben, Bill. 1989. *The End of Nature*. New York: Random House, pp. 47–91. Cronon, William. Editor. 1996, 1995. *Uncommon Ground*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Worster, Donald. 1992. "Freedom and Want: The Western Paradox," in *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 79–93. Elliot, Robert. 1997. *Faking Nature: The Ethics of Environmental Restoration*. New York: Routledge, pp. 42–62. Turner, Frederick. 1991. "A New Ecological Ethics," in *Rebirth of Value*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 51–64. Also see "Valuing Nature" in Harvey, David. 1996. *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 150–175. For another mechanistic/organic world comparison see: Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simian, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

PIONEERS OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

edited by Charles A. Birnbaum and Robin Karson. 2000. New York: McGraw-Hill. xxiii + 474 pages, 450 illustrations, appendices, \$59.95 hardbound.

ISBN 0-07-134420-9

Reviewed by Richard C. Rome

Comprised of 160 bibliographical essays prepared by a wide range of authors, this encyclopedic text offers an important addition to the resources available to scholars of the American landscape. Since the work was envisioned as a comprehensive survey of noteworthy individuals with supporting documentation of their contributions to the design of the American landscape, the individual essays are intentionally concise and abbreviated. Moreover, the editors chose to keep the individual authors' writing styles and approaches to the subject matter intact. This results in a very uneven collection ranging from the bright and insightful to the mundane and ordinary. Nevertheless, the overall

contribution of the work is substantial and valuable.

Each essay begins with a short biographical sketch that seems to be a particularly unfortunate decision. Often, the work reads like a social register rather than a useful tool for landscape research. The format often results in the gist of each profiled individual's contribution being placed at the end of the individual essays, where these succinct and often critical paragraphs give this work its value. Learning of Robert Wheelwright's oh-so-common Harvard pedigree at the start of his entry seems less significant than the information delivered in the last line of the last paragraph. It is here that the reader learns of his role as a "pioneer in the now emerging field of historic landscape restoration" (p. 447).

Similarly, much greater latitude would have been appreciated in the length of entries, given the range of individuals included. A page and a half devoted to Paul Rubens Frost, whose greatest accomplishment seems to have been opening an office in Harvard Square in 1914 with "(R)elatively few projects . . . identified" (p. 130), seems excessive considering that Stanley White is allowed only a half page more in spite of his being "recognized by many as one of the most influential educators in the history of landscape architecture" (p. 447). Perhaps there is some consolation in the fact that Gary Kesler and Malcolm Cairns are able to pack so much information in such a spare and thoughtful essay on this amazing educator.

As in all compilations by different authors, the quality of the essays varies greatly. A bright and insightful portrait of J.B. Jackson by Kenneth Helphand allows the reader to see the potential in a work such as this. However, the obscure search for a thread connecting the topic to African-Americans in Lynn Miller's essay on Benjamin Banneker appears to be more of a nod to political correctness than significant scholarship. The thirty-one, mostly informative and thoughtful essays on the significant roles that women played in the profession of landscape architecture

provide a major resource for further research into related areas of the discipline. Nell Walker's brief but incisive piece on Majorie Cautley provides a great example, while Judith Tankard's presentation of Ellen Biddle Shipman's career and Kenneth Helphand's wonderfully enticing glimpse into the practice of Elizabeth Lord and Edith Schryver offer much to scholars in women's studies.

It is unfortunate that so much of the information is hidden deep within the essays and no topic index is offered to help access these vital clues to a full understanding of the "why's and wherefores" of the American designed landscape. The evolution of landscape architectural education remains hidden in the essays unless one has a companion document that lists faculty for major institutions during the period. As the editors comment in their introduction, the profession of landscape architecture is characterized by the "interesting theme" of "interconnectedness" (p. xxi). Research into this interlacing of personalities, institutions, and shared projects would be admirably served by such a topic index.

One of the great delights of a work such as this is the discovery of larger than life personalities who have animated the scene in which they practiced. Certainly, Dennis Domer's account of Alfred Caldwell's career fits into this category. Similarly, David Streatfield's portrait of Lockwood de Forest Jr. provides needed information on an important designer about whom little is known. To learn in Reuben Rainey's essay on Charles Freeman Gillette that sheer determination, great talent, and seized opportunity served him well in lieu of any professional schooling is noteworthy. Gillette completed approximately 2,500 projects during his professional career, including nationally recognized and published works. Gillette, like many of the personalities profiled, was culled from the roles of the Fellows of the American

Society of Landscape Architects, and the essays suggest many opportunities for additional research by budding scholars in both landscape architecture and related fields.

On the other hand, the ongoing legacy of the contributions of a firm as noteworthy as Hare and Hare seems woefully underrepresented by the extremely terse essay on its founders by Cydney E. Millstein. Similarly, it is curious why the essay detailing Henry Vincent Hubbard's contribution is limited to two and a half pages while almost as much space is allotted to the social and design ambitions of Robert Morris Copeland. Judicious use of limited space in a compilation is critical to how a work such as this is perceived by its readers, and some entries would have been best served if limited to a few paragraphs.

The bibliographical information provided at the end of each essay is sparse but valuable, and the list of sites associated with the personalities profiled that are still accessible to the public is commendable. The photographs, plans, and sketches are thoughtfully selected and are helpful to further the reader's understanding of the rich imagery available to students of the American landscape.

It is too harsh a criticism to say this work is a treasure-trove of trivia, social pretensions, and Harvard connections among landscape designers in America. It represents an extremely valuable collection of carefully researched and expertly edited essays that reveal the rich source of what we now experience as the American designed landscape. Authors such as Robert Grese and Dean Cardasis make this work a true resource to scholarship. Grese provides a clear understanding of Jens Jensen's contribution to the cultural landscape of North America, and Dean Cardasis is able to encapsulate the soul of James Rose for those who may not have knowledge of his pivotal role in the modern landscape movement in the United States. The value of this work lies in essays such as these—snapshots of a journey that landscape architects are still traveling—and they offer much upon which new scholars

and seasoned researchers in the field of landscape studies may ponder.

Richard C. Rome, ASLA is Director of the Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture in the School of Architecture at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee.

THE SPACES BETWEEN BUILDINGS

by Larry R. Ford. 2000. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. xii + 225 pages; photographs, bibliography, index, \$25.95 paperback. (Published in cooperation with the Center for American Places, Santa Fe, NM. Center Books on Space, Place & Time, George Thompson, Series Founder & Director.) ISBN 0-8018-6331-7

UNCOMMON GROUND: ARCHITECTURE, TECHNOLOGY, AND TOPOGRAPHY

by David Leatherbarrow. 2000. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. xi + 297 pages; photographs, plans, sections, notes, index., \$37.95 clothbound. ISBN0-262-12230-8

Reviewed by Iain Robertson

The two books reviewed here address the same broad topic: the relationships between buildings and their surrounding spaces, sites, or “topography.” This common thematic ground suggests that the books should share a common spatial language and that useful comparisons might be drawn between them. This, however is rarely, if ever, the case as the authors approach the study of the space around and between buildings from radically different perspectives.

Larry Ford’s book, *The Spaces Between Buildings*, is the lively work of a geographer who has spent years exploring cities. His opening line attests to his fascination with urban spaces: “For as long as I can remember, I have been an avid ogler of the urban scene.” (p. xi) His explorations range across a broad spectrum, from the form and character of building skins to the effects of zoning and building codes on urban de-

sign. There is similar breadth to the temporal sweep of his work, which focuses primarily on contemporary American cities but is comfortable reaching back to nineteenth century or earlier antecedents to explain contemporary urban forms and patterns.

By contrast, David Leatherbarrow’s book, *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology, and Topography*, is the exacting work of an academic architectural critic. His text is more abstract, his methods more theoretical, and his scope more focused. Leatherbarrow conducts a painstaking analysis of selected works of three mid twentieth century architects, Richard Neutra, Antonin Raymond and Aris Konstantinidis. He uses this analysis to examine the relationships between the architectural design approaches of, and technology incorporated into, Modern Period buildings and their sites, or in his term, “topography.”

As a result of their differences, these two books may be thought of as bookends that contain, between the geographer’s and architect’s perspectives, the stuff of much of the professional practice of landscape architecture and urban design. Despite their shared interest in space around and between buildings, the task of drawing comparisons between the two works remains difficult if not impossible.

Ford is immediately engaging. He invites us to explore city spaces with someone who clearly possesses a deep interest in their health and vitality both as physical entities and as social communities. His text is lively and provocative and he possesses the happy habit of describing, in simple terms, issues and situations familiar to anyone concerned with urban space design. For example: “You cannot window-shop at a bank lobby.” It is as though someone had—finally—got around to recording the daily observations each of us as a designer makes about our urban existence. Again and again, one finds oneself saying, “Yes, I’ve noticed that,” or

“Yes, that’s exactly what I thought, too.”

The Spaces Between Buildings contains three essays: “Buildings and the Spaces Around Them,” “Lawns, Trees, and Gardens in the City,” and “Places for Driving, Strolling, and Parking.” These address spatial issues at progressively larger scales. As the author says: “The intent is to start at the skin of buildings . . . and to work outward through front steps, lawns, and gardens, to the sidewalk and the street” (p. 5). The essays are contained within two short, but eloquent, chapters: “Introduction: The Nooks and Crannies of Everyday Life,” and “Conclusion: City Space and Human Nature.” Each essay is augmented by a photo “gallery” that suggests that there isn’t an alley, street or boulevard in North America that Ford hasn’t poked his head into or strolled inquisitively. But the galleries also give rise to one problem with this charming book: the photographs so aptly illuminate the text that they should have been interspersed among the essays, not shepherded into separate zones—a planning practice the author himself deprecates, albeit at a larger scale. But I quibble; let us return to the substance of the text: What does Ford see and think in his peripatetic peregrinations?

The contribution of this book is not that it expounds startling new theories or lays bare hitherto unnoticed facts. Rather, it addresses and integrates an enormous range of issues of contemporary urban form that lie under our noses but to which, all too often, we find it beneath our dignity to pay attention. Ford pays attention. In one cogent comment after another, he reminds us of the importance of examining and thinking about our daily living and working environments. Speaking, for example, of a planned unit development with “magnificent Georgian style doorways,” Ford notes that these front doors are never used, as they face busy streets with no sidewalks while parking is located in the rear for easy access to back doors. From this he draws the ineluctable design conclusion: “The front doors were now the back doors, yet form did not

follow function. The confusion was jarring, and the design was insincere” (p. 63).

There is no better way to explicate the range and tenor of this book than to offer a few quotes from each essay. Here are Ford’s observations on porches and contemporary garage doors:

Front porches figure large in history and literature as an exceptionally important type of setting for a variety of social activities. . . . In recent years, the porch has become an important nostalgic icon for those advocating neotraditional design. It can add not only a transitional grace but also visual complexity to the front of a building, with a collage of romantic historical references. (p. 42)

In most neighborhoods, the ritual of pedestrians stopping to chat in front of a neighbor’s porch or stoop has been replaced by electronic garage door openers, which allow drivers to avoid ever setting foot in front of their houses. If anyone has time to while away the hours, they do so in back, away from the impersonal street. The backyard has developed to accommodate much of the activity that once took place in front of houses. (p. 60)

The delight is in the way Ford derives conclusions about human social and cultural behavior from his analysis of the forms of space and physical objects or environments. With respect to vegetation in cities, Ford observes that most towns and cities got by with little or no vegetation within city walls for thousands of years, but:

In late 20th century North America, greenery has largely won the day. . . . Most Americans feel that if a space is not being used for parking then it should be green. (p. 85).

Having established that huge amounts of planned and unplanned open space now exist in contemporary American cities, Ford makes a comment that has great implications for “ecological design”:

It remains to be seen, however, if Americans will desire as much space between buildings when it is

designed to be wild instead of tame. (p. 107)

In his third essay, Ford compares contemporary residential streets with alleys. Of the former he says:

When 60 to 80% of a residential façade consists of garage doors, it is difficult to design a picturesque house with what is left. In addition, when the massive garage doors are open, the house looks a bit like an airplane hangar. (p. 145)

In contrast to the inhospitable nature of residential streets he waxes eloquent about the visual delights of alleys:

While alleys remain ideal locations for utility poles, trash dumpsters, marginal belongings that are not quite ready for Goodwill, and a variety of junk, they can also offer quiet retreats and a cozy scale. American alleys vary tremendously in their usage and degree of upkeep. (p. 150)

Not content merely to describe the physical context, he draws the behavioral conclusion that must surely gain the concurrence of the “inner child” in each of us:

Children need messy places to play and, despite their reputations, alleys can be just the thing. (p. 151)

Ford repeatedly makes cogent observations that are of practical use to students and practitioners of landscape architecture and urban design. This, however, is not the case with David Leatherbarrow’s work, which is a text whose density constantly flirts with opacity and thus offers little to anyone other than the academically erudite.

Uncommon Ground comprises seven chapters: Introduction: Architecture and its Horizons; Building Levels; Back to Front, or About Face; The Topographical Horizon or Dwelling Equipment; In and Outside of Architecture; The Play of Articulation; and Conclusion. These titles allude to the broad spatial issues addressed in the book, which include:

the enclosing functions of walls, platforms, and roofs; the flow of space from outside to inside buildings; the modification of climatic conditions by building form; and the interaction of built forms with place.

Despite the importance of these topics, Leatherbarrow’s work presents two hurdles for those wishing to understand how buildings and sites interact, or, specifically, how the designs of several modernist buildings of three mid-twentieth century architects relate to their sites and surrounding spaces. The first hurdle faced by site planners, landscape architects and urban designers is that Leatherbarrow no sooner steps outside the buildings he is describing than he turns around to face them, giving their sites little more than a passing nod of acknowledgement. Inside and out, it is all about architecture.

Secondly, although Leatherbarrow explores topics of importance to site planning—such as how ground plane manipulations were used in these buildings to create platforms for building footprints and the flow of space, and light, into and through buildings—he does so by conflating the myriad characteristics and features of every building site with abstractions that substitute for that reality. Sites become “topography” and contexts “horizons,” which, as he points out, can never be reached.

Further, Leatherbarrow practices a form of oratory that makes comprehension problematic. For example, here he is discussing the site of a weekend house, by the Greek architect Konstantinidis, that is built on a promontory overlooking the sea:

These recesses or lacunae in the land are not void of content or empty of substance but full of its potential or promise; like an ‘empty’ vessel they contain an inexhaustible depth that possesses, or simply is, the capacity to sustain everything that comes into appearance, no matter how grand or modest. The horizon bends, turns, or twists in on itself, plying into its terraces the means of their renewal. Implicated in the gold line that licks the floor of the house and creeps up its walls is a constellation

of powers that is inversely as effective as it is conspicuous. (pp. 204–5)

Despite, or perhaps because of, its poetic language, this work fails to engage with the gritty, or earthy, reality of sites and places and thus offers little traction to those who wish to understand the interaction of space and building.

I noted earlier that these two works may be conceived of as book-ends, containing between them much of the scope of landscape architecture and urban design practice. This represents the strength as well as the weakness of landscape architecture, which may borrow to its advantage from allied professions but all too often fails to articulate its own unique views on these topics. These two works, each in its own way, ought to encourage landscape architects to develop and offer their views on space, buildings and the human and natural condition in which they reside.

Iain Robertson is professor and chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington in Seattle.

SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE
CONSTRUCTION: A GUIDE TO
GREEN BUILDING OUTDOORS
by J. William Thompson and Kim
Sorvig, Washington, D. C.: Island
Press, 2000. xxi + 348 pages, appen-
dices, notes, references, index,
\$45.00 paperback.
ISBN 1-55963-646-7

Reviewed by Margaret Livingston

This book, aimed at a variety of landscape professions, effectively presents the philosophy, terminology, and opportunities associated with designing for and implementing sustainability in landscapes. One of the major strengths of this book is the application-oriented approach, providing examples of sustainability in existing projects. Construction details of various practices related to this concept and extensive references at the end of each text section are extremely useful for various professionals focusing on sustain-

able landscapes. Readers are introduced to the term “sustainability” and some of the challenges and successes associated with its implementation in the introduction and following section. The remaining body of the work addresses ten ecological principles related to sustainability and includes design and construction techniques for accomplishing each principle.

The introduction delves into the use of the word sustainability, an often misunderstood term. A simple definition is presented, “meeting the needs of today’s population without diminishing the ability of future populations to meet their needs” (p. 2). The authors use this section to effectively introduce this definition and many other terms and concepts relating to the idea of sustainable landscapes. Readers are engaged to evaluate how sustainable their current practices are and encouraged to better approach this sometimes lofty goal. The authors also provide a useful “road map” to the organization of the book in this section.

A section dealing with *successes and challenges* establishes a groundwork for sustainable landscapes by introducing additional concepts related to sustainability and landscape ecology such as the need to balance human influence and ecosystem function. In particular, they identify projects that demonstrate aesthetic, naturalistic landscapes that appear to effectively support an existing ecosystem. They also point out the need for involving various professions in the design of these complex systems, a key principle that is reiterated throughout.

The first principle, *keeping healthy sites healthy*, is presented in the next section. Figures of various sites are provided and their sustainability or in some cases, unsustainability, is discussed. The authors also address problems associated with categorization of sites as healthy based on appearance alone. Additional ecological issues, such as succession and disturbances, are presented. How-

ever, the authors do not attempt to elaborate here, and this section resembles more of a primer, with examples for conceptual clarification. Techniques related to site analysis are presented, including GPS, ground surveys, limiting site disturbance, and protection of native plants and soils. The authors emphasize ecological adaptations that have evolved within natural ecosystems and the need to maintain such systems to foster sustainability.

The next section, addressing the principle, *healing injured sites*, begins with a general discussion of restoration or rehabilitation of a disturbed site and continues with descriptions of existing projects that demonstrate this principle. Arguments in favor of community involvement and strategies for site restoration are convincing. Recycling of materials and sites is also emphasized in this section; rehabilitating landfills, recycling soils, composting, and phytomediation are some of the topics described.

The third principle, *favor flexible, living materials*, stresses the importance of adaptable, biodegradable, living elements for structural support. Ecoroofs, bank stabilization with plants, and creating healthy environments for plants in small spaces are some of the topics considered. However, more discussion of the climates or ecological sites where these techniques are most appropriate would be helpful to the novice reader. For example, use of pole plantings of tree and shrub species in arid environments is typically practiced only in riparian areas that have a shallow water table to support such cuttings.

The next principle, *respect the waters of life*, shifts the focus from issues of soil and plants to water. Sensitive wetlands and river systems are emphasized in this section. The protection of wetlands, the erosion prevention and filtration role of plants in relation to streams, and reconstruction of wetlands are addressed. Other topics include the erosive effects of human development, stormwater systems, and effective use of water in landscapes.

Principles five, *pave less*, and six,

consider origin and fate of materials, concentrate on reducing the use of abiotic materials in landscapes. Techniques for reducing paving and water runoff in a design, developing traffic calming structures, and re-using materials from sites are some of the topics highlighted. The description of toxic materials and the potential for recycling of landscape materials described in this section is a valuable reference for comparing specific materials. The authors also effectively illustrate how old tires can be utilized in the landscape—always an aesthetic challenge.

Principle seven, *know the costs of energy over time*, relates to the various input energy costs of landscapes, another very timely topic. How often do we, as professionals, accurately calculate initial and long-term energy costs of a project? Categorization of types of energy used in construction are presented, providing readers with a system for organizing their energy use within projects. This section will stimulate readers to reconsider how energy is used to produce and maintain their projects. References for reducing energy costs through design of the landscape are provided at the end of the section.

The following two principles converge on the idea that “less is more.” Principle eight, *celebrate light, respect darkness*, focuses on the efficient use of lighting in landscapes. Various products are highlighted that produce effects similar to traditional lighting with less energy use. Topics such as low-voltage, fiber-optic, and solar lighting are also discussed. Principle nine, *quietly defend silence*, focuses on the reduction of noise in the landscape. The authors argue the ineffectiveness of most noise “barriers,” an argument strongly supported by this reviewer. Reducing noise is creatively addressed using a more psychological approach; blocking visibility of noise-producing areas and masking noise with more desirable sounds.

Principle ten, *maintain to sustain*, focuses on long-term sustainability of a landscape through maintenance. This principle emphasizes the importance of recognizing the inherent changes in landscapes over time, and the need to plan for inputs such as water, insecticides, and fertilizers.

Conclusions are presented in the final section as seven themes and strategies derived from concepts presented in the previous segments. These themes include community participation, integrating the built and natural elements, and envisioning new ways to achieve sustainability. The authors discuss strategies for encouraging sustainability in related professions, through informal and formal teaching, and illustrating public examples of sustainability. The value of providing more strategies of and techniques for practicing sustainability is recognized—thereby furthering the field through learning from the successes and failures of our examples. The authors encourage readers to use the book as a planning tool as well as a resource book for sustainability in the landscapes they restore, rehabilitate, and create.

Margaret Livingston is Assistant Professor in the School of Landscape Architecture at the University of Arizona.