Streetsweeper

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Recently I have been reading two books – one new to me: *Slow Living*, by Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig (2006), and the other which has been around for a couple years and to which I have returned: *Riding the Rapids: Urban Life in an Age of Complexity*, by Charles Landry (2004). As the titles suggest, these two books at first sight are somewhat at odds: the latter, a sort of survival kit for coping with the increasingly frenetic pace of urban life for the professional and chattering classes, and the other making a case for slowing things down. Yet perhaps unsurprisingly, the core concerns of a book primarily for built environment professionals (already past its sell-by date according to John Worthington's forward), and one for a wider section of urbanites, have significant cross-overs.

In many respects, Landry's is a carefully written book: in one short paragraph he gives a fair basic account of the *slow city* movement, though without direct comment about its sustainability in a global context. This is a repeated characteristic of the text, and my main complaint, in that it repeatedly avoids any clear moral analysis or opinion about the inexorability of our current paths or the real 'faultlines', 'battlegrounds' or 'drivers' of our lives and the places that we inhabit.

I have a great regard for John Worthington, but I well remember his presentation to the UK Urban Design Group Conference in Leeds, maybe a decade ago. He, like Landry here, was describing a world where movement would form an alternative workplace and communication nexus. He drew a landscape (literally, on a display board) of intermittent peaks with planes moving from one to another. When asked what was in the valleys between these global hubs, my distinct memory is that he described them as 'the swamps'. Depending on your definitions, almost three-quarters of the world's population inhabit these swamps, without (the increasingly dubious) benefit of jet travel, high-speed train travel or a stake in what Landry calls the 'weightless economy'. These people are still dependent on marginal or

international capital-driven mercantilism and its manufacturies and markets.

The submission of the 30% and the eager ambition of most of the remaining 70% to join this weightless, valueless, febrile economy is no reason to present it as a silent given, without alternatives.

'Progress' over the last three to four centuries has done a great deal for urban elites, increasingly at a cost to the planet. 'Progress' has also consistently eroded the inherited 'wisdoms' of the local and regional and replaced them with global profit-seeking and manufactured messages – increasingly ephemeral as the world of political values and actions are required to follow the market's ever more pressing demand for novelty.

While the notions of 'deep ecology', however attractive, carry with them extreme challenges to modern, liberal urbanism (where it survives), I believe that the time has come for us to return to study them carefully – and quickly – if we ourselves are to survive. Bill Devall's and George Sessions' book: *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (1985) remains a useful primer, while Schumacher College at Dartington continues to work positively with this and related practical concepts and strategies.