FROM ASPHALT TO FIELD -
PARKING LOTS AS TRANSITIONAL URBAN LANDSCAPES

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1   ABSTRACT

It is time to reconsider the amount of impervious surface that covers so much of our country and come up with a plant-forward alternative. Much attention has already been devoted toward questioning the amount of area given to cars. Equal thought should be given to the empty lots that dot the urban fabric, those oceans of paving that surround big-box retail developments and sports complexes and are only full a handful of days out of the year. Landscape Architects have the skills, and the creativity, to turn these surface lots from locations back into places that can benefit both city residents and the urban environment. What critical thought and scholarly writing exists on the topic of parking lot design is largely focused on functionality and efficiency. How to move the most cars in and out of the lot in the quickest and safest manner possible. Very little consideration has been given to the aesthetic or environmental implications of parking lot design. Through the study of the history of parking lots in the United States and a critique of today's current "green" parking lots design strategies, this paper aims to begin a conversation, and transform the discussion, of what parking lots could contribute to the urban landscape. Why keep to the accepted formula of aisles, parking bays and medians. Why stop there? Why can't parking lots be dynamic parts of the urban fabric - active fields where the median and the bays become one continuous planted whole?   These fields will soften the site and decrease the heat island effect during slow retail months and can be mowed down during periods of high traffic. Let the choreography of the planting reflect the choreography of our activities as consumers. The field to fallow ratio illustrates the temporal - planted in the off-season, more parking available during holidays or sports seasons. The landscape becomes the framework for the program, turning a location back into a place while addressing the variabilities of its users and imperviousness in the city fabric.

1.1   Keywords
Parking, Impervious, Pervious, Urban, Contextual, Temporal, Fields