

>> From WXXI News, it's 1370 Connection.

[Background Music]

>> I'm Bob Smith and land used to be both a measure of wealth and a social treasure, as it now become a commodity to be used up like so much iron or gasoline. Does human activity change it? Has that activity devalued it? Here are the questions to ask the man whose been studying these issues and recording the impact of people on the land. Matthew Coolidge of the Center for Land Use Interpretation whose been studying that issue not only nationwide but globally. He has a lot to share with us about that. He'll be speaking tonight at 8 at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Caroline Werner Gannett Lecture Series. He's talking with us right now. Matthew, thank you very much for sharing this hour with us.

>> Good morning, thanks.

>> I want to begin with the photographic record that you and your colleagues have compiled really all over the world. Is there any place right now where you can't find at least a little evidence of the impact to human beings?

>> Well arguably, every molecule on the surface of the planet has been affected by some kind of human agent of change. So sort of the answer I guess is no.

>> By the same token, are there any places that are even relatively untouched at this point, in other words where people haven't come in there and made some tangible visible change in the landscape that you can see with the naked eye but you don't have to necessarily take plant samples or soil samples to find?

>> Right. Yeah. There are certainly are places that looked like they might have had we not been here as a species even though they are affected by things that are less visual like you're saying, things like, you know, climate or chemical composition et cetera. So yeah there are places that look natural. But they look natural. I mean I would sort of argue that in the sense we live in a world where nature as we used to understand it doesn't exist and can't exist ever again. We live in what you might call an unnaturalized world or a denaturalized world, a world where humans as agents of change have affected everything. You can put things kind of back in a sense, but they are restorations of what used to be there. They are not the thing that was there. Humans are, you know, the genie or whatever is out of the bottle.

>> Of course people can't help it, people being people. They're gonna have some impacts on the world. Is it all necessarily negative? Is it all necessarily bad? Is some of it neutral? Can some of it even at times be positive or can't we look at human impact and say, "That's damage"?

>> Yeah. I mean that's the other thing I would argue is that humans have a right to be here. And if you believe in humans, as I think most of us do, then you have to support some, you know, dynamics with the planetary material and all animals change their habitat. Everything from ants to you know to mammals to humans. All of these creatures interact with their environment and are therefore part of that environment. So ecology or you know environmentalism despite the sort of political founding nature of those terms really should be considered as

the study of the integration of interaction of all the materials living on the planet together. And yes things affect one another all the time and that if anything is natural and we are part of this nature we as humans. So that--that's really the kind of point I guess is that no it's not bad to change the environment. There's much in the way that the environment has been changed that could be improved. Yes, we are in control of that situation largely and what we choose to do is often not the best thing but there is nothing inherently wrong nor is it even possible to live without affecting your environment.

>> Maybe I'm asking a question that might not necessarily be appropriate in this context because what you do is basically make a record of the changes for better or worse that we make to the environment. But how do we determine or what's the best way for us to determine which changes are relatively benign, which changes do no harm, and which changes potentially harm not only the world and the environment as a whole but us and our place in it. How do we make that judgment, value judgment though it might be in some respects?

>> Yeah, that's a big question and that's what we are all working on in our different ways as people living on the planet. Some people take a more active approach to it than others. But that is the collective decision that will occur whether we sort of actively decide or not. What the best way of doing that is and essentially it is a political decision, but on one level, it's also a kind of a spiritual one and even one that goes down to just the basics of individual character. Do you, you know, there is something, you know, that basic common decency and common sense and I'd say those are the things that ought to guide us through our daily lives and our decisions that we make.

>> If decency and common sense is the fundamental root criterion we use, a term which has become very popular lately is the concept of sustainability. Things we can continue to do without harming things any further. Is that a pretty good practical guide to what we ought to be looking toward creating something that's sustainable that won't degrade things further?

>> Yeah, well it seems to me that in life you wanna do things that you can sustain, and that sustains life, right? So yeah in a sense anything sustainable is very--is good. You don't want to do things that are going to degrade, wear out, and take people down with it when it goes. You want to maintain the kind of a balance and the sustainability even though that also has become such a sort of a political sounding term like, you know, ecology. Those are basic common sense things. You want to do things that you can continue to do that don't make a negative effect on the resources and degrade the situation in a way where eventually that behavior will have to stop because it's depleted the resource. You want to do things that do maintain balance and to continue it. So yeah, sustainability is a good thing for sure.

>> Is it a positive development that it's become a major part of the public dialogue that we're even hearing it coming out of the administration on the federal level and on many state levels?

>> Yeah. I think it's--I'm frankly kind of surprised how much has changed in short period of time in the past 10 years. The words like sustainability are being uttered in the mainstream. And back in my college days it seemed, you know, that was unlikely that that sort of thing would happen. It's amazing what high fuel prices will do to compel us into thinking of new things.

>> Well does that mean now that gas has come back down from four and a half bucks a gallon to one or two and a quarter, we may lose some of our enthusiasm for it?

>> Well, you know, we'll see how sustainable the notion is. But yeah, I think--I think it will drop down. I think it is largely determined by our economic system and so yeah we need to have those kinds of incentives whether they're from the market or from the government or the combination of two, yeah.

>> Just like we started driving gas gustlers again when things got a little better 15 years ago?

>> This is not the first time we've been through this and yeah we've learned from history I hope and it was '70s weren't that long ago. Most of us maybe even were around and remember what happened then.

>> Or the '90s.

>> Yeah. You know, we've lived through it again or the '80s.

>> Yeah.

>> So we've been through this.

>> Sure.

>> We've watch this picture before. Do we seem not to learn too many lessons too well too fast?

>> Well I don't know. I think--I think we do learn and I think we are learning and I feel like there is some sustained interest in this sort of new emergent of kind of common sense activities. And yeah, you know, you have to be optimistic 'cause otherwise things just look too dark.

>> But the photographic record, the visual record, the interpretive record that you're compiling in your projects, are they basically setting a baseline for where we are as of right now so we know what we've already done and maybe implicitly get a sense of what we've got to do?

>> In a sense yeah. But I think, you know, our project is--or the sort of collection of information about how the nation's lands are used, that's part of what we do as this sort of inventory of the landscape. But it is a kind of a curated collection of places that we point out and not all of them in fact I would argue the minority of them are about the kind of degradation of the environment, I think, because there's so many ways you can read landscapes. So I think some people sort of have had the immediate reaction to assume that it's got--it's about the negative land use. But in a way, it's not about negative land use, it's about land use.

>> And as what we're trying to do is just show people that all of culture, all of American culture particular because we do focus primarily on the United States plays out on the ground in some way where they're visible artifacts created by human activities, even individual ones but certainly collective ones and corporations and governments and other entities. So there--we're looking at culture on the ground. And not all of culture is negative in fact almost of all

it is positive. Cultural is a good thing. Culture just is--it's the character of the people so you want to understand that and you want to kind of encourage that and that's what we're trying to do is to sort of describe culture by its interaction with the physical material of the ground. And so we look at land art. We look at farming ranges. We look at, you know, shopping centers, and we look at newer urban housing. We look at everything.

>> And maybe even some of the more dramatic changes we've made in our landscape whether it be the canyons of Manhattan or Mount Rushmore or Hoover Dam or whatever?

>> Yeah for sure. The dramatic, but also it's not a matter of scale. We look for examples that have a compelling sort of story, a component of kind of an articulate quality for describing that type of land use. You know with the criteria we use. We call it the unusual and exemplary criteria. So half of that is unusual meaning it stands out. It's particular. It's rare. It's something that you don't see everyday or that you might not have thought of but the exemplary side of that criteria is to look at examples of different more quotidian, more daily, more mundane kinds of land uses. And again all that's in quotes because often when you look at the sort of more mundane things, that's where the real poetry is because people tend to kind of overlook what seems to be--what they're sort of used to seeing, and so they don't notice necessarily the features within a place, a plain looking place like a parking lot. There are actually is poetry in a parking lot.

>> I wanna find out what the poetry is and what the verse is saying and how they rhyme in just a moment. But first, you're by here listening to 1370 Connection on WXXI AM and FM HD2. I'm Bob Smith and we have across the table with, Matthew Coolidge, Founder of the Center for Land Use Interpretation speaking tonight at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Caroline Werner Gannett Lecture Series. You can be a part of the conversation, dial 263-WXXI, 263-9994, or drop us an e-mail at asktalk@wxxi.org, either way, mail box, lines open to all network, love to hear from you. Talking about the poetry of a parking lot, what does it say and how does a parking lot like the one I'm looking out the window and seeing across State Street downtown, how does it speak to you?

>> Well, I mean you can look out almost any window and what you'll see is not, you know, nature. You'll see the product of human activity generally. And just like, you know, a script, like something somebody writes, a narrative or a bunch of notes, you can kind of read those that narrative and notes in a way where you extract things that are between the lines. You know, as well as maybe part of the lines. So in this script of a parking lot out the window here, you see the intentional form of asphalt and cars kinda moving around, but you also begin to think about the idea of how parking is something that we all strive for. We live in an automotive society. We, the automotive age of oil that we live in is one that's had an effect on the landscape more than perhaps any other single component in terms of its physical effects on our architecture, our cities, our planning, and the physical structure of the content itself. Cars have or, you know, the agent of change more dramatic perhaps, you know. So what do we do with these cars? We move around but the point of cars is not to drive, it's to park. When you think about it, what you're trying to do with your car is to get somewhere so that you can park you car. The driving is an interstitial act between these somewhat protracted periods of parking.

>> So you don't go with the theme of a magazine like car and driver which says, "Driving is more than half the fun in and of itself, but it's an end in itself, you just see it as a means to an end."

>> Well, I mean certainly, you know, car and drivers, not car and parker. So parking, you know, collectively, societally, sort of culturally in a sense, this idea of parking space, parking environments, architectures and structures built to support this ambition of ours to park out cars where incidentally our cars spend most of their lives parked, more than 90 percent of their lives are spent parked. So what we are suggesting or what I'm suggesting by looking at a parking lot and looking for poetry is to sort of look for the ways in which a parking lot describes us in ways that you haven't perhaps really thought of and that parking is not about so much even roads and overpasses and navigation. All of that fluidity is there to support the end result which stasis, which is parking.

>> Getting to where you want to go in the end.

>> Exactly. And it's also the last thing on your mind in a way. It's what you wanna think about the least is parking. How boring, how it's a problem, how do you gotta pay for it, you gotta hunt as you parallel parking, so tricky. There are people honking at you as you're coming out. There these dangers, you know. Parking is a thing you don't wanna think about, yet it is the ultimate objective of this car culture.

>> 263-WXXI, 263-9994, as we're talking with Matthew Coolidge from Center for Land Use Interpretation. Right across the street from that parking lot, there's a baseball stadium where thousands of people will come at a given night, dozens of nights a year to watch our ball team play. That's a whole different kind of experience, a whole different kind of purpose. Would you look at something like that, whether it's Frontier Field for the Rochester Red Wings or Yankee Stadium for the Yankees or Citi Field for the Mets, Dodger Stadium for the LA Dodgers, what do you see?

>> Well stadiums are fantastic form of land use bringing people together in ways physically that doesn't occur anywhere else. It's an amazing type of structure. The stadium rebuilding programs that are going on all over this country right now and in urban areas to build stadiums next to existing stadiums is kind of an interesting trend to sort of a doubling up of capacity and a transition from one form of stadium life to another. And so there are things in that element of the sort of subject of stadiums that you could look at for some interesting ideas for looking at culture. What that means, what are the new stadium, what do they have that the old ones don't have are desired to renew even though perhaps in many cases the old stadiums are perfectly functional. We still invest hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars on these some of the largest, you know, structures known to man.

>> And then they build some of the new stadiums in a style that's meant to evoke the old ones.

>> Right, yeah for sure. So there are many stories to be told and sort of stadium land use subject that I personally haven't look into in great detail but I imagine there's other people in our organization who thought about it to quite a bit and we may end up doing some kind of exhibit about it someday.

>> Did we just launch a project perhaps?

>> Yeah, perhaps, yeah.

>> That would be interesting to see, but in everything that you've said, do we need to step back and look at our surroundings perhaps in a different way than we usually do?

>> Yeah I mean, just like--I don't think there's too many people who'd argue that biodiversity is a good thing. You wanna have a variety of biological forms out there, not just for their own sake or that perhaps reason enough but to be able to draw from the diversity of the gene pool for solutions to problems that might come up to on our planet whether it's, you know, from biological and the nonhuman or the human side. It's a toolbox, the biological diversity and I would argue also that ideas, you wanna have diversity of ideas. You wanted a perspectival diversity in order to be able to have different models for breaking down problems as well as different ways to understand ourselves, to get closer if there is such a thing to the sort of a more accurate and a better and more complete and a more compelling and a more sustainable way of understanding what we're doing here on this planet. So you need the sort of idea diversity and I think part of our contribution hopefully is to provide a little bit more, especially from an institutional point of view because as an institution, the Center for Land Use Interpretation looks at things that are systematically based on other institutional models and tries to sort of provoke a new structure and new possibilities for what an institution can do looking at the world.

>> Now you've look at a number of projects here in New York State and even in western New York that have had an impact all of their own that I wanna talk about in a few minutes.

>> After we take a short break, we will be back with more here on 1370 Connection. I'm Bob Smith with you on WXXI AM and FM HD2. We are talking with Matthew Coolidge of the Center for Land Use Interpretation speaking tonight at 8 at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Caroline Werner Gannett Lecture Series. And we're back with more including your calls in just a moment as 1370 Connection continues.

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>> 1370 Connection continues on WXXI AM and FM HD2. I'm Bob Smith. Across the table from me right now Matthew Coolidge from the Center for Land Use Interpretation, speaking tonight at 8 at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Caroline Werner Gannett Lecture Series. You're invited to be a part of the conversation at 263-WXXI, 263-9994 or write to us at asktalk@wxxi.org as our e-mail address. Let me get into you the phones in just a moment but I wanna talk about some of the things that you've found that are noteworthy here in Upstate New York. Start with the big Niagara Power Project that spans the American and Canadian sides of the Niagara River near the falls. What jumps out at you about

that project as particularly remarkable, particularly noteworthy that can teach us something?

>> Yeah. Well the Niagara Falls, the mother of all falls, and when you look at the way towns in this part of the country were developed in general it's at a place where the river made some kind of a precipitous drop. The patterns of development for Upstate New York, New York, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, mainly--mostly in the northeast and lots of the south and other places too is about taking advantage of the power that's produced by falling water, whether it's a rapid that you can then dam or whether it's an actuable drop based on some natural waterfall. And here in Rochester you've got High Falls as wonderfully dramatic example of this phenomenon. But Niagara Falls is like nowhere else in America. The biggest drop in energy which has produced some of the largest power projects as well as some credible visionary ideas historically as even today, but mostly historically about that site as a kind of a birthplace for crave notions about culture, commerce, economy as well as technology. And this really where a lot of our energy, infrastructure ideas were developed. People like Edison and Tesla were out there building those power plants because that was the most obvious, the biggest resource in time of developing electricity from falling water. > And of course it helped grow the 20th century Rochester, Buffalo, Hamilton, and Toronto into what they are.

>> Exactly.

>> No question. By the same token it was sort of a [inaudible] of, well, good starts and then false starts, the canals on either side of the river. To the west, Welland Canal, moves the goods, part of the St. Lawrence Seaway System, positive, good. Nobody questions it today. Then you go a few miles to the east of the river. Love Canal, need I say more.

>> Yeah. Love Canal is two words that loom large in our imaginations. It probably, you know, means immediately for most people just sort of a whole unpacking bag of negative environmental effects of industry. But what, you know, what was Love Canal, one relatively small place that was singled out is a sort of progenitor of environmental problems that initiated a whole set of chain reactions that lead to political acts and measures about some environmental, you know, problems. And so it ends up not being necessarily any worse than thousands of other places around the country, but is a set of words that became a signifier for a very broad and wide phenomenon that bogus up in a lot of way.

>> It's a monument to good ideas gone wreck. It started out as something similar to Welland Canal, a parallel channel to take Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, run out of money real fast before they could develop it, finish it, build it up, and then, you know, look at how it was repurpose.

>> Right yeah. And, yeah, just driving here today going over that massive wonderful trench, the Erie Canal, you know, it boggles the mind, the construction of that thing paralleling a fairly large existing body of water for much of its course. But so these feats of engineering like the canal system perhaps more than anything else in terms of the early development that those were--those are monumental achievements that today we just pass over on some bridge and barely notice. But they as well as some waterfalls are the reasons why we're here.

>> 263-WXXI, Natalie in Rochester on the line. Hello Natalie, you're on the air.

>> Hi! I'm a fan of your organization so I was really surprised to hear you on the radio this morning and I just tuned in. So if you've already covered this, stop me. But Rochester is a city that is trying really hard to develop certain areas in such a way to make people feel a greater sense of community and kind of gather together and I wonder how much good it does. I'm always curious how much good it is to you to think about your money into developing a certain area. Is it true if you build it they will come or how much--how much of land developing needs to be about tapping into ideas and feelings and kind of movements that are already present in the community?

>> Yeah, are you talking about High Falls, 'cause I was just--[laughter]?

>> Partly High Falls, yeah, that's part of it.

>> Yeah. I understand the phenomenon and it is something that you encounter across the country. The cities are rediscovering their waterfronts et cetera in a lot of cases that means that they're plowing through their waterfronts, tearing down, and to recontextualizing some of the more interesting parts of the city is in for, you know, partially good reasons but also, you know, there's economic reasons to do that too. And development in, you know, on those areas changes the character of them in ways that isn't always positive character. It's something that's hard to create. It's more like it's something that just happens when you are trying to do things, you know?

>> Right.

>> And, so in a place that is--has a kind of chaos, some kind of unscripted kind of environment. Those can often be more sort of character filled than a place that's been redeveloped to kind of describe its character for us. And of course a lot of the work we do is about the perception of things and the ways in which people interpret place. And those kind of physical reinterpretations along the confluence points of major cities or waterfronts can end up. You know, certainly they maybe having a positive economic effect but also they do change the place in other ways too. And whether cumulatively, you know, what's good and what's bad, it's something I don't know that I could actually say I think it really depends on where you're coming from and which specific case you're talking about. But we tend to find more sort of beauty and poetry and stimulation in places that haven't been totally retooled in diversions of themselves.

>> Right. I think for me the confident sort of news item of High Falls makes it feel like it's supposed to be mandatory signing and I just wonder if that prospective or is something you see a lot.

>> Well, I must confess that when I visited High Falls it--I was inspired. It was an amazing place--

>> It's certainly beautiful.

>> It's certainly beautiful and it's, where I felt like, you know, that's the core of the city of Rochester right there and all the layers are exposed, you know, even though half the waterfall is, you know, turned off or whatever. It's a fantastic blending. The infrastructures there are so significant that they overwhelm the kind of the redevelopment issues if you have issues regarding that

redevelopment. Those are sort of, you know, sort of occluded by the drama of the place itself.

>> Hey dude, thank you very much for calling in.

>> Okay.

>> A funny thing happened on the way to everybody's idea that that was going to be the new entertainment district for the city.

>> It didn't happen. And all of the buildings around this neighborhood and we're talking about this neighborhood where the studio building is located when we're talking about High Falls ended up repurposed as either business offices, corporate headquarters. The big bowling alley/nightclub nearby that spares the Saddle Ridge sign is going to be repurposed as a company headquarters very soon. It's already changing hands or lost apartments or, you know, in a couple of cases, broadcasting station headquarters. An odd outcome for something that was originally intended to be something else but due to natural paths of development, just go in a different channel than a lot of our ideas and plans and so we just sort of accept it.

>> Well, certainly things don't always come out like we've planned for sure and yeah, you accept it, you change it, it depends on the case. I don't know enough about the situation here to be able to say what would be the best course of action to this part of town. But you know, in general like I'm saying these places more interesting when it's all has been turned into, as I say you've got version of itself. There needs to be a bit of chaos, a bit of unscripted space. There's a writer Norman Klein who talks about that notion and it's kind of wonderful notion to think about the idea that's space can be scripted like a story or a play. And when somebody's telling the story, there's a disengagement that occurs. You feel like that somebody is telling that story. It's not my story. I'm listening to their story. So, when places haven't been scripted, when they're just kinda as they are then you can make your own story.

>> Or when those places sometimes go off-script.

>> That's true.

>> And the story ends up with a different ending not necessarily an unhappy one, just a different one, you know. 263-WXXI. We have Pat in Greece on the line. Hi Pat, you're on the air.

>> Yes. Hi Bob, good afternoon. How are you? My comment is I think your guest is speaking tonight at RIT and you're just talking about scripted and unscripted outcome. RIT obviously within the city of Rochester is now part of Monroe County's suburban's ball and I'm not saying that's a good or bad thing. But how, could your guest kind of talk about how academic institutions which are kind of the hotbed of sustainability discussions in many many cases, Buffalo--University of Buffalo is another example, how they really have lent to suburbanization of major metro areas and in fact have caused decline of urban centers and that's very true here in Rochester. And I'll just take your comments off here for me.

>> Okay. Thanks very much for calling.

>> Well, you know, yeah, certainly universities have and colleges have that a big impact on development. One of the first things that kinda comes to mind is the idea of the sort of the campus being a center of technology stimulating business development in a region, you know, the research triangle. You know if you think about the relation of both Stanford and Silicon Valley or you think of MIT and Route 128 and all the technology in suburban Boston and those relationships were massively transformative and important. And it's a model that other universities have tried to duplicate in thousands or maybe not thousands, but hundreds of situations around the globe. So sometimes it works well. Sometimes it does drain energy and resources from their previous locations if they were located elsewhere or changes the pull that magnetic attraction of energy from perhaps an urban core to a more suburb one. So, yeah, that certainly is a phenomenon. And again I don't know too much about Rochester Institute's history to be able to say comment about that case particular but I've seen that sort of thing occur, it seems in other places but for, you know, every place that has its served energy drained away from is a place that has this energy attracted too. So, there's usually other side of the coin to consider for sure.

>> And one of those other sides of the coin is the University of the Rochester along the banks of the Genesee and some set of City of Rochester.

>> Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's as we saw it as we drove in. It looked like a nice place over there. That's been there for how long?

>> 75-80 years almost. And before that, it was over in the east side of the city, the University Avenue, a few blocks north of east and some remnants of it including the Memorial Art Gallery are still there.

>> Yeah.

>> And what's interesting to note though, in the middle of all that is a university can have all kinds of relationships to a city, whether it's stuck in the middle of town like Columbia and in New York City or Penn and Philly or sitting on the edge.

>> Yeah and, you know, look at a place like Yale and New Haven and the relationship they've had to their city and for many years it almost seemed like Yale and New Haven were separate entities. [Laughter] But I think they're beginning and certainly are and historically they have to some degree too to get more involve in their--the city that they're in. So whether Yale, you know, to look at that example is a city that's in--a university that's in a city, you know, that wasn't an idealized relationship either, was it? I mean the city benefited but there was also the sort of Ivory Tower was still pretty tall around that place. So there, you know, it's not always the, you know, best thing to have a university in the middle of town, but it does seem like, and when you've got a town that needs space filled and needs economic vitality sort of seems like well you cut all those buildings there, we've got an office in Troy, New York and that's another great example of the city that's sort of mostly emptied but this giant university up on the hill that keeps building new fancy buildings when there are these wonderful historic structures sitting vacant down below. A lot of people are wondering sort of why doesn't Troy, you know, the RPI just sort of moved into Troy and have a nice urban campus, so it'll be fantastic but probably that's not gonna happen.

>> Or why doesn't SUNY-Albany or anyone of another, a number of institutions in the area do that because of--I mean the capital district is certainly chuck a block with colleges.

>> Yup.

>> Very good ones and very influential ones.

>> Yup.

>> And what's interesting though in the midst of all that, the relationship between cultural institutions and the landscape can sometimes be problematic, economic institutions as well. You're talking about Troy. I'm thinking about in the capital district, the old GE plants that poured PCB into the Hudson River and that those are among your exhibits. What can we say about those and what should we draw from those plants which are now pretty much unwanted and shattered?

>> Yeah. Well beyond that the largest super fund site the America, right, is that spill along the bottom of the Hudson River from the GE plant. And yeah, you know, the industrial sites on one hand, they're monuments to our technology. They represent the legacy of the industry and industriousness which built this country and you wanna preserve them in a sense so that you know we are reminded of that. So you don't necessarily wanna go tear down everything that you don't agree with or you think is ugly because I think we need to be reminded of those things also. I mean that's one project we continually revisit as this notion of waste and landfills. And you know, it isn't always a good thing to push landfills out to the margin so you don't see them. Well, 'cause if you had your landfill in the middle of town and confront it everyday, then you'd actually see the effects of throwing away that little, you know, milk container or whatever. So in a way to be able to bump into these monuments of our technologies and our industry and our consumptive way of life which again is not necessarily something we can avoid. Consumption is part--is what makes life but to be reminded of the manner and the different ways we can live or by being reminded by these monuments of industry, it can be a good thing.

>> So what does it say about us that we adopted some years ago to put our main landfill for the Rochester metropolitan area down at the western end of Interstate 490 about 20 miles out of town.

>> Yeah, well nobody wants to dump in their backyard. And there's, you know, this kind of problem where, you know, communities that are more economically bereft end up being the political factors of least resistance for sighting, you know, negative land uses like landfills. So that's certain, you know, problem to keep an eye on, but, you know, this city like every city pushes its landfills as far away as they can. And, you know, they're not necessarily smelly, dirty, places but they are things that--here's the technology of landfills that progress quite dramatically but they are things that we don't wanna think about for sure.

>> And they don't wanna live near them here. So they put them out where nobody is or very few people are.

>> Yeah exactly.

>> So they don't have to live with it, which gets to another place that you've looked at that you've included on your online site certainly and that's the landfill that used to be New York City's made landfill on Staten Island.

>> Yes.

>> Which is now pretty close to where people are living?

>> Yeah, yeah and it's closed now. And, you know, it closed right before 9/11 and then was sort of partially reopened for taking some of that debris and all. But--

>> They put this fill over Twin Towers there I guess or at least that part of it which wasn't reclaimed and recycled for bridges or whatever.

>> And it was a logistic site you might say for the breaking down of the components of that site. It was trucked from and barged from Manhattan to that site. And they were still looking for human remains et cetera out there. But the landfill is a landfill closed before that and is by far the biggest landfill probably in the world, certainly in America. It's monumental. It represents, you know, 50-60 years of American culture that are antipode you might say to the biggest city in the country. And there are garbologist who've studied it and understand its resource potential as a place to literally look at our culture. Because, you know, it's like Bill Rathje whose one of the more famous garbologists who studied Fresh Kills you know likes to say you know they found as they cored into the mound that the historical stratigraphy, which you find in archeology by reading rocks and things like that in layering, was so distinct in Fresh Kills that you could date these stratigraphy to the day by reading the New York Times that was still legible in the landfill. These are anaerobic environments meaning they don't really decay so quickly. So what we've got in Fresh Kills and in every other landfill in America is a reliquary of our past 50 years as a massively consumptive society.

>> So that basically is the monument to America post-1945?

>> Archeologists have always gone to the midden mounds, to the waste deeps to understand culture and this isn't something we can do to ourselves.

>> It makes you wonder what we'll decide about ourselves from reading the layers?

>> Well it would be an objective reflection.

>> 263-WXXI is our number, 263-9994. Matthew Coolidge from the Center for Land Use Interpretation, helping us to understand the impact we've made on our world for better or worse, speaking tonight at RIT. He's speaking with us right now on 1370 Connection. To the phones we go at 263-WXXI. We got John on the city, John welcome you're on the air.

>> Hey Bob. Hi Matt. Matt, do you have any familiarity with our project here in Rochester, the midtown plaza redevelopment and the Renaissance Square redevelopment?

>> Not so much but this related to the mall which was closed last year?

>> Yes, yes.

>> Yeah, no I don't know what the current status of that is but it's certainly a fascinating mall and one of their first like gathered developments for indoor mall in a downtown redevelopment.

>> Right, right. I want to get to see if you have any opinion on whether they are doing the right thing in demolishing a lot of the property and redeveloping a complete New York reusing what's there--

>> Is that what's happening or you know is it being demolished, so to speak.

>> Well it's gonna be a com--it looks like it will be a combination of things. But any ways, I have another question regarding urban--suburban sprawling and you might be able to help me out on this. My interpretation is that President Eisenhower when he became president really was a proponent of the Interstate system in United States, and into the certain extent, created suburban sprawl by promoting interstate highways and et cetera. And my understanding was one of the issues that he had was too much congestion in a few metropolitan areas was the nuclear threat of nuclear war where if we were too focused on too few metropolitan areas, we do more susceptible to take a large hit in a nuclear war. Versus if we had a lot of different development areas created by suburban sprawl, we'd be able to survive a nuclear attack easier. Have you heard anything or read anything about that theory?

>> Oh yeah. For sure that was a component to understanding and generating the tremendous and unprecedented amounts of billions to build the interstate highway system. There was a defense component that was part of it. There was a civilian component as well, and economic one. But it meant all kinds of needs and addressed all kinds of fears that were rampant at the time. Among them, you know, how to move weapons and troops during an attack where you might have an isolated base that would get cut off and no way to sort of move its materials. So having this sort of network which, you know, is really kind of similar to the internet network developed at this multinodal infrastructure where you could route around things if there's a failure at one site, you know, traffic can move around it. And to be able to integrate the whole country as a system for rapid transportation where it'll have benefits military as well as a economically and you can land airplanes on it.

>> You know, the real subtext behind a lot of it according to some of the history I've read was that basically we needed an alternate way to move people and move goods from place to place quickly at a time when the railroad system was decaying and starting to go to hell.

>> Right. And railway is limited. I mean most of our commercial traffic takes place on the freeways and--

>> There is a business reason for all of it.

>> Yeah.

>> Well you know Matt I think about this probably more than I should. But 9/11 when you think about what happened there, it wasn't a nuclear attack but was more of a, more of a, I guess you would call it more of a conventional attack

and look at the chaos it created in that metropolitan area of one major city. So maybe if President Eisenhower hadn't let on the ball.

>> Yeah well New York is a special case because of its density. It's the most scariest place to imagine being under attack because of those difficulty of getting out, but--

>> Even though in that particular day you almost had to be watching television in order to know what was happening if you were more than maybe 20 or 30 blocks away from it.

>> Yeah, yeah, but also what would happen in Los Angeles, the freeway city, if it were to have an earthquake, which it will, it's not an if. You know and if they have two or three collapses of their interstate system egress from that valley will be impossible. Everybody will be stuck there, so--

>> I guess you just read the newspapers from 1994 on the Northridge quake to find out because they've been through it. It's already happened. Hey dude, thank you very much--

>> Thank you.

>> --for calling in at 263-WXXI. Apropos of that and of all the changes we've run in our landscape for pretty utilitarian purposes, how long are those going to last or are they eventually going to be gobbled up by soil? A television program on the History Channel called After People, which basically made the argument that nature is going to reclaim a lot of what we've left behind if for some reason or other we ever disappear or ever decide for whatever reason to leave planet earth and go someplace else. So is much of what we've done going to survive?

>> I think in a way everything that we've done will survive in some way. Like I say I don't think we can--we'll ever go back to nature in a sense because nature has been changed by us. So there will be a post-human world someday maybe, probably, inevitably, as it gets too hot or cold for us to stand.

>> And we'll just come back every once in a while presuming we survived as a species to visit?

>> Yeah, we'll I recommend you to, yeah the book that came out and I think that series was based on called The World Without Us which describes an environment as if people left that hand. Yeah. [Background Music] Yeah, it's a constant evolution. It's not--nothing will sort of end. It will just continue to transform.

>> Well hopefully we'll not be around for the beginning of it, one way or another. Our thanks to Matthew Coolidge of the Center for Land Use Interpretation sharing his insights and observations with us at this hour of 1370 Connection. He speaks tonight at 8 at RIT's Webb Auditorium as part of the Caroline Werner Gannett Lecture Series, speaking with us in this hour of 1370 Connection for WXXI AM and FM HD2 Rochester. I'm Bob Smith. Thanks for joining us. We're back right after the news.

[Music]

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