Cities and Nature
Historic Cities and Nature

• Two important senses in which cities interact with ‘nature’:
  • Nature as metabolism
  • Nature as construct
Nature as Metabolism

• Cities consume food, water, energy, resources, fresh air, land
• Cities produce sewage, garbage, smoke, waste, recyclables, heat
• Cities are metabolically dependent on the environment
• Cities depend upon ‘nature’ for subsistence
Barles on Paris

• As Paris grows in the C19th, its food supply must expand
• Population of Paris grows 500%+ between 1801 and 1914
• Paris becomes a place where nutrients (Nitrogen) get concentrated to feed people and animals, and volume greatly expands
• The urban diet, food regime, changes over time
• Waste nutrients, in excrement and sewage recycled back to farmers, but also into the Seine
• Seine becomes polluted, eutrophicates
Nature as Construct

• All ideas are human constructs, the idea of nature is no exception
• Nature is cultural and symbolic
The Worship of Wilderness

• Transcendentalists argued that nature was divine, contact with it ennobling

• US politicians set aside the first wilderness national parks as the US urbanized
  • Yosemite
Marketing Nature

• If ‘Nature’ is sacred and a desirable alternative to all that is bad in modern life
• Use nature to sell things, to sanitise or ‘greenwash’ unpleasant activities
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Washington Park, Albany NY

• Park re-used the existing concept of the public park
• Transcendentalist idea of the transforming power of contact with ‘nature’
• A large public park, professionally landscaped to construct a ‘nature’ themed public space
• Park bans subsistence uses of its ‘nature’
• Park intended to buttress the social order of Albany, combat disorder
Hamilton Farmer’s Market

• Created in 1830s to supply food to the city, farmers bring produce into town
• Part of the machinery of the city’s subsistence, metabolism
Hamilton Farmer’s Market

• Still very useful in 1940s but:
• Food retailing industrialising, shifting to supermarkets
• The market conflicts with automobile-dependent modernity
• Late 1959-61 market shifted to a new parking garage
• End of 1970s shifted to the Eaton Centre
Figure 2: The market in the 1940s, showing the parking sheds, and trucks protruding onto York Street in the
Hamilton Farmer’s Market

• Late 1959-61 market shifted to a new parking garage
• End of 1970s shifted to the Eaton Centre
Figure 3: The interim market in November 1959. Running horizontally across the middle of the photo is Macnab Street.
Figure 4: Another view of the interim market in November 1959, looking north-west on York Street. The imposing
Figure 5: The Market Square Carpark, shown shortly after its completion. York Street is in the foreground, while Macnab Street is partially visible to the left.
Figure 6: Market stalls in the new car park facility in July 1961.
Hamilton Farmer’s Market

• Modernity brings metabolic changes to the way the city is fed
• From small independent farmers selling produce direct to consumers
• Through a 3-times-a-week street market
• To agribusiness supplying food processors and supermarkets
• Modernity brings symbolic changes to urban traffic, aesthetics
• Need to redesign the city to serve the motorist
Hamilton Farmer’s Market

• Also a gendered process
• In 1950s Hamilton, who symbolically shops for fruits and vegetables? Who is the symbolic motorist?
Bloor Viaduct

• Viaduct is a modernist symbol, an engineering structure crossing a major valley, heavily photographed, iconic, loaded with symbolism
• But it was also part of the metabolic reordering of the city
• Relocated water lines, transit lines, urban development, reconfigured urban and suburban spaces
• Helps Scarborough, East York develop as a suburbs, helps create ‘The Danforth’
Cities and Nature

• Relationship is a complex mix of metabolism and cultural construct
• Subsistence activities (farmers markets, firewood collecting) that conflict with the symbolic ideals of city parks and efficient motor traffic flow.
• Present-day farmers market shopping in Toronto: party subsistent, but largely about the tastebuds and cultural needs of reasonably well-to-do shoppers.