For many, across a range of disciplines, landscape has become both the lens through which the contemporary city is represented and the medium through which it is constructed.

-Charles Waldheim

“In 2008…for the first time in history, more than half [the world’s] human population … will be living in urban centers.”¹ How we design and make cities is increasingly a central concern for the design professions. Understanding how project design influences and is influenced by urban processes and systems is a critical skill. And the design of urban places that improve the environment and ecology of cities is the future of the field.

Landscape urbanism balances the cultural need for structured places with the reality of change over time. Urban design traditionally uses the physical form of successful urban places as a guide to creating new places. Landscape architecture, founded in ecological process, sees form as “merely a provisional state of matter, on its way to becoming something else.”² Landscape urbanism combines these two approaches: landscape architecture’s understanding of the role of succession, erosion, deposition, and ecology as urban processes, and urban design’s understanding of the need for tangible places.

Landscape urbanism incorporates urban ecologies and urban habitat creation; stormwater capturing, filtering, and groundwater recharge; “closed-loop” designs, where waste from one system (trash, sewer) becomes a material resource for another system; and multi-functional design, where a place can be e.g. both a courtyard and a stormwater detention basin. These designs can contribute to improved energy efficiency, lower material resource use, and improved air and water quality, as well as higher returns on investments for developers. Obviously, such developments require sophisticated understanding of natural and urban processes, as well as interdisciplinary and collaborative design teams.

Format:
This seminar examines the core writings, projects, and design methods of landscape-based urban design, from the early modern to contemporary periods. Class meets twice a week; classes are seminar format (lecture and discussion), examining a different site of contemporary urban invention, site resource, or design strategy each week. Students are responsible for weekly readings, discussion participation, four graphic research and design projects, and a final design and presentation.

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