

of settlement in North America have been designed by landscape architects than any other professionals. However, an accusation (sometimes accurate) has persisted that landscape architect–directed urban design favors low densities, exhibits little formal sensibility, and contains too much open space—in other words, it produces sub- or non-urban environments.

Proponents of landscape urbanism, such as James Corner, challenge such a cliché, instead insisting that the conception of the solid, “man-made” city of historic imagination perpetuates the no longer pertinent view that nature and human artifice are opposites. Landscape urbanism projects purport to overcome this opposition, holding neither a narrow ecological agenda nor mainstream (read architectural) city-making techniques as primary. Valuable urban design, landscape urbanists insist, is to be found at the intersection of ecology, engineering, design, careful programming, and social policy. Largely a set of values rather than a mature practice to date, landscape urbanism may prove its utility as endeavors such as the Fresh Kills landfill reuse project on Staten Island proceed.

In one regard the movement may be a reaction to the Nolli map view of urbanism, the binary conception of cities as made up of buildings and the absence of buildings, where the white of the map—the voids—is the result of built form, the black of the map. Maybe this was a useful interpretation of the preindustrial city—of the Italian piazza as space carved out of the solidity of built fabric. Outside the preindustrial walled city were certainly landscapes and undesignated space, but within the city, space resulted from built form. But any careful perusal of a preindustrial-era city map proves this assertion false: surely the “white” of the Nolli plan comes in many hues and nuances of meaning. Besides, the landscape urbanist asks, isn’t the landscape the glue that now holds the contemporary, low-density, sprawling metropolis together?

The radicalism inherent in thinking of the landscape as determining or organizing urban patterns, a radicalism in which Nolli’s white, today colored green, becomes the central component of urban design, brings us at last to the territory of:

Urban Design as Visionary Urbanism

I have saved, nearly for the end, this long-standing expectation of urban design: that its practitioners—or rather, in this instance, its