An aerial photograph of a landscape, possibly a wetland or coastal area, with various colored lines and red dots overlaid. The lines are in shades of purple, blue, green, and red, and the dots are red. The background is a dark, textured aerial view of the terrain.

Kathryn Moore

A New Look at Landscape

Landscape can be described in many ways, for example, its ecological diversity, botanical or cultural significance. But it is always more than its constituent parts. For future challenges we need to formulate a new philosophy of landscape that considers identity at its core.



We no longer fully recognise the pivotal role that landscape plays in shaping identity, culture, self-confidence and worth in everyday life. Detached from the fabric of our lives, from our experience, the stories and myths, memories and celebrations that make up a sense of place, it is taken for granted, taken as read. Identity can look after itself. Its potency, complexity and value are therefore all too often overlooked within the development process. Objectified, we think of it as something out there, beyond the city, green, blue, or grey, a place to pass through, to visit and admire provided it's pretty enough. But ultimately, it's up for grabs, there to be used or abused, man-handled or bulldozed.

The groundswell of criticism against this cultural vandalism has been evident for a considerable time now. Ian Nairn's campaign for example "to convince the public – as well as the planners – of the full horror of what is happening in England today", articulated in *Your England Revisited*, and Nan Fairbrother's *New Lives, New Landscapes*, in which she presents "plans to halt haphazard and thoughtless modern development" were significant in drawing attention to the crisis of what seemed like the uncontrollable despoliation of urban and rural England. They were asking us to observe what was happening. Look and understand, make critical, informed judgements about our surroundings.

In their singular and some might say, idiosyncratic ways, critics such as Denis Cosgrove, Simon Schama, Jonathan Meades and Paul

HS2LV is a proposal to transform the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail link, the UK's largest infrastructure project for generations, from a linear engineering scheme into an iconic landscape vision that would be a catalyst for wider social and economic transformation.

Shepherd disclose the rich cultural and social significance of landscape. In *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* Cosgrove, writing in response to the “profound collapse” in the 1970s and 1980s “disciplinary coherence, scientific method and verification, objectivity and the politics of knowledge”, interprets the symbolic, social and economic ideas evident in maps and paintings, formulating what he calls the “landscape idea”. Primarily concerned with the expression of politics, economics and power in landscape imagery, he admits in the introductory chapter to the later edition that he never seriously grapples with the aesthetic and emotional qualities of landscape.

A new role for philosophy

Landscape can be described in many ways, for example, its ecological diversity, botanical or cultural significance, its history and traditions, through its evolution, spatial structure, economic value as well as the countless narratives describing the way it impacts on us and the aspirations we have for its future. This is the idea of landscape, that is to say the relationship we, as communities, individuals and nations have with the landscape in response to its materiality. It is not just an abstract, academic concept. It is not simply about technical details. It is the whole package. This holistic view is in stark contrast to the habit we have fallen into of compulsively evaluating its constituent parts.

To understand materiality in this way changes everything. The relationship we have with a place, inevitably influenced by knowledge, mood

and context, locates us, not as cool observers of a world “out there”, but as an indispensable part of that world. We are not just in close relationship with the landscape, but part of it. It is as impossible to separate or detach ourselves from it as the air we breathe. This rids us irrevocably of the object/subject dichotomy. We no longer need to reconcile the irreconcilable.

From this perspective, landscape is not only concerned with the countryside or matters of heritage, it is not just a physical entity. It is our values and memories, the experience we have of place, our culture and identity. This is altogether a more powerful, evocative idea. Landscape, what we see and experience around us, from the towns and cities to the most remote corners of the world, reflects our principals and ambitions and the expression of these aspirations in form, shape the quality of this experience. This compelling new idea of landscape is what is opening up debate, encouraging different ways to articulate the social, cultural and physical context of our lives.

Pragmatism in practice

My essay *Design: Philosophy and Theory into Practice* explores the implications of breaking down traditional conceptual and institutional silos, examines how we can operate and conceptualise ideas without relying on the notion of a sensory interface and looks at the possible outcomes for theory and practice when we abandon these resistant, arcane, philosophical constructs. Talking about landscape in this holistic way, about the idea of landscape, is





The proposal asks how it might be possible to integrate the stations so much into Birmingham's city regions fabric that they become almost invisible, major anchors for major investment, led by the public realm strategy.



establishing it at the forefront of development and as the context within which the development processes take place.

Given the opportunity for a vastly expanded field of practice, encompassing policy, advocacy and planning, it is clear that by adopting a genuinely holistic vision of the landscape, we can avoid the splintering of the environment into components vying for control. Helping to unite, rather than divide, cutting across disciplines and hierarchies, the argument is proving very persuasive. Of course, it's never quite that simple, that straightforward. Concepts carefully knitted together, can be painstakingly even innocently unpicked by those not familiar with the ideas or ambition of the work. If we want to move beyond existing traditions, we need to change views, change minds, change the way we talk about the world, expanding our ideas, developing a better descriptive vocabulary to help us and others see things from a different perspective. The role of language, advocacy, patience and determination in all of this is as demanding as it is vital. It requires strong leadership and support.

This new definition of landscape, central to the European Landscape Convention, underpins a number of projects that are generating considerable interest globally, including the proposal for the International Landscape Convention (ILC) from the International Federation of Landscape Architect's (IFLA), as well as HS2LV (see below) and Big Skies Big Thinking (BSBT) in Thurrock, both in the United Kingdom.

A more expansive definition and way of talking about the landscape, making it tangible

and resilient in the face of development pressures, is crucial in meeting the major global challenges created by industrialization, demographic shifts, climate change, deforestation, the depletion of natural resources and a host of issues relating to the quality of life and other aspects of land use development. These challenges, like financial infrastructures, do not respect territorial boundaries. The proposal also responds to an urgent need to provide strategic design leadership at a regional, national and international level. With a new strategic vision, we can bring together many organisations each with their own interest in the landscape and very different agendas.

Iconic landscape vision as catalyst

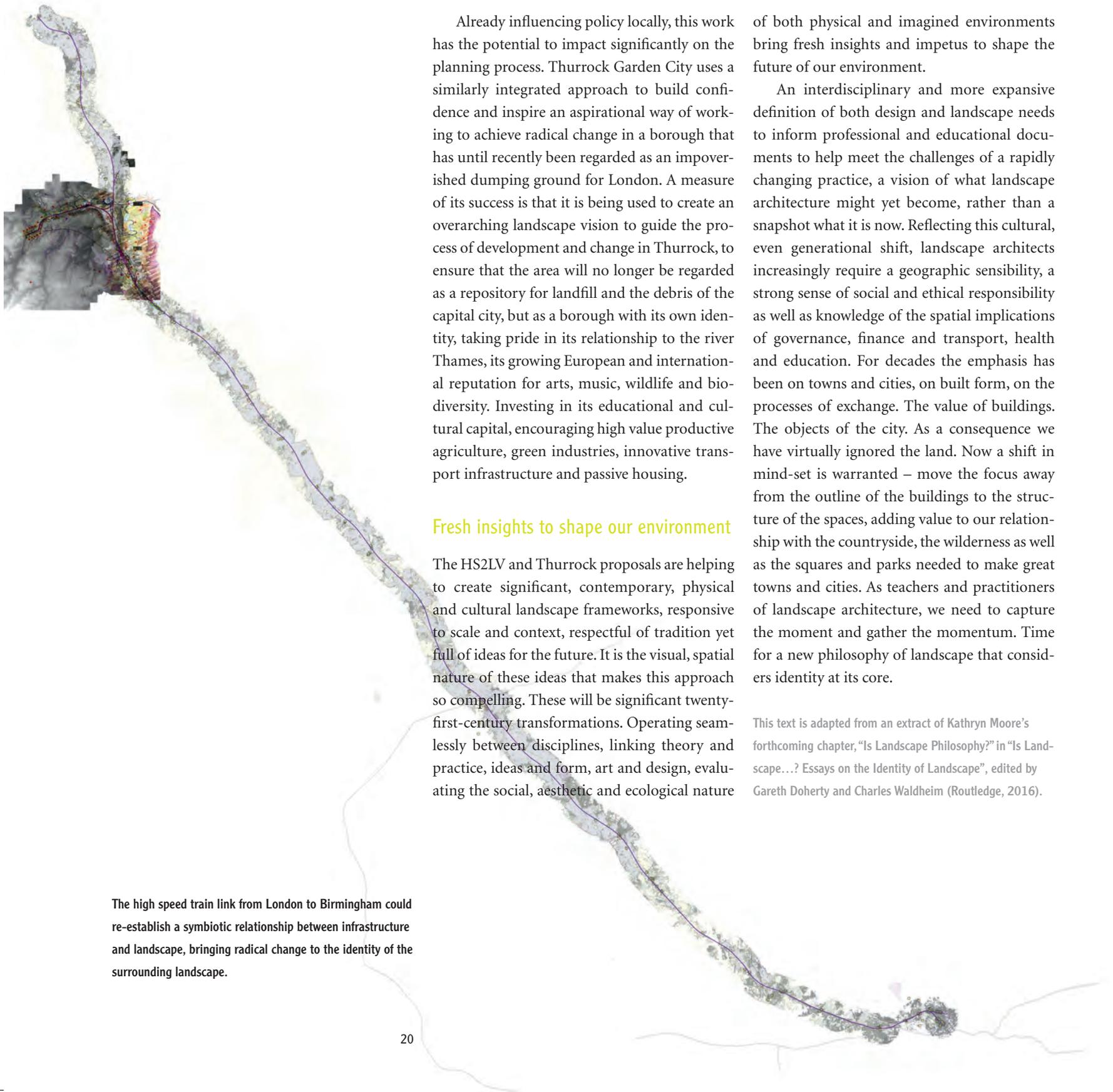
Evidence of this can be seen in initiatives such as HS2LV, a proposal to transform the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail link, the UK's largest infrastructure project for generations, from a linear engineering scheme into an iconic landscape vision that would be a catalyst for wider social and economic transformation. Representing a unique opportunity to create an enduring legacy by placing the landscape at the core of the project, it has been described by Andrew Grant of Grant Associates as "continuing the spirit of all Britain's great landscape evolutions, seizing an opportunity to rediscover and celebrate the connection between communities and the countryside."

Working with the landscape as the context within which development takes place is an effective way to increase environmental quality.

Conserving and highlighting the richness of Thurrock's landscape, improving degraded and derelict land and avoiding suburban spread, it will provide a mix of affordable social housing, accommodation for large families and professionals, a graduated range of densities and visual, physical connections with the water to re-establish a symbiotic relationship between local communities, the river and the landscape.

A pilot for the future, the study aims to put the city of Birmingham and beyond at the forefront of sustainable spatial development, conservation and urban regeneration, cementing its reputation as a leading global destination for business, tourism and education. It is a real opportunity to create an enduring legacy for the region and the UK as a whole. It could mean the re-imagining of an immense valley system, largely unloved and unnoticed, as the productive and sustainable heart of the region. By adopting an inclusive approach to the overall planning of HS2, it is possible to engage communities in the project, promoting social cohesion and economic development incorporating bio-diversity, culture, ecology, spatial quality and identity. Since large parts of the area are blighted by 20th century infrastructure, it is hugely important to drive home the message that HS2 will not necessarily be another blot on the landscape – if we learn some hard lessons from history, after all we do have over 200 years of industrial despoliation to put right, HS2LV could re-establish a symbiotic relationship between the city and its landscape bringing radical change to the identity of the area.

The stations in Birmingham should be used in a positive, progressive way to ensure they contribute significantly to the quality of life. Furthermore they need to shape the quality of the experience people have of the city and region.



Already influencing policy locally, this work has the potential to impact significantly on the planning process. Thurrock Garden City uses a similarly integrated approach to build confidence and inspire an aspirational way of working to achieve radical change in a borough that has until recently been regarded as an impoverished dumping ground for London. A measure of its success is that it is being used to create an overarching landscape vision to guide the process of development and change in Thurrock, to ensure that the area will no longer be regarded as a repository for landfill and the debris of the capital city, but as a borough with its own identity, taking pride in its relationship to the river Thames, its growing European and international reputation for arts, music, wildlife and biodiversity. Investing in its educational and cultural capital, encouraging high value productive agriculture, green industries, innovative transport infrastructure and passive housing.

Fresh insights to shape our environment

The HS2LV and Thurrock proposals are helping to create significant, contemporary, physical and cultural landscape frameworks, responsive to scale and context, respectful of tradition yet full of ideas for the future. It is the visual, spatial nature of these ideas that makes this approach so compelling. These will be significant twenty-first-century transformations. Operating seamlessly between disciplines, linking theory and practice, ideas and form, art and design, evaluating the social, aesthetic and ecological nature

of both physical and imagined environments bring fresh insights and impetus to shape the future of our environment.

An interdisciplinary and more expansive definition of both design and landscape needs to inform professional and educational documents to help meet the challenges of a rapidly changing practice, a vision of what landscape architecture might yet become, rather than a snapshot what it is now. Reflecting this cultural, even generational shift, landscape architects increasingly require a geographic sensibility, a strong sense of social and ethical responsibility as well as knowledge of the spatial implications of governance, finance and transport, health and education. For decades the emphasis has been on towns and cities, on built form, on the processes of exchange. The value of buildings. The objects of the city. As a consequence we have virtually ignored the land. Now a shift in mind-set is warranted – move the focus away from the outline of the buildings to the structure of the spaces, adding value to our relationship with the countryside, the wilderness as well as the squares and parks needed to make great towns and cities. As teachers and practitioners of landscape architecture, we need to capture the moment and gather the momentum. Time for a new philosophy of landscape that considers identity at its core.

This text is adapted from an extract of Kathryn Moore's forthcoming chapter, "Is Landscape Philosophy?" in "Is Landscape...? Essays on the Identity of Landscape", edited by Gareth Doherty and Charles Waldheim (Routledge, 2016).

The high speed train link from London to Birmingham could re-establish a symbiotic relationship between infrastructure and landscape, bringing radical change to the identity of the surrounding landscape.



“Big Skies Big Thinking” is a new water, land, development and transport strategy for Thurrock 2015-2040. The holistic, integrated approach calls for a new kind of urban living. It connects housing, transport, planning and landscape and underpins a potential Thurrock Garden City proposal.