

Edited by Robert Fishman

New Urbanism

Peter Calthorpe
vs.
Lars Lerup

Michigan Debates on Urbanism volume II

New Urbanism

Everyday Urbanism

New Urbanism

Post Urbanism & ReUrbanism

Series Editor, Douglas Kelbaugh

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New Urbanism Michigan Debates on Urbanism: volume II

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The Michigan Debates on Urbanism



A year or so ago, Dean Douglas Kelbaugh asked me to write a letter of support for funding a project to launch a series of debates on urbanism in the United States today. I agreed to do so, since I liked the format that he proposed, combining public participation, intellectual gravitas, and engaged polemic. And I was sympathetic to his tripartite classifications of Everyday, New, and Post Urbanisms, on which I have heard him speak and which I have written about in *Building/Art* (University of Calgary Press, 2003). He has since added ReUrbanism to the typology.

Each debate was to have a proponent of one of the urbanisms and a respondent of a different persuasion. It is now a year later; the debates in question have occurred; and it is my pleasure to write a foreword to a series of publications that cover the debates. The expectations I held for the series have more than been fulfilled. Participation by both speakers and spectators has been lively, the level of intellectual discourse high, and the polemical stances of the factions represented well articulated.

But it seems to me that I – and the audiences at the University of Michigan – got a bonus from the series: one that is a byproduct of the specific combination of personalities participating. For example, two of the three debates are conducted by opponents who, in the course of the event, come to reveal powerful, personal shared sets of commitments to specific geographical locations, and intellectual lineages. In two of them, the anticipated format of proposition followed by commentary, is effectively superseded by one in which the presentation of the initial speaker constitutes as much a critique of the stance of the respondent as it does a position proposed for response. For me, these features of the debates give this publication a deepened intellectual significance.

A number of currents of thought in American urbanist discourse that usually remain well below the surface of public discussion here become startlingly – even poignantly – evident.

I did not expect, for example, that the conversation between Margaret Crawford and Michael Speaks would be so engagingly suffused by their palpable, long-standing, and mutual affection for the specific urban features of Los Angeles. They did indeed disagree on the plane of theory as the format of the debates required that they do, and no reader of this series of texts will doubt that they hold different positions. But it is clear as well that Speaks does not so much oppose Crawford's idea of "Everyday Urbanism" as find it an insufficiently efficacious tool for the address of the contemporary urban issues. And Crawford is eager to align herself with such younger generation theorists such as Speaks on the matter of the role of the automobile in future American urban form. As she puts it: "the idea of eliminating the automobile is just a dream and, for me, not even a good dream. I don't want to give up my automobile. The thing I miss most about Los Angeles is the parking and the driving," an opinion to which Speaks quickly assents.

A parallel conversation comprises the third debate, even if this one, between Barbara Littenberg and Steven Peterson on the one hand, and Peter Eisenman on the other, plays out according to a quite different dynamic. Littenberg and Peterson argue for what is labeled in Volume III of the *Michigan Debates* as "ReUrbanism," rather than argue against any putative "Post Urbanist" position that might – per Kelbaugh – be ascribed to Eisenman. And this is probably just as well, since Eisenman confesses that he isn't sure that he is an urbanist at all.

But here too, two powerful undercurrents suffuse the conversation. The first one, as in the first debate, is a place: the city of New York, for

which all three speakers figures share a powerful affection. The second is the deep intellectual debt all three owe to their shared urban design mentor: the late Colin Rowe.

Eisenman begins by setting out his own classification of urbanisms operative in recent years, calling them “Arcadian,” “Utopian” and Koolhaasian “junk space” respectively (he includes Littenberg/Peterson in the Arcadian category). But in a fashion which you may find as surprising as I did, Eisenman offers a nostalgic nod to the Arcadian group observing that “their idea was a wonderful notion of urbanity.” He associates the “Utopian” category with modernism, but observes that “both of those positions...have been problematized by the failure of Modernism, and the idea that you can go backward in time. I don’t think it is possible.”

Then, having dismissed his first two categories, he characterizes the third one as: “what I call junk space, Rem Koolhaas’ urban theories,” and then dismisses it as well: “Junk space is not a project because it isn’t critical, it’s cynical...” Having thus dismissed all three, Eisenman presents several of his recent projects. Yet he attempts little linkage of the projects to the themes of the theoretical introduction with which he began, and which I have just summarized, limiting himself solely to efforts at “incorporating the possibility of negativity into new research in mathematics, biology, physics...” For their part, Littenberg and Peterson launch no theoretical introduction at all, save for the insistence I have already cited: that “multiple urbanisms” do not really exist, and instead that “urbanism is a condition.”

They proceed directly to an extended descriptive/analytical account of their firm’s own recent urban design proposals for the Lower Manhattan site of the World Trade Center – design proposals that preceded the later and

better-publicized design competition won by Daniel Libeskind.

But once Eisenman’s and Littenberg-Peterson’s opening presentations are concluded, their debate becomes charged in complex ways. To start with, Eisenman commends Littenberg-Peterson’s “beautiful plans,” but he then goes on to claim that “the concept of a good plan is no longer alive.” Littenberg and Peterson resist this historicization, but in doing so, they argue that an urban design method that has the capacity to “heal the city” does not depend on a tightly determined relationship of an overall urban design plan to the design for any specific building to be erected within it. Before long, the methodological idea of “healing the city” and the non-determinist relationship of urbanism to architecture posited by Littenberg-Peterson drive Eisenman to balk: “I don’t accept that architecture and urbanism are separate.” Yet Peterson persists, and the exchange ends with his insistent observation that “the city is a different kind of form.”

In this fascinating exchange, it seems to me that one sees being played out all over again, the tense dialectic between the more-or-less ahistorical methods that had been formulated and propounded by Rowe, and the more-or-less teleological revisionisms to them that have been so persistently pursued by Eisenman in recent years. But all this notwithstanding, Eisenman’s Michigan references to the “failure of Modernism”; his disparagement of Koolhaas’ characteristic current methodologies; his only-lightly-theorized account of his own recent production; and his admiration (however guarded) for Littenberg-Peterson’s “beautiful plans” together have the intriguing effect of returning him more closely to the intellectual lineage of Rowe than he has been for some time.

This brings me to the remaining debate in the series. This one – between Peter Calthorpe and Lars Lerup – had in common with both of the other two a reunion of former academic colleagues. But the interchange between these two protagonists, unlike that between both of the other pairs, did not underscore how much they have basically in common. In fact, in this case, one senses an estrangement between former colleagues, rather than a rapprochement. This effect is sharpened by Calthorpe’s opening presentation, which he begins by describing his disappointment that the New Urbanism (of which he was Dean Kelbaugh’s designated proponent) has been less successful as a coalition of diverse groups (“for people to think comprehensively about our patterns of growth”) and is instead better-known as a neo-traditional style. Understandably exasperated by the its stylistic foregrounding in its East Coast versions, Calthorpe also dismisses in advance many of the criticisms commonly made of it – including, along the way, a number of those implicit in Lars Lerup’s subsequent presentation. It is in this sense that I tend to see Calthorpe’s presentation as being as much a critique as a proposition. But this is not to say that it is not a proposition. On the contrary, his eloquent plea for a shift from the familiar parameters of new urbanism to a consideration of “the Regional City” is a refreshing and compelling address to the whole panoply of issues central to contemporary urbanism: political, economic, environmental, social, etc. And his insistence on the need to bring detailed design sensibilities even to such obdurate matters as traffic flow on arterial highways, within the overall urban field, cannot be too highly praised.

To Calthorpe’s broad – if somewhat impatient – account of the current scene, and of his own projects within it, Lerup responded

with an account of his own “outsider’s” enduring fascination with the American “myth” of mobility as freedom. Using his current home town of Houston as his test case, he delivers an often caustic account of current urban failures: mono-functional land use, the degradation of the bayous, etc. – even summing them up, in a telling phrase, as “toxic ecologies.” But Calthorpe challenges Lerup on what he sees as his excessive infatuation with the “myth,” and presses him to go much further – and to do so propositionally. He is, for example, intrigued by Lerup’s tantalizing account of the ecological potentials of flat roofs in a location such as Houston’s.

I want to conclude my commentary with a crossover theoretical reference. Reading through this series of commentaries in sequence, I have found myself seeing Calthorpe’s engaging combination of historical critique and ambitious urban proposal in a new and different light. To my surprise, it has reminded me again of Eisenman’s complaint about Koolhaas’ theory. Following on from the theory of Manfredo Tafuri (and of Tafuri’s colleague Massimo Cacciari), Eisenman labels Koolhaas’ method “nihilistic and cynical.” Instead, Eisenman insists, “To have a project... means in some way or other to be critical.”

I would not have expected it when I endorsed the Michigan Debates a year ago, but it seems to me that one of its fruitful outcomes is a reading of the efforts of such avowedly “on-the-ground” urbanists such as Peter Calthorpe as important contemporary – if perhaps unwitting – exemplars of the powerful theoretical ideas of Tafuri that Eisenman has championed, and that he has (perhaps less successfully?) sought to emulate for so long.

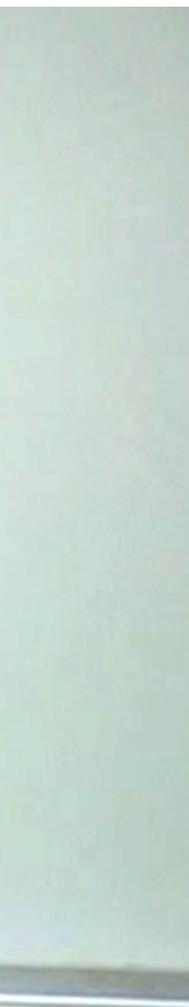




Douglas Kelbaugh



Douglas Kelbaugh, Dean of Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, has won a score of design awards and competitions, organized and participated in thirty design charrettes, and taught at eight architecture schools in the US and abroad. In addition to writing dozens of articles, he has edited and authored several books, most recently *Repairing the American Metropolis: Common Place Revisited*.



As the Swede, Lars Lerup, aptly states in this book, Americans have always put great distance between themselves and then gone to great cost or, to be more literal, great lengths to overcome that distance. We still do. We atomize ourselves into a low-density spray of individual houses across the land, sometimes in enclaves protected by walls, gates, guard dogs, but mainly by distance. How do we break out of this socially and ecologically unsustainable pattern of settlement? How do we better engage and embrace each other and, in so doing, urbanity? These are the kinds of questions that the Michigan Debates on Urbanism attempt to answer.

The USA is the most *socially* mobile society in the world, if not the history of the world. It accepts more immigrants for permanent resettlement than all the other nations in the world combined (1.1 million in 2003, well above the historical average of two hundred thousand per year). We also place great store in *physical* mobility. In fact, we are addicted to it, as we *must* be given the physical distances that need to be overcome to allow people to be where they want or need to be. How can we reduce their perpetual need to be somewhere else – and to reduce the use of so much energy and resources getting there? One answer is to provide accessibility without physical mobility – either by moving destinations closer together or by substituting other modes of interaction for travel.

New Urbanism, the subject of this volume, claims a finer mixing of land uses and socio-economic-racial groups in a physically coherent way can go a long way toward social and physical accessibility and ultimately toward sustainability. Everyday Urbanism,

featured in the first volume, maintains that it is more a matter of accepting and empowering the disenfranchised underclasses and their populist, often ad hoc environments. Post Urbanism, the focus of Volume III goes with the flow of new technology, new sensibilities, and new social phenomena looking for deliverance, or for at least a sense of personal experience and excitement. (For a more detailed description of *Everyday, New and Post Urbanism*, see my introduction in Volume I of the series and/or Chapter VI in my book *Repairing the American Metropolis*, University of Washington Press, 2002.)

In many ways, it comes down to the twin questions of physical mobility and social mobility and whether we, or anyone, can have them simultaneously. Americans seem to think so. We continue to build infrastructure that encourages distance and physical movement, while we continue to sponsor upward social mobility. These two goals have been the great unspoken and, in some ways, heroic project of the USA. Since the Puritans first hewed out the wilderness in New England and the Virginians boldly speculated on land west of the Appalachians, physical mobility across a vast continent has promoted American social mobility; since World War II physical mobility across metropolitan regions and the suburbanization it helped spawned have continued to be linked to social mobility. But, as the New Urbanists suggest, the costs of physical mobility in the United States are now working against American social mobility.

Meanwhile, the Europeans have been concentrating on *place*, specifically rebuilding and refining their major cities, which architecture continues to play a major role in shaping.

City-making has been their great unstated project since World War II, as it has arguably been since the Renaissance. But social and physical mobility have been a secondary priority. Compared to the US, European roads and the vehicles they carry are simply not given as much right-of-way. And a strong class structure lingers in some countries. Permanent immigration and the granting of citizenship are very rare, not to mention slow upward socio-economic mobility for the newcomers.

Several profound questions lurk within the differing agendas of these two societies (not to mention non-Western societies). Can America retain its social mobility without resorting to physical distance and the provision of extensive physical mobility to compensate for that distance? Conversely, can Europe retain its urbanity and simultaneously open up its society? These two Western cultures have been the envy and the model for the rest of the world for decades if not centuries (albeit forced in the case of their colonies). Is the question for the developing countries whether either or both are still worth emulating? An even bigger question is whether any of these societies can simultaneously foreground mobility and urbanity? Can they take the relevant elements of Everyday, New, Post and other urbanisms and meld them into an appropriate urbanism that befits particular places in the 21st century? Places with both social and physical mobility? Or is that simply too much to hope for in one culture?

However these urbanisms are perceived, they do represent different values and sensibilities. They need to be situated in time and space, contextualized in different cultures and geographies. As Rahul Mehrotra argued in the first volume of this trilogy, what makes sense

in the developing world is very different from what makes sense in North America or Europe. It's unlikely there will be one urbanism for all people, not even for all North Americans. There is not even one New Urbanism. In a recent issue of *Architecture*, Latino New Urbanism made its debut. It has called for a series of public dialogues and educational programs looking at low income, predominantly Mexican-American neighborhoods in southern California. The focus for the fledgling group is the way that Hispanic communities adapt their environments to embrace New Urbanist principles for compact living, pedestrian-oriented downtowns, communal transportation modes, and active occupation of public space.

I used to think of New Urbanism as the polar opposite of Post Urbanism. I now think of it as occupying the middle ground between Post Urbanism and Everyday Urbanism – a position that the media and design students tend to find less exciting than either extreme. It's considered by Everyday Urbanists to be too formal and, admittedly, it can be overly formalistic. It's seen as too conservative and formulaic by Post Urbanists, and it's true that New Urbanist site plans can be repetitive and its architectural language can be nostalgic and trite. Nonetheless, New Urbanism attempts to uphold the social, economic, and environmental principles of its charter and to apply them to problems in society.

No urbanist is more committed to addressing the problems of the whole metropolis than Peter Calthorpe. More than any New Urbanist, he has promoted a regional focus on the entire metropolitan area – everything from development in existing downtowns at the center to urban growth boundaries at the pe-

rimeter. As a founder and West Coast leader of the movement, Peter invented and popularized TOD – Transit Oriented Development. He has also resisted neo-traditional design and a narrow focus on the neighborhood scale, which have emanated more from the East Coast wing of the Congress for the New Urbanism.

Lars has long distinguished himself as a designer, writer and educator. His insightful commentary and critique of American lifestyles and urban geographies are always original, provocative and revealing. Even a city as seemingly placeless as his Houston has succumbed to his sharp eye and acute and intractable mind. Dean Lerup makes contemporary urbanism more understandable by seeing and naming new morphologies and modalities that were too obvious to be perceived by the rest of us.

Lars Lerup and Peter Calthorpe are not strangers to each other. Lars mentions Peter in the very first paragraph of his book, *After the City*. I remember visiting Berkeley in the mid-1980s to speak in a studio they were teaching together, a studio that helped to jump-start what later became New Urbanism. Peter and I would later write *The Pedestrian Pocket Book* together and dabble in a professional partnership. Although Lars has since gone in a different direction, he represents in some ways the loyal opposition to New Urbanism. In this remarkably friendly and fruitful debate with Peter, he shows respect – begrudging at times – for its urban principles.

Professor Robert Fishman, who has written widely and wisely on New Urbanism, offers more about the topic and the speakers.

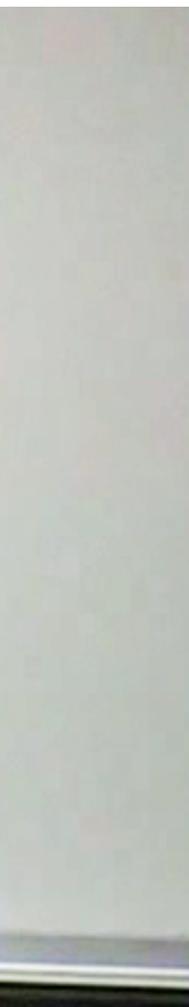
I would like to thank all the debater/writers, the moderator/editors, and the staff who worked hard on this project – but, alas, there

are too many to name. I must, however, single out Keria Rossin for her patient typing, Christian Unverzagt and Martha Merzig for their thorough and thoughtful graphic design, Peter Knox for his DVD/video transfer, and George Baird, who took time out from his new job as Dean at the University of Toronto to write the Foreword. For this volume, Joe DiStefano of Calthorpe Associates and Jessica Young at Rice University were very helpful. I'd also like to acknowledge the Graham Foundation for their grant.

Robert Fishman



Robert Fishman teaches urban design, architecture, and urban planning at the University of Michigan's Taubman College and is an internationally recognized expert in the fields of urban history, urban policy, and planning. He has authored several books including *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* and *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier* and is presently writing *Cities After the End of Cities*.



It is a pleasure and an honor to introduce this debate, although I admit I was disappointed to learn from Doug Kelbaugh that our two debaters are in fact old friends. In fact, the best debates are between protagonists whose agreements and disagreements go deep; this one continues a discussion between Peter Calthorpe and Lars Lerup that has gone on for a quarter-century.

Moreover, I think this prolonged friendship/debate says something very important about New Urbanism, and the close relationship between its strongest proponents and its strongest critics. New Urbanism is a design and social movement initiated and led by architects. One has to go back to the Regional Planning Association of America in the 1920s or even the City Beautiful movement of the turn of the century to encounter a similar attempt by architects to put themselves at the head of a major social movement.

And yet the most insistent criticism of New Urbanism has not come from developers or from other stalwarts of the status quo. It has come instead from other architects who share the same education, the same practice, the same experience of the city as the New Urbanists and yet advance very different views of what the city is.

As a historian, I (perhaps inevitably) see this difference coalescing around the issue of history, and especially the relationship of the history of urban forms to current practice. If New Urbanism means anything at all, it means that the urban past is also an integral part of the urban future, even in this new age of transportation and communication. Peter Calthorpe's use of supposedly obsolete rail technology as the basis for reorganizing a region around

what he called Transit Oriented Development is a salient example of this. The past becomes the future.

More broadly for New Urbanism, there is the assertion that the traditional vocabulary of urban design, the boulevard, plaza, perimeter block, monument, above all the pedestrian scale of the street and public spaces – all these forms that gave identity and permanence to the city – are as much a part of our future as the urban past. This is true not only of the neighborhood and the district, but even the region can be designed to have a clear center and edge. That to me is New Urbanism.

By contrast, Lars Lerup in the very title of his 2000 book, *After the City*, declares his belief in the radical break between the cities of the past and the metropolis of today. The book is a celebration of what he calls radical mobility, fluidity, change, even placelessness and instant communication. It is a call to discard what he calls the “ancient palette of urban forms” and for architecture to embrace the speed and transience of the new metropolis as the key to its own survival.

As to his good friend, Peter Calthorpe, Lars refers to Peter in a long footnote in *After the City* that reads in part: “It is ironic, at the end of a century categorized by the most dizzy urban transformations in human history, that academic readings...remain haunted by the irrelevant ghosts of the historically outdated European city center...The hegemony of the pedestrian, the street, the plaza and the perimeter block must be questioned.” Lars then goes on to categorize Peter Calthorpe's New Urbanism as “nostalgia for the eternal return of the bourgeois pedestrian.” (Well, that's what friends are for.)

I have no doubt sharpened the disagreements between Peter and Lars; in any case, their differences – and, just as importantly, their points of agreement – will soon be evident. I can imagine no better pair to debate this issue.

The founder and principal of Calthorpe Associates in Berkeley, California, Peter Calthorpe has been a designer, a social activist, an author, and a leader for more than three decades. After studying at the Graduate School of Architecture at Yale, Peter began his architectural practice in 1972 and was soon a major figure in the passive solar movement for ecological design. He is the coauthor in 1986 with Sim Van der Ryn of the book *Sustainable Communities*. He went on to work more broadly on urban and regional issues. An early version of his breakthrough concept, Transit Oriented Development (TOD), was published in 1989 in *The Pedestrian Pocket Book*, edited by Doug Kelbaugh. Peter then developed and elaborated these concepts in his next book, *The Next American Metropolis* (1993) and, more ambitiously, in his 2001 book, *The Regional City*, written with William Fulton. All of these books grew from a nationwide practice that has ranged from inner city neighborhoods to regional plans. Peter is a founder of the Congress for the New Urbanism, and its first board president.

In all these activities he has shown, in my view, a style of leadership that is as rare as it is admirable. It's a style that is based on persuasion rather than self-assertion, inclusion rather than self-aggrandizement; and most importantly on his capacity to identify the important issues in American urban design and society and to devise clear and compelling design solutions.

Lars Lerup carries the impressive titles of William Ward Watkins Professor and Dean of the Rice School of Architecture, but here at the University of Michigan we have added yet another title, Saarinen Visiting Professor for 2004. As studio instructor, critic and colleague Lars has brought to this College a unique vigor, an outspoken originality, and a profound love of the urban in all its varied and fragile forms. Whether one agrees or disagrees with *After the City*, it is in its descriptive power and originality one of the few indispensable works of contemporary American urbanism.

And like so many others who have made indispensable contributions to American urbanism, Lars is from outside the United States – from Sweden, in fact, and he has just been chosen as Swedish-American Citizen of the Year.

After studying engineering in his native country, he went on to graduate study in architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, and urban design at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard. His first professional job, as he tells us in *After the City*, was in 1966 with the San Francisco firm that was designing the last generation of Eichler houses, the classic modernist tract houses for the Bay Area. So Lars has been on the case in suburbia for a long time. He subsequently joined the architecture faculty of The University of California at Berkeley, where he worked at all scales, from furniture to a new town for Taiwan. This work has been exhibited throughout the world and published in his books *Villa Prima Facie* (1976), *Building the Unfinished* (1977), and *Planned Assault* (1987).

In preparing this debate for publication, we have given Peter and Lars the opportunity to “amend their remarks,” as the *Congressional*

Record would put it, but (unlike that weighty publication) we have tried to stay as close as possible to the actual words of the debate. In particular, we have preserved the spontaneous give-and-take of the discussion and questions that followed Peter’s and Lars’ prepared presentations. The result is a unique exchange of ideas between two leaders of American urbanism that goes far to clarify the often-murky debate around the issue of New Urbanism.



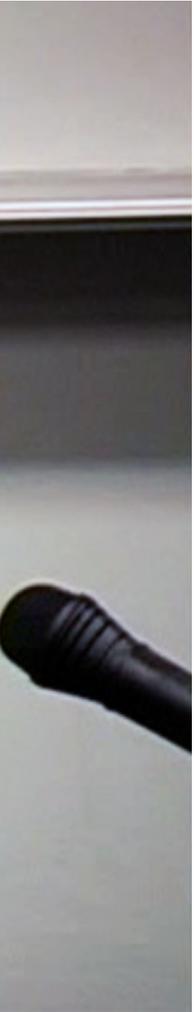
Peter Calthorpe, principal in Calthorpe Associates and a co-founder/director of the Congress for the New Urbanism, has been named one of twenty-five "innovators on the cutting edge" by *Newsweek* magazine for his work redefining the models of urban and suburban growth in America. His latest book, with William Fulton, is *The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl* (2001), which follows *The Next American Metropolis* (1993).

New Urbanism: Principles or Style?

□ New Urbanism struggles between two identities, one a lofty set of principles that many criticize as utopian and the other a style which is stereotyped as retro and simplistic. In fact, it is many other things as well; a coalition meant to unify a broad range of disciplines and interest groups; a rebirth of urban design over planning; and a powerful counterpoint to the norm of sprawl. The truth is that it is all of the above, like it or not. And for different people it has different meanings and that is part of its vitality. Unfortunately every movement or set of ideas becomes identified as a style that somehow soon becomes independent of its core principles. But personally I believe that it is in its principles that it finds its greatest strength and as a style it finds its most debilitating limits.

Unfortunately even within New Urbanism there is debate as to whether the movement is guided by an open-ended set of principles or a design canon with specific forms and norms. The Charter of New Urbanism is a clear articulation of the principles and steers clear of prescribing a specific set of urban design forms or architecture. The Transect, a more recent outcome of the Congress for New Urbanism, is more formal and creates a more definitive urban design taxonomy (although it also does not declare a style). This tension is healthy, I believe, but should not deflect the need to always judge practice by principles rather than formulas.

But as well as a set of principles, I see New Urbanism as a unique coalition, a coalition of many different individuals, professions and vantage points. I originally wanted New Urbanism to become the umbrella for people to think comprehensively about our patterns of growth and the impacts those have on our culture, our ecology, on our economy, on our

□

capacity for equity. I wanted New Urbanism to be able to bring together people from all different disciplines, whether traffic engineers, sociologists, historians, landscape designers, and even architects. (Architects of course, have been the ones who questioned us the most.) I don't think New Urbanism has lived up fully to its potential as a coalition partly because it has become known mostly as a style and as a style I'm not interested in defending it. I don't think style is at its heart.

We can debate the style issue and the neo-traditional quality of many New Urban projects. I would posit that in my experience as a practitioner, most of the neo-traditional style comes from the marketplace itself, not from the intentions of any designers or an intentional design ethos. And it is this marketplace force that must be understood and directed if the cartoons are to stop. Students must learn to take on the challenge of marketplace forces and understand that the demand for a sense of scale and history and uniqueness, even in its most ridiculous and absurd caricature, represents real needs that relentlessly express themselves. Architects who don't rise to those challenges are swept aside (deflected to the task of designing patron homes or civic monuments). So there is a real challenge even within the debate about style. But that's not the debate I would like to engage.

Ironically the other critique of New Urbanism is that it is unrealistic and idealistic, rather than retro and derivative. I think it's absolutely reasonable, appropriate, and at this stage, necessary to counter current development practice with thoughtful and radical alternatives. Some people call that utopianism; I just call it a very practical way of addressing

problems, as long as it's thought of comprehensively. Many architects like to have it both ways now, unprecedented forms for buildings combined with fundamentally compliant urban design; a cynical celebration of sprawl with an architecture that largely ignores context. Not idealistic in social, ecological, or equity terms, and not responsive to market forces.

Whether idealistic or not, I have a set of principles that I work with. These principles may seem grandiose or abstract, but when I sit in my design studio, they actually are the things we think and argue about in our daily practice. There are four: diversity, human scale, conservation, and regionalism. Each runs contrary to current practices. Each raises significant questions and each plays a formative role in shaping our urban design.

Is this project as diverse as it could be – diverse in terms of including as broad a range of our culture and population as possible? Is it exclusive or is it inclusive? Does it have a wide range of income groups and a wide range of age groups? Is it multi-racial? Is it accessible, or is it locked away? Those are questions that we debate every day in our clients' conference rooms, because there are many builders, as you well know, who think the only way to build communities and housing is to build them in isolation, to allow people to escape one another, to allow people to escape any differences. So it's an important principle, diversity. And it's one that we do attempt to apply, and if we cannot, we usually will not work on the project.

Diversity has another more direct meaning: diverse uses, a rich mix of activities as well as people. Maybe that's Old Urbanism, to say that we need environments with a mix of activities and things going on in each neighborhood,

district or quarter. If that's Old Urbanism, it's fine. If you want to put a different façade on it and call it New, that's okay too, but certainly, in my mind, segregating land uses is an old, tired, and dysfunctional form of community planning and urban design. So diversity in its many meanings is a principle we apply.

Human scale really is important to me, the interaction of auto scale and human scale – of speed and place. It's not so much that I think we can get rid of the automobile, which is often one of the misinformed lines of attack that comes my way. As a matter of fact I spend a lot of time thinking about automobiles, how they move, how they can move seamlessly through environments, where they come to rest. But the more interesting design challenge for me is not to make either the car or the pedestrian the nexus that we design around. I think it's a much more interesting design problem to take on the question of how you integrate the pedestrian and human scale environments with the car and the automobile scale. How do they coexist? What kind of urban environments come out of that? Those are very timely questions, and they are not a retreat to the past. They are actually a lot more difficult than the glib notion that we can simply give ourselves over to the current circumstance and in some cynical way, celebrate it. So that's a second principle.

Every day we fight over the issues that result from this principle of asserting the place of the pedestrian in an auto-dominated world. This is not utopian, nor idealistic. For example it boils down to simple things: Can that arterial have parallel parking which can help make a sidewalk and apartment buildings viable along its edges. Can we split the arterial

into two parallel routes and reduce the scale of each to something that not only functions for the car but also for the pedestrian? Can we narrow local streets to slow cars and protect kids on bikes? These amount to very practical questions with important consequences, not idealistic at all.

The principle of conservation and restoration can apply to the man-made environment as well as nature. It leads to the basic goal of re-using and repairing what we've already abused (in many cases within the existing suburban environment) and conserving that which has cultural, historic or social value. This may seem obvious but within contemporary economic structures it is often easier and cheaper to build on virgin land than invest in infill and redevelopment. It is easier to tear down than repair. Reconstituting suburbia is a focus of our work and leads to a type of urbanism that's not necessarily traditional, but certainly learns from the wealth and the wisdom that's accumulated over hundreds of years of urban design and community form.

Of course this principle of conservation has an ecological component. You cannot be an urban designer without having a sophisticated understanding of ecology and all the laws that surround the preservation of different environments, habitats, and working landscapes. This is now a matter of law, and in many major projects these laws are the fulcrum of the economic viability as well as urban design. So it's not idealistic to say that we must respect ecology and be as resource-efficient as possible. It's a legal and economic structure that we're bound by today.

The last principle is one that I think is fundamental to the 'new' in New Urbanism:

regionalism. Our lives now are lived at a metropolitan scale. We no longer live in isolated villages, neighborhoods, or even singular cities. Your job opportunities, the quality of the environment, the air you breathe, the water that's flowing through your neighborhood, the traffic congestion that constrains your life – all these things are regional in scale. Your economic opportunity, your cultural outlets – all of it is regional. Yet we have local governments commanding urban design. This is perhaps the greatest of the challenges. In a way the first three principles are already on the table whenever we come to a project, and the fourth – thinking on a regional scale and understanding the interconnectedness of opportunity at the regional scale – is the one that's not on the table and needs to be. We fight all the time to have it be there.

This I think is one of the greatest misnomers about New Urbanism, that it's only about a private little neighborhood that's very pretty and isolated unto itself, as in the movie "The Truman Show." The parts of New Urbanism I've been most involved with are recognizing and putting forward in an outspoken manner the notion that we live in Regional Cities. That the regional connections are as important as the individual places, that where we develop is as important as what we develop, that how neighborhoods, districts and urban centers fit together is as important as the urban design of a block or a building.

Principles in Practice

So those are the ideas behind our work. As I have stated New Urbanism is much more than the stand-alone Traditional Neighborhood Developments like Seaside, Florida. Since those

early days the movement has grown to include federal low-income housing policy (the HOPE VI program specifically), Grayfield redevelopment (much work on the reuse of suburban dead malls and strips for example), and a new focus on regional design. The following projects attempt to encapsulate that new range while demonstrating the application of our principles in these differing circumstances. Many differing scales and places, similar principles.

A Regional Plan for Southern California

We are currently working on a regional plan for Southern California – the Los Angeles basin plus Imperial County – it's everything but San Diego in southern California. It's a massive area, with a population of thirteen million. The growth demand there will be seven million over the next twenty-five to thirty years, generated partly by immigration, but most by internal demographic trends.

Seven million is two cities the size of Chicago. So the design problem is how do you add two Chicagos to LA. It's a fascinating question because it frames the typical issue of piecemeal growth in a grand, comprehensive manner. One approach often advocated is *laissez-faire* – just let it happen and see what goes on – trust the invisible hand of Adam Smith. But in truth there is no *laissez-faire* approach to growth. It's all regulated, it's all predetermined, and it's all a series of political questions and major public investments. Engineers and politicians have more control than designers or planners.

The economy of the region is based on trade as much as on the entertainment industry or other services. It's not just Hollywood. In fact Long Beach is the largest port in America. This is a map of the flow of goods through the

region,¹ and when you trace these flows you begin to reveal the physical structure of the regional economy. Trucking and rail lines radiate out from the port at Long Beach. On the map you will find all the job centers in the Greater Los Angeles area adhering like barnacles to these routes. So there is an economic structure to the region that is not that difficult to uncover. To use that economic structure of the region as an armature for growth is a strategy that we employ.

You'll see here also a special line that connects Los Angeles International Airport, downtown LA, Ontario Airport, and San Bernardino. That is a recognition that we now live in an era in which airports are major focal points of the region. If the train station was the epicenter of mobility in the historic city center, airports are the focal points of the multi-centered regional metropolis. This is a new scale and a new structure for urban design. Whether we're capable of thinking about it and designing it is another matter.

This gives us the overarching framework of how we add seven million people to the region. The viable and logical placement of jobs becomes one of the formative forces that shape the location of new housing. The growth strategies have to do with recognizing the structure that exists and building on it. This internal order is complemented by external forces, the natural boundaries of the region.

It's interesting that the physical boundaries in Los Angeles, the mountains and the ocean, almost dictate an urban growth edge. As a result infill development is going to be the primary mover of growth in this area. In many areas we struggle to put in place an urban growth boundary to create this effect and in re-



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ality, it's already there in Los Angeles. They've sprawled out to the boundaries. Certainly development is squeaking over the mountains into Palmdale and into other areas to the south. But economics and commute distances will redirect most investment to the core, and the interesting thing is that it's already happening.

LA was historically a streetcar city, and on those once-grand boulevards and avenues were streetcars and trolleys. In a way that's what's re-emerging.² The maturation of the region will take on many forms. The light rail has been added and now that it has gained a foothold it has become a very central feature of a growing regional transit system.

Remember that the population growth in Los Angeles is largely low income and non-white. Transit is very important to large segments of this population, not just because it is more affordable but also because it ultimately can save time as the freeways continue their nosedive into gridlock. The reality is that for many people, transit and transit-oriented development can be an economic lifesaver and a mechanism of creating a viable life in what could be a very alienating environment. The commuter rail network in the region is now extremely extensive. People are astounded to know how much transit exists in this "car city." The new rapid bus lines and light rail along the historic streetcar boulevards are the framework and the investment around which much infill development is happening. And it will be the core of future development.

When we map out the extensions of planned new transit systems in the LA region for the next thirty years, we see that 43 percent of new households can be located within these

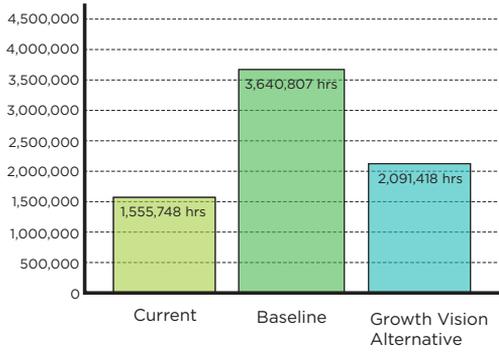
corridors.³ Close to a million households can and will be within using walking distance of those transit systems. Ironically the place that is thought of as the auto city is really the transit city, in stealth.

But it is more than economics and mobility that will drive this shift to the transit city, it is the air. The regional entity, The Southern California Association of Governments, can no longer comply with federal air standards using its traditional methods of auto emissions standards or tweaking fixed-point pollution output. The only way they can hope to comply is to adjust land use, to be more transit and less automobile-dependent. The good news is the natural trend of development, this infill core-oriented development, is already heading that way.

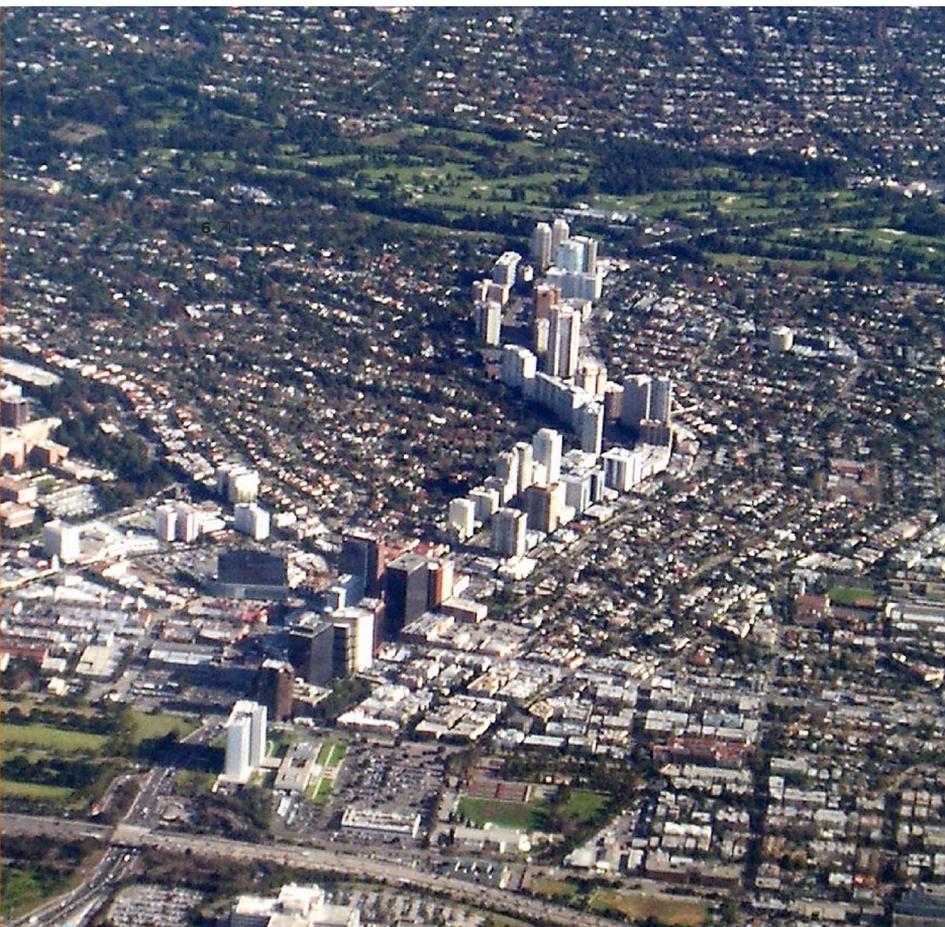
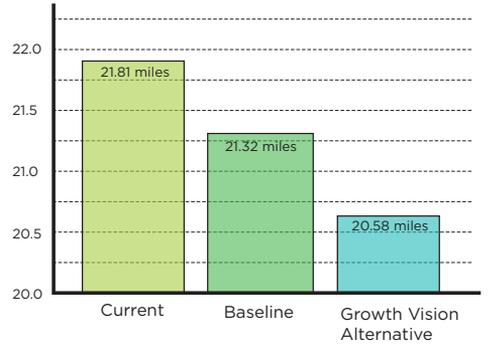
In regional design we create different scenarios to calibrate the consequences of differing futures. The baseline scenario is what happens in LA when you add seven million people and continue along the current trend configurations and growth patterns, sprawl in a word. The alternative scenario is a more compact, walkable and transit oriented region. The analysis shows improvement for the compact, transit oriented Growth Vision by almost all measures.^{4,5} Interestingly enough, in the future people may actually be traveling fewer miles than they do today. Add seven million people and the place becomes a more urban environment and begins to behave in a more sophisticated and complex manner.

Wilshire Boulevard tells the whole story of LA's infill potential.⁶ This is a thoroughly American version of urbanism, ReUrbanism you might want to call it. Wilshire Boulevard

4 Vehicle Hours Delayed



5 Vehicle Miles Traveled per Capita







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is an extraordinary artifact, with high-density, mixed-use environments back-to-back with low-density suburban environments. In a way it works very well to combine the two worlds that Americans live in. So this became the model for much future growth in LA in the alternate scenario.

These computer simulations⁷⁻¹⁰ make graphic the infill and redevelopment that will complement Southern California's new transit systems in a high and medium density context. (Urban designers typically have to wait a long time to see their projects realized, and it takes a lot of delayed gratification, but now we have computer morphing so we can actually see, and we don't have to worry about getting anything implemented or anything built because we can just get it done in the computer.) It is infill that places jobs and housing near the transit along moribund strips in a way that preserves the existing adjacent neighborhoods. In fact it complements and improves them by transforming the strip into a more urban place. There is no conflict between the development community and local community groups about this opportunity. They both see this as positive.

Such low-density strip commercial, what I call Grayfields, is ubiquitous throughout the United States. (This is the zone, Lars, that you've been studying.) There is no reason this transformation can't happen. From an economic standpoint many lower income households need this kind of pedestrian mobility, affordable housing and central location. If the choice is an affordable house in a very distant suburb, and the penalty is two or three hours of commuting a day, versus a higher-density, more urban life, many people will choose the urban life. But we must create that choice. It rarely



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exists today. The current demographics are beginning to push us in that direction anyway. So the LA regional plan succeeds by allowing the reality of the future, its demographics, its natural physical boundaries, and its established economic infrastructure, to guide development to a more urban, compact form.

University Avenue Redevelopment

Case Study: In 1993 I was hired by the City of Berkeley, my hometown, to try to fix up University Avenue. They thought we were just going to put new landscaping on it and talk about façade treatments. We went through and looked at all the opportunities for redevelopment. There weren't that many, but as you can see here, it's a very piecemeal environment along the Avenue.¹¹ We also did a little background research and discovered this crime map.¹² Where does crime take place? It's all along University Avenue. It's because the strip, not having people living on it, without mixed-use buildings fronting it, without a strategy of defensible space inherent in the urban form, creates a context in which people no longer feel safe. That was the old University Avenue – a dangerous place and a lost opportunity in a town much in need of affordable housing.

So we created a new zoning ordinance for three and four story mixed-use buildings to replace the single story strip commercial.^{13,14} The buildings that resulted are not great architecture, but they work. In some cases they are terrible architecture. But do I care? I really don't. I would like it if students were to come along and try to work for developers who do that sort of thing. To do that they'd have to understand the economics of construction, they'd have to understand the marketing of housing,

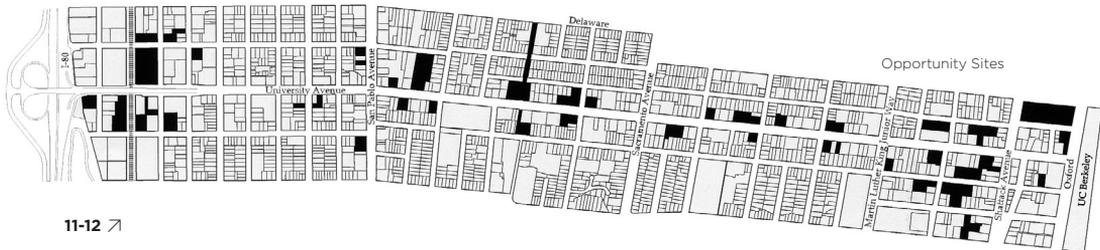
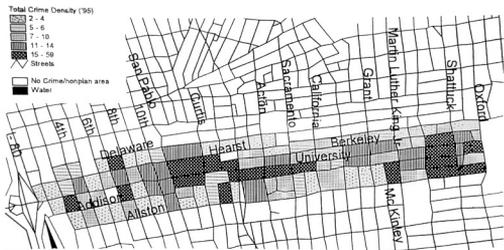
and the market preference of the people using it. They'd have to come to terms with a lot of things that would constrain artistic expression. So we don't get very good architects working in this domain because good architects don't like to be constrained. I think that's a manifestation of being wimpy, not particularly brilliant.

The picture¹⁵ shows another building on University Avenue where an architect is trying to be a little more aggressive. But do I care? Not really. What I care about is that 20 percent of the housing in that building is affordable; what I care about is that the ground floor is retail and active; what I care about is that there are windows overlooking University Avenue and the drug dealing and the muggings are going down.

This was a simple but important project. It is important because it can be replicated in so many older communities in which the strip has gone to seed. It is also a simple manifestation of the principles I have spoken of; it conserves land through infill and redevelopment and restores an historic place, the avenue itself; it supports human scale by making the street safe for pedestrians and adds enough shops and people to make it active; it promotes diversity in housing through its inclusionary requirements and provides a balance of rental housing adjacent to the surrounding single family neighborhoods; lastly it is regional in that the street connects directly to the regional transit system (BART) and to the University, connecting the new life of the avenue to these larger metropolitan assets.

Henry Horner HOPE VI Housing

You might say that it's easy to pull that kind of thing off in a relatively wealthy town such as



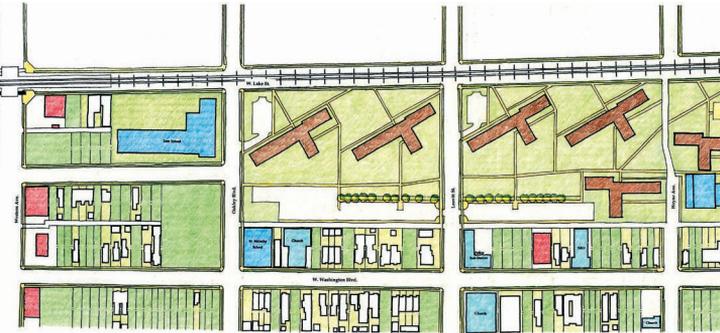
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Berkeley. Here, by contrast, is the West Side of Chicago, and a HOPE VI housing redevelopment site.¹⁶ When the Clinton administration came in and Henry Cisneros became Secretary of HUD I helped them develop the guidelines for this program, which has been roundly criticized for being New Urbanist. The strategy here was to replace the high-rise public housing towers, which violated the historic urban fabric and violated the social continuity of their neighborhoods – the social diversity, the complexity, and the human scale – and produced places that were truly dysfunctional for those living in and around them. This is the existing condition¹⁷ and the redesign,^{18,19} one could say is not very inventive at all; it's really just a copy of what used to be there, a rebuilding of the fabric of the city, its normal block pattern and housing types.

When I first visited this site, the Henry Horner Homes, only 30 percent of the units were occupied. The site was so dangerous they wouldn't even allow us to get out of the automobile to walk the site. This is not an environment in which low income households have an opportunity to advance the quality of their lives or the set of opportunities that they have. The program called not just for New Urbanism, human scale, frequent streets, and safer streets. The key policy in HOPE VI was to create mixed income housing in place of public housing's monoculture of poverty. Each project was required to be one-third market rate housing, one-third affordable, and one-third public housing. And the various units had to be interchangeable and indistinguishable from one another. The people who live in HOPE VI public housing would rub shoulders with people who have jobs, whose kids go to school and finish,







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who enjoy a broader social network. The social and economic opportunity that comes out of interacting with not just gangs but with a diverse range of individuals is immeasurable. It has a profound impact.

You can argue that this is social engineering, and that would be fine with me. Because if it works, that's fine. The truth of the matter is that what came before was also social engineering. So we have the responsibility at this stage to at least set it back on a course that makes a little more sense from a philosophical and, perhaps, practical level.

Interestingly enough, this house near the HOPE VI project is a *spec* house.²⁰ Once it was known that those towers were coming down, private enterprise and more diversity started coming back into the neighborhood naturally. It wasn't just about redeveloping public housing; it's also about redeveloping the viability of that whole neighborhood, and now it's largely built out.²¹ These are some apartments that were built by the private sector within a block of where the Henry Horner homes came down. At the same time that the public housing people have a better place to live, the surrounding neighborhood is undergoing a rebirth, free from the decay that federal housing policy had instigated.

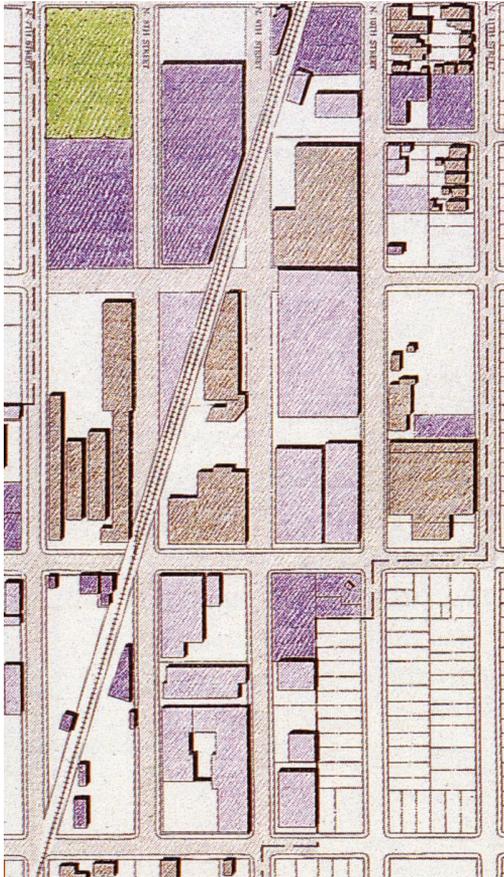
The Grayfields of Suburbia

Our suburban and less urban areas have generated massive opportunities for infill and redevelopment, what I call suburban grayfields. Here is an example in San Jose at a confluence of old railroad lines surrounded by defunct industrial buildings.^{22,23} Not an uncommon condition. Such an area is a wonderful opportunity for infill and redevelopment. They are typically

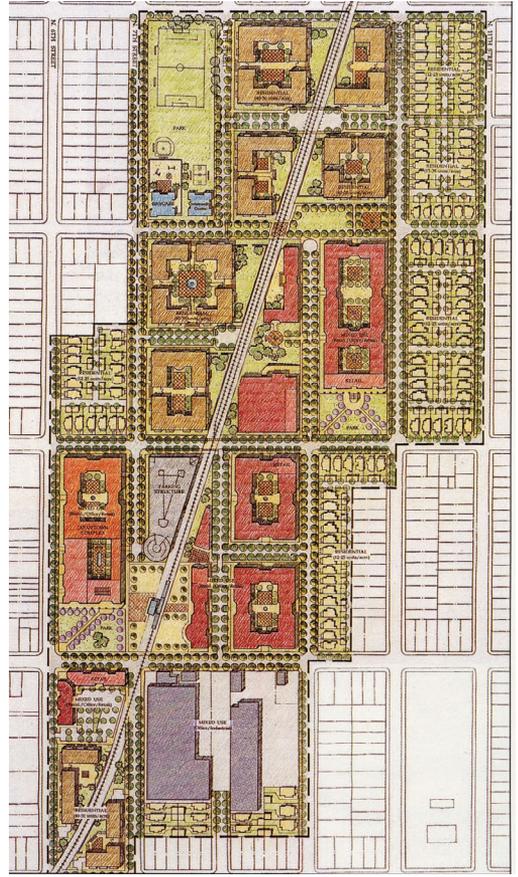
close to the urban center, have built in transit potential, and are well situated for a range of housing, retail, and businesses. The area, called the Jackson Taylor neighborhood, now has countless mixed-use buildings and many renovated non-residential buildings.²⁴⁻²⁶ A historic Main Street came back to life as a result of the redevelopment.²⁷ The area now has a broad range of housing types and uses, human scale and pedestrian activity has been reestablished, a blighted area has been restored (displacing the need for more distant Greenfield development), and a set of regional connections established through transit and the proximity to downtown San Jose. New Urban principles without the cute new-town context.

Stapleton, the community built on the site of the old Denver airport,²⁸⁻³¹ is a fascinating example of reuse. This goes to this question of conservation and restoration. They are tearing up the old runways and reusing the material for new streets. Over 40 percent of the site will become open space to re-establish the streambeds, creeks and wetlands that once were on this site. The development has proven to be wildly successful, commanding nearly a 25 percent premium over typical subdivisions in the area.

The developer decided to use a modern vocabulary for all of its multi-family, civic, and commercial development. The contrast with the traditional single-family homes creates, I think, an interesting hierarchy. In the Stapleton town center,³² we see mixed-use buildings (lofts over retail), the school (which is a charter school and an elementary school combined³³) and community center, all free of the historicism that seems to be required for single-family homes.



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What's important to me about this so called neo-traditional project, is not that there are picket fences and front porches, but that when you analyze the neighborhood you find a remarkable range of costs. Homes facing into the greenbelt³⁴ sold for 1.3 million dollars and two blocks away there are homes selling for \$180,000.³⁵ And near the town center are condos, rental units and subsidized affordable housing.³⁶⁻³⁸ This breaks all the rules of what developers think they can do in terms of economic integration. And it works, and they are getting premiums for these homes.

All these different people, different household sizes, different economies live within the same neighborhood. And none of the property values are being damaged. I think we've made great strides in destroying the suburban myth of enclaves and gated communities.

The Urban Network

Finally I want to go to something that is my particular fascination these days – reinventing the arterial grid. The armature of urbanism has and will always be its streets, from medieval donkey trails through the surveyor's grid, Haussmann's boulevards, the super block, or the unholy alliance of Arterial and Collector Street. The structure of circulation is a fundamental postulate of community form. For example when the assumption was avenues with a mix of streetcars and autos the result was a form of low-rise mixed-use urbanism unique to America, the streetcar suburb. Likewise our historic fine-grained grid became the fixed framework for the evolution of almost all our cities. We cannot shift away from the faults of sprawl without reworking its foundation – the freeway, arterial, and collector street hierarchy.





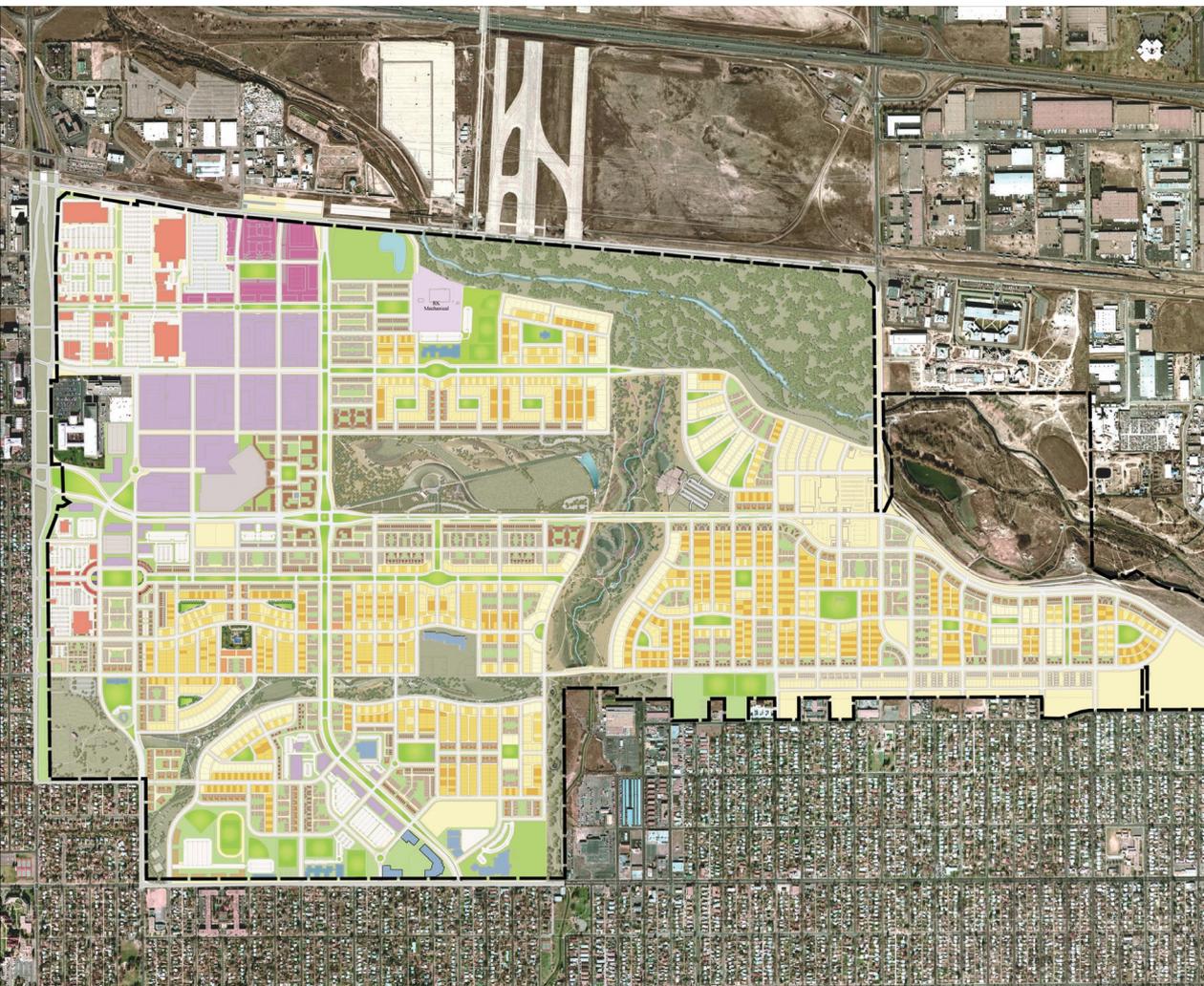
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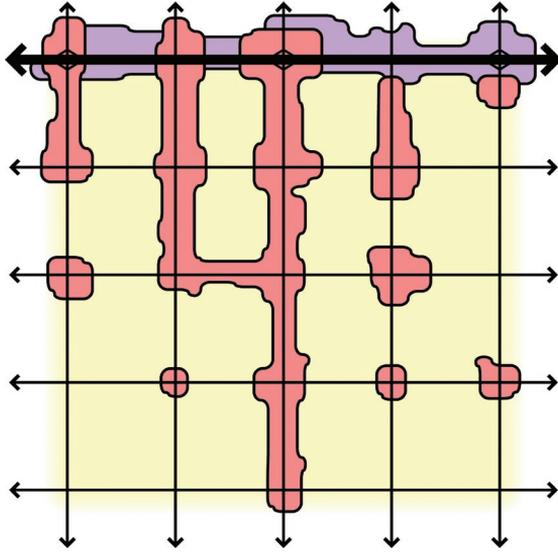
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a range of neighborhoods, villages and two town centers. The central spine of the plan is a transit boulevard with light rail.

The elements of the Urban Network can also be retrofitted into existing areas. The University Avenue plan shown before is an example of turning a strip-lined arterial into a Transit Boulevard, and the LA plan depends on a similar transformation throughout its historic arterial grid. The state of Oregon is retrofitting “connectivity” by requiring that connector-type streets be created whenever redevelopment takes place.

Here, for further example, is the site plan of a project that was handed to me by a developer who said, “This is our town center” – a cross between two arterials that would have resulted in yet another suburban shopping center.⁴⁴ They were actually correct in one way: that’s where the retail wants to be, at the crossroads. But when you have two arterials intersecting, you don’t have a pedestrian-friendly environment. So that’s the design challenge. Our solution was to break the arterials into smaller one-way streets and create a miniature grid.⁴⁵ Immediately, we were able to place buildings that normally would have giant setbacks and parking lots, right on the street. Now these buildings began making urban environments.^{46,47} As a matter of fact, an elementary school literally built its classrooms at the sidewalk in the old-fashioned perimeter block configuration.⁴⁸ At the corner is the school library, which is open to the public as a community facility.

Because each leg of the network carries only half the traffic of an arterial and there are no left turn lanes, all the streets are pedestrian friendly. In fact, where the arterial intersection

would have been is now the village green, accessible from all sides.⁴⁹ You have a pedestrian-permeable environment with mixed-use buildings at the sidewalks all located in what would have been an auto-only zone. The irony is that cars get through better here than at a standard single-point intersection. So it’s not as if we have to turn our back on the automobile in order to have a healthier and more robust pedestrian environment.

Conclusion

I think the challenge is on many scales: building, street, town, and region. It is not resolved by simply returning to patterns that used to be, but at the same time not giving up on a lot of the fundamental desires that people have for what I would call true urbanism. You can use the word urbanism without implying diversity, conservation, regionalism, and human scale, but then, to my mind, you might as well develop a different word. We are now challenged in much more sophisticated ways to think holistically on a regional scale and find new meanings and expressions for these timeless principles.

So that’s what is “new” in the New Urbanism for me – principles not style, content not form.



Lars Lerup, Dean at Rice University School of Architecture, is the author of *Villa Prima Facie*; *Building the Unfinished*; *Planned Assaults*; *After the City*, and the forthcoming *Mobility's Wrath: Rethinking Suburbia*. He was recently awarded Swedish-American Citizen of the Year for his lifelong contributions to architectural education and practice.

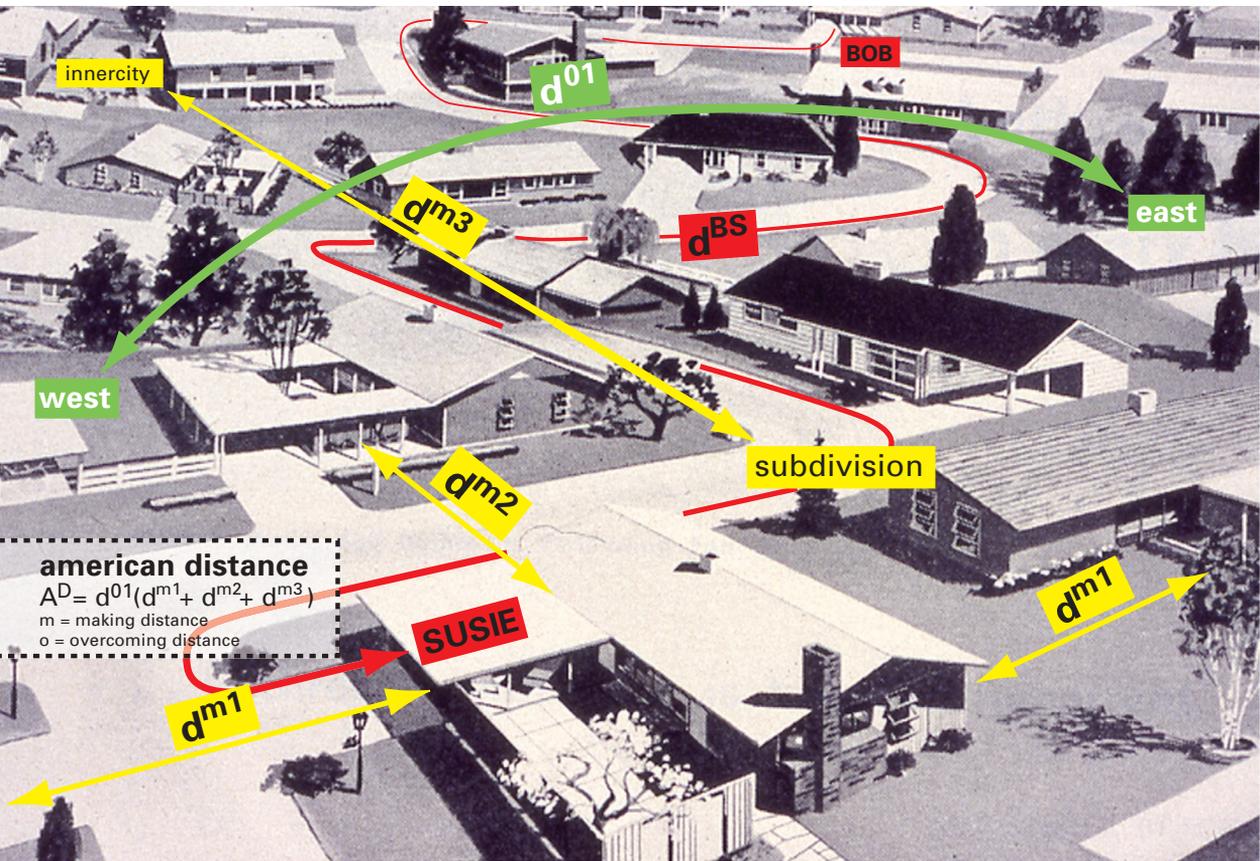


American Speed, American Distance

This afternoon Peter, Doug, and I visited Henry Ford's world – the plant at River Rouge – and now I still feel uplifted by the vision of powerful cars driving along freeways at high speeds. This vision lingers in my consciousness because I'm a European who left Europe. I was offered a job at Harvard, but I decided to go to California instead because I wanted more miles between me and Europe. I first ensconced myself in Berkeley, where my friend Peter lives, but when I came to Houston I realized that I'd never really been to America. Houston blew me away. Much more than Los Angeles, this is a freeway city, a city of "community without propinquity," as Melvin Webber put it. I was fascinated by Houston, and I could not help but feel connected to America and to the American dream of overcoming huge distances, of finding freedom in motorization. I respect this dream; it lingers in my heart.

If I have an argument with the so-called New Urbanists, it is that they are too ready to go back to the old city, and they don't have enough faith in this new motorized city that tries to overcome distance – and tries to make distance at the same time.

My argument first is that we do not understand this new suburban world. We have to find a new vocabulary, something I begun in *After the City* and am continuing in my new book, *Toxic Ecology: Rethinking the Suburban Metropolis*. Similarly, scientists invent words because they are seeking a language that allows them to talk about things that are not yet known. It's dangerous, because we also have to peel off the old language in order to see the real things. Foucault says we have to invent a "gray language." But in any case we need to



17 This "mad science" equation attempts to reveal the complex contradiction in the American tendency to simultaneously overcome and make distance. The typical subdivision is the emblem of American Distance.

develop a new vocabulary to talk about the city.

I begin by quoting Henri Lefebvre, an old Marxist, who is gone. “The urban,” he says, “is defined as the place where people walk around, finding themselves standing before and inside piles of singular objects, experiencing the intertwining of the threads of activities until they become unrecognizable, entangled situations in such a way that they engender unexpected situations. The definition of this space contains a null vector, virtually. The cancellation of distance haunts the occupants of urban space.”

If I then paraphrase Lefebvre for suburbia, I come up with the following: If suburbia is defined as the domain where people drive around, find themselves standing before and inside singular objects, experience an activity entirely familiar, engage situations in such a way that they engender predictable situations, the definition of this space contains a cacophony of vectors. Attenuated distances haunt the occupants of suburban space.

Here is another kind of city, and very different. It appears to be a scattered array of objects, but suburbia is in fact perfectly organized, perfectly striated, clearly motivated by motorization.¹ If little Bob lives in the bottom end of this subdivision and wants to go to meet Sue, he has to trace the way that automobiles move. And that is the fate of those places.

At its heart is something that is thoroughly American and that needs to be discovered – American distance. Since I was an engineer at one time, I’m trying to make an equation – we try to overcome distance by moving fast, and then we try to make distance – for example between the suburbs and the inner city, or between us and our suburban neighbors.

That is American distance, in itself a bizarre contradiction that we have to live with. Overcoming distance seems fundamental to us, but by making distance we have created the desired isolation with the possible unforeseen side effect of loneliness. Are there any people more lonely than American men? I haven’t met any. (Women don’t seem to have that trouble.)

Because of the car, the old city failed young families. The young families did not want to be in the traditional city and the traditional city didn’t provide the kind of space they needed. Suburbia worked for (and only for) the young families. But when you get old and the kids have moved out – or if you are a teenager – it’s a terrible place. So there are all kinds of drawbacks here that came with the price of mobility. It really is – or was – a male environment. But now, in Houston the women seem to drive the biggest SUVs. I’m sure it’s a kind of revenge, and maybe it’s all right.

Any city or suburb is, in Lefebvre’s term, an interaction of distance and what he calls the null vectors – what we all have experienced when we are together in a bar, or with friends, and distance disappears. At the other extreme is pure distance, what I call dross space, which is only distance.

Let’s examine this American distance as it actually exists in a place like Houston, which is my obsession. I live in a high rise building overlooking it. Everything I know about Houston is from this high rise building. I occasionally go down, but very rarely, so I have a peculiar point of view.

When I began looking out of my window I realized that there were what I call mega-forms, forms of such enormity that they defy traditional urban categories. Take the weather.

Houston is where Arctic air and Mexican air get together to produce a lot of terrible storms while constructing a wonderful ecology – the moist prairie. A canopy of trees stretches all across the city, and underneath the canopy is the common space – the Fieldroom – the living room in which all Houstonians live. Embedded is another major megashape: the freeway whose influence spreads and spills out to become what I call a *speed zone* that snake-like winds itself through the whole city.

Houston is not a city that is centered on downtown, but rather on three sub-centers. Our downtown is a euphemism, an office park for oil companies. You produce the cars; we set the gasoline prices. But today downtown is looking and acting more and more as a real downtown – Houston has come to realize it needs to fictionalize its own characteristics. Then there is the Galleria, which is shopping, and the Medical Center, which is where we all end up eventually. I've been there myself.

This polycentric activity surface – I no longer call it a city – is very interesting. I have defined it as a dynamic between *stim* – the places where all the lights are on, where we're all having a great time, we're having drinks, we're having a null vector going on, and everything is terrific – and *dross*, where activity fades away and it's dead. It's very different from the kind of city where there is activity all the time. I was just in Paris the day before, and that has become an activity surface too. The French are working now. They are not out in the streets. At eleven o'clock they're home watching television.

The activity surface is a kind of alphabet city in which all the pieces that once made up a city are separated – made ready for stim and

dross. The separate fragments are like military missions. The freeway was in fact a military mission – the system was begun in the 1920s when Eisenhower took a whole team cross-country to overcome distance, and then as President in 1956 he enacted the legislation that made it possible to produce suburbia. He was our freeway President, and he was a military man. It's uncanny that most enterprises in suburbia are like military missions, determined and highly focused with no concern for the collateral damage. (If this happens to be a metaphor for what has happened recently in world politics, so be it.)

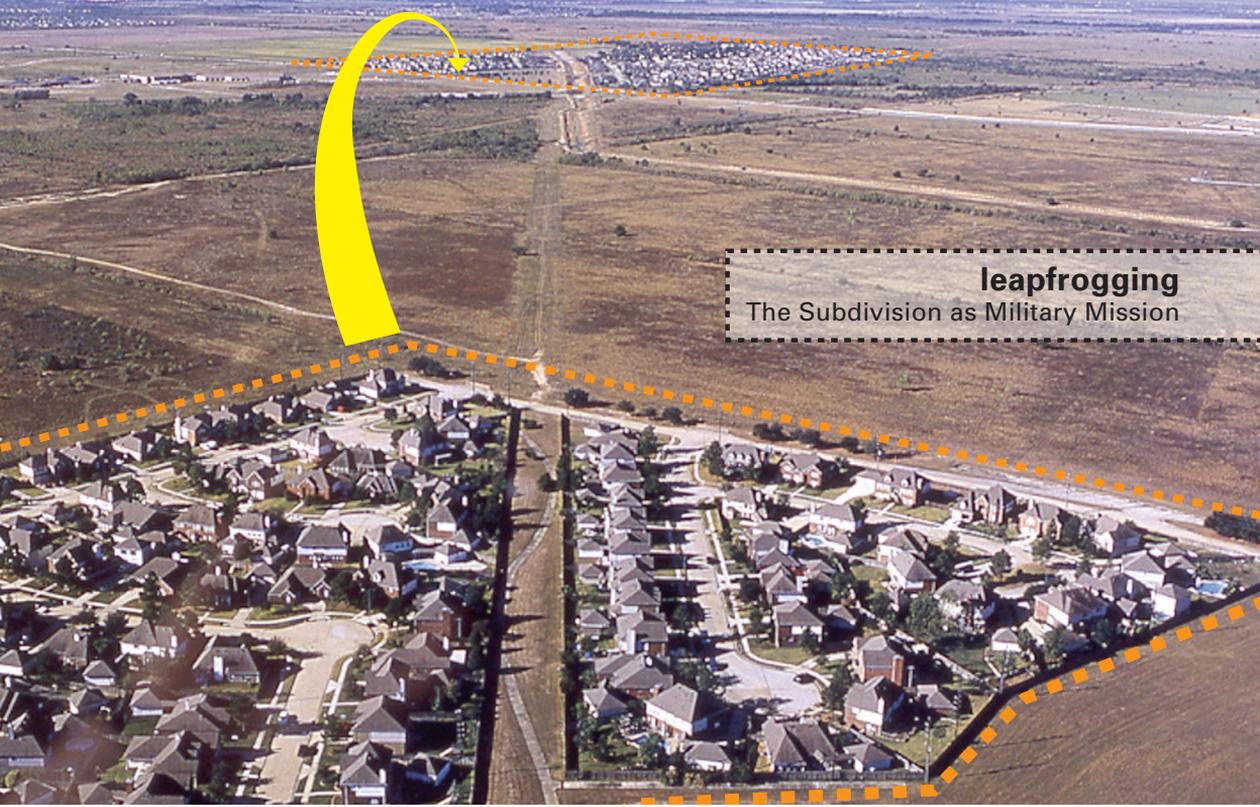
If suburbia is a microcosm of who we are, it is because we make all these things without paying attention to each other. That produces what I call a *toxic ecology* whose consequences inevitably flow downstream. Nobody wants to deal with the downstream consequences because you cannot expect market forces to take care of them. The private sector wants to make money, and thinks the public sector is there to help the private sector make money. We need a public domain that is now missing: it's disappeared, for example, in England, where it was replaced by the market principles of neo-liberalism typified by Thatcherism and later versions thereof.

What's interesting in Houston now is what only a few demographers predicted: that the inner city is growing faster than the outer city. It's as if you took the old pedestrianized inner city and stretched it, and that has become the new inner city; it is, in fact, the motorized inner city. This area is the hope for the American city as far as I am concerned. What's happening on this inner frontier is not always fun, but it has enormous possibility.



speedzone kirby
Commercial Swelling

2  Seen from above the "alphabet city" appears; each megashape is set against the others. The giant Zooemic Canopy of trees stretching across much of the city is broken by the Speedzone centered on the freeway system but often extending along major arteries. In the case of Kirby Avenue, shown here, it carves out a pocket of dense development known as the Village.



leapfrogging
The Subdivision as Military Mission

3 ↖ Unencumbered by spatial limitations, subdivisions proliferate according to land values, resulting in so-called leapfrogging. The result is a tattered suburban fabric interspersed by accidental landbanking. Each subdivision on its own errand is much like a military mission unconcerned with any collateral damage: destruction of agricultural land, pollution flooding, exaggerated commutes, etc.

4 ↘ Perfectly reasonable row houses meant to be accessed by a nice sidewalk, are surrounded by walls, and entered through a gate in the back. Not only denying the building type, this type of arrangement expresses clearly the suburbanization of what little urban culture left in our cities.



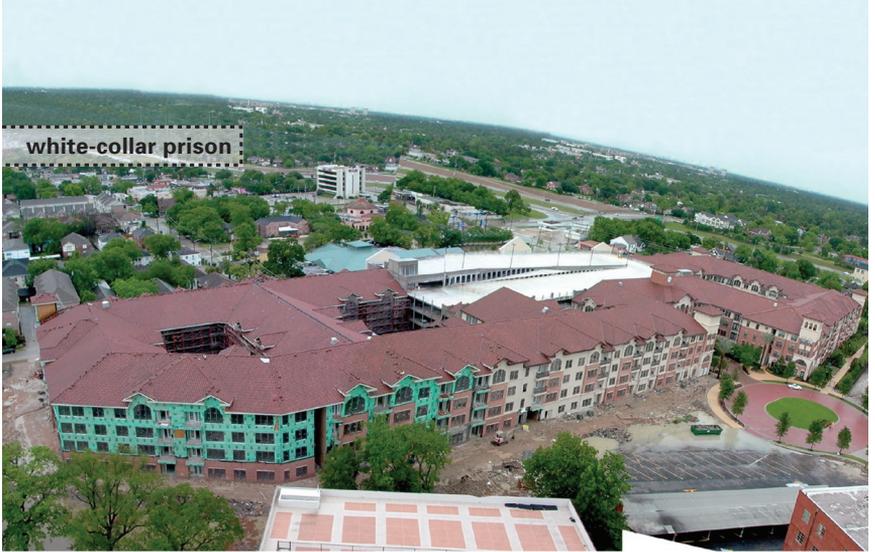
Houston's *megashape* has its own ecology, and it's a peculiar one. In the downtown high-rises, the executives who set the prices for oil move up and down from office to underground parking, so that's the First World vertical axis. On the ground floor the people who clean the buildings move horizontally, so that's the Third World surface. So this is a totally striated place. Today the Greater Houston Partnership under the leadership of Robert M. Eury are working on this striation of class – I love them – and trying to reinvent the surface, to mix the First and the Third World to make a Second World.

This image shows what I call "leapfrogging," which is a wonderful thing.³ One developer builds a little splotch on the ground and land prices all around go up. So the next developer, if he is clever, jumps away so he can find a cheaper piece of land and do his thing there. And then you have a real mess on your hands. In fact what you have here is a kind of informal land banking that if it was looked at carefully, and was bought by some rich guy, like the city, it could be turned into a wonderful system in which we could bind together what is broken.

These downtown townhouses are a reflection of what goes on in the stretched inner city, a bizarre example of *American distance*.⁴ If you are a European you pull over and laugh. These are perfectly reasonable townhouses, but they never want to touch each other nor access the street directly, thus the wall in front. Townhouses in denial! We see street lights, and of course nobody goes on the street. We need somebody to take down those walls between the townhouses and the street and move the entry so it fronts a real street. Then we'd have a wonderful city.



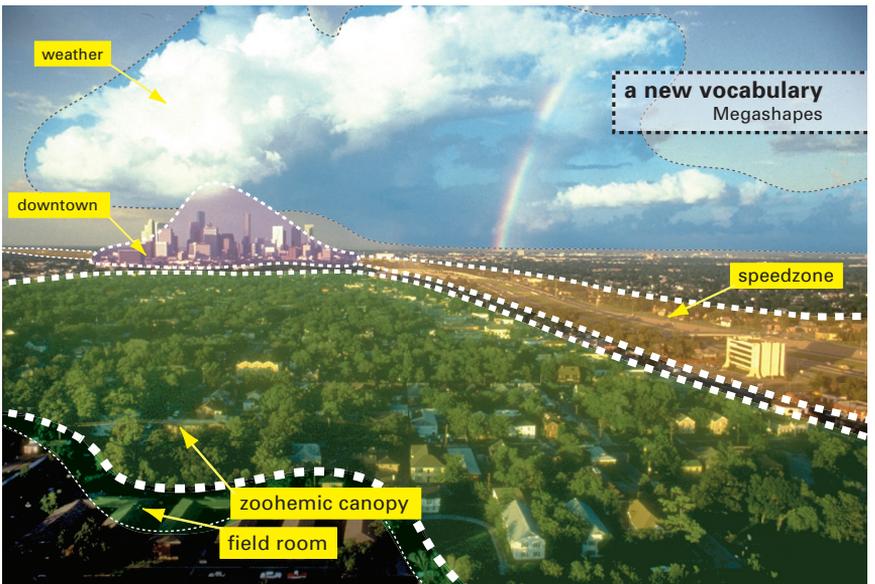




white-collar prison



the subdivision



a new vocabulary
Megashapes

weather

downtown

speedzone

zoohectic canopy

field room

- 5  Inside the inner loop, land prices force developers to shift from the typical subdivision, via row houses, to apartment blocks. Tightly packed four-story apartments surround a concrete garage. In turn a wall with one entrance, suggesting the subtle imprisonment of its young white-collar workers, surrounds the block. A mere subdivision on steroids, this almost-perimeter block of apartments screams for stoops and sidewalks, for street life, for urbanity.
- 6  The suburban metropolis is an alphabet city centered around the subdivision, here surrounded by a wall and accessed by one guarded entry. Totally dominated by an internal logic derived from the movement patterns of cars, the subdivision is so simple-minded in its organization that it does not know how to stop. The accumulation of several subdivisions results in a ragged in between, the geographical locus of sprawl.
- 7  The dense gaggle of priapic high-rises, packed on to the old square grid-pattern of downtown streets, form a dense megashape. Apprehended while driving or flying, the megashape takes on symbolic and navigational importance. Actually, Houston's downtown megashape is the energy capital of the world, connecting it to political centers, stock markets and oilfields all across the globe.

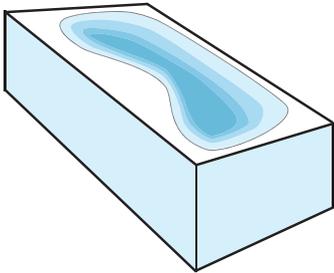
Here is a suburban apartment complex, what I call a “white collar prison.”⁵ It’s all about land prices: land is getting a little more expensive, so we leapfrog. In Houston you know the land prices by the building types. This “white collar prison” is very clever; it has a nice concrete box in which you park your car and then you make a solid four-story block of apartments in wood and stucco and one entry and one exit for your cars, because it’s all walled in. So here live these young workers, the new workforce that is going to make our world so wonderful. They don’t quite know it, but they obviously are. These are perfectly reasonable perimeter buildings in a European situation, and if there were real streets around them they’d be okay. I’m a bit like Peter in this: I don’t really care how it looks, not at this point; we haven’t gotten there yet.

These McMansions⁶ are like suburban houses on steroids, and it’s a real problem that we cannot shift – like a “catastrophic shift” in catastrophe theory – between a suburban world and an urban one. First we have to do something about the infrastructure – especially the street system, those things that Peter so eloquently speaks about. Because we don’t have a vocabulary to think about the “equations” that dominate suburban thinking, we don’t understand why the suburban house dominates everything we do. We’ve failed, and we make idiotic things. And look, we’re fenced in again. Ironically, all that you need to prove is stuck right in between. (It could be so nice. We could fix it so easily: just move that fence.)

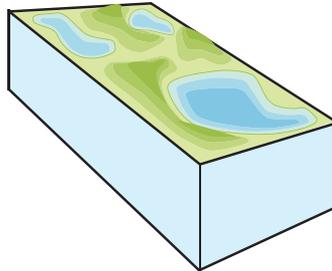
When we look at Houston, we see the city and its weather⁷ – and weather is one of the keys to what I think is a new direction for urbanism in cities like Houston. If we find the



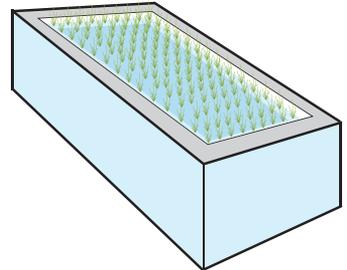
8 ↙ The Fast and Lite City has never had time to recover from its own diffuse expansion, thus thousands of unforeseen consequences result. One of the most dominant is frequent flooding. Here at the end of a flash flood, cars are lined up like insects on a flypaper - never to fully recover, but there are other problems now accumulating into a veritable toxic ecology.



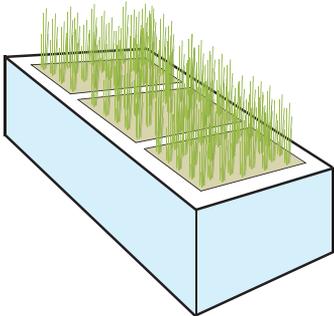
pool roof



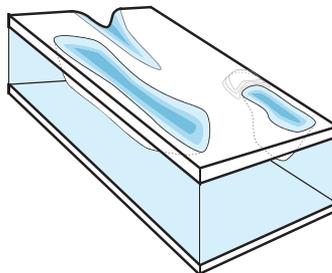
moist prairie roof



rice paddy roof



bamboo roof



S.I.V. House

catalog of roofs

9 ↖ **Flooding Prevention**
 By slowing down rather than speeding up water runoff (which has been common practice in Houston), water can be retained at some of its primary sources such as at the millions of rooftops. Ironically Houston is a city with steeply pitched roofs, when if they were flat as in this catalog, water would be momentarily retained and let go when the storm was over.

new vocabulary, it will allow us to be gardeners or ecologists of the megashape, and then eventually we all come together inside the toxic ecology where everything rubs up against everything else. In that toxic ecology the public domain has to emerge in which citizens actually talk to each other, communicate, because they have a common problem – pollution. Houston is the sinus capitol of the world. All the kids are coughing and the old guys are wheezing, and we are all living on pills.

We have floods.⁸ Flooding is one of the most wonderful things about Houston because it is one of the keys for this future public domain. (About six months later all these flooded cars you see will have a funny smell and be for sale for about five thousand bucks.) The flooding turns out to be an interesting reflection of the military mission.

Then we begin to look closer at suburbia itself, this wonderful paradise. We have at least a million and a half roofs in Houston, and they shed water really fast. The black surfaces produce excessive ozone, and that's where the kids play. The ecology itself has disintegrated because it is totally its own mono-ecology – one kind of grass. A prairie has two hundred species per square yard; there are about fourteen species in the backyard.

All these unforeseen consequences speed up the flooding. Here is an opportunity. If people were a bit educated about what's happening to them they'd get together and talk about how we can deal with it. The problem is you have runoff from a million-plus roofs, and the flood waters carry more residues directly to the bayou. Then the Corps of Engineers paved the bayous to control flooding and thus destroyed the whole ecology of that beautiful

moist prairie and the fantastic life it supported. The bayous, those wonderful snaking streams curlicuing around themselves, are finished.

Now we have total destruction, just because people want the water gone. I say: Slow the water down. We would have flat roofs, and flat roofs are brilliant. If we got the roofers and the pool guys together we could have water on the roof that would drain really slowly into a pond in the backyard. And then we would have new materials that would allow water to seep slowly through. No more black asphalt! If we had these new materials we'd have a completely different world.

We put the ground on the roof, and thus we have a pool roof, a moist prairie roof, a rice paddy roof, a jungle roof, a bamboo roof – a menu of roofs.⁹ Even young architects would find this exciting. We wouldn't have to argue about how it looks because there is an intelligence that drives this: the logic of network analysis. Just consider flooding. To understand it we trace the many unforeseen consequences of collateral damage and we wind up right at home on our doorstep, because that's where the problem begins. We can fix it right there and we would be much better off.

Subdivisions would no longer prevail. It would be one endless return to the moist prairie. We would enjoy living in that bayou world. The bayous would return as wonderful long parks in which we'd have these wonderful ecologies. It is a huge project with fantastic investments that even developers will appreciate. We would have a terrific world.



Discussion



Peter Calthorpe:

Unfortunately Lars and I do not disagree. What I heard was someone saying: Look, face up to what's going on out there. Stop turning away, stop pretending that you are designing things for some kind of ideal world, and begin to understand and name the things that are going on out there.

That active understanding was there. The "speed zone" is something I'm going to start to plagiarize. I think that's exactly the domain we have to work on remaking. It's not just a design ethos, it's a cultural structure in which the civil engineer thinks about one dimension of the problem, the architect thinks about another dimension. Until somebody somewhere begins to break down those boundaries, you are not going to see the design that Lars showed at the end, which means seeing that it's all part of a much larger system.

In my theory that's what urban design is – pulling all the disciplines together and seeing the concurrence, the interdependence of all those. We don't have schools for this – maybe we do here? Lars and I did teach together once, and the subtext of that teaching was to try to make Berkeley what its name implies, which is the College of Environmental Design, which is supposed to pull together the planners and the architects and landscape designers – at least those three. The School of Economics wasn't in there, and they should have been, and all the engineers were in another building. Until those pieces come together and people think comprehensively about how those things interact, you don't get the solutions.

One thing I would contest is the notion that there isn't a problem-solving challenge imbedded in all that. I don't know how to read where you end up on that. I hear many people saying, "This is the way it is, let's look at it, let's appreciate it, and let's be hip enough to accept it the way it is because it's just cool to be cruising down the strip." *Learning from Las Vegas* is just that. I think that's a category I would debate. Would anybody like to come up and play that role?

Robert Fishman, moderator: My question for Lars is: once you've lost the initial euphoria about the *speed zone* and started to analyze, in a fascinating way, the relationship between distance and separation, where do you want to go? Do you want to challenge the basic structure of suburbia?

Lars Lerup:

I think this nation has to realize that the way we build suburbia is a national issue, with enormous problems and terrible collateral damage producing these consequences of toxic ecology. Having agreed with that, we have to face up to the idea that our children will be worse off. We have to face up to thirty-four years of commuting (the sum total in years of the time spent each day by commuters on the Houston freeways) that is beginning to wear on people. There is where we're going to find the solution. I'm not going to find it. We haven't done the market analysis.

If you read, for example, Perry Miller, a wonderful Harvard historian, who wrote about the first Americans who came into the forest and made a clearing, who cut down the trees to make the first suburban house, and how they didn't want to be next to Jews or next to Anabaptists, or whoever. That's fundamentally

who we are as Americans. That is still in our blood, in our upbringing, in the way we live our lives. At the same time there is a liberal allowance, the way all of us exist because we have so much space, and when we come together in the cities, there is great trouble; that's why we separate. One of these days we're going to have to face up to having to talk to each other about this. Let's evolve a little. Let's become grown-ups about what we have produced, and let's be excited about what we can fix and make better and more interesting.

When I made this analysis of the flat roofs, these are examples of the type of network analysis that one has to do in order to reach some of these issues. Over and over again it starts with that house, with that operational force that Miller talked about, that it is ingrained in us. Maybe we will say Look, this is the way we want to live, but there are these consequences that have to be dealt with. Maybe it begins with the space in between the leap-frogged environments that's unpopulated in some way. So maybe there is another solution in what I call light urbanism that is somewhere in-between. There is also an evolutionary step, our own realization that living in the world has affected us.

Calthorpe:

The process you are talking about, Lars, has already started. I think the question has to be addressed on a regional scale. Your diagram of taking what was the city and saying it's the loop is exactly the way I see it. The city is no longer just a city, it is a region. That's why I named my most recent book *The Regional City*. The region itself is now effectively the city. It can be designed, and you can have a dialogue about it

and document all the consequences, intended and unintended; when you put that in front of people they start to make some very intelligent decisions and things progress in ways that I haven't seen happening before.

The context in which I see urban design evolving is only after people attest to the common ground that you articulated. And the common ground is inherently on a regional scale, not at the local scale, not the neighborhood scale. I'm constantly driven crazy by local environmentalists who want to save this little piece of whatever it is in their particular area, and have no concept of the whole. I think that work is underway. It needs more people to invest their time and think about it, especially in the schools.

Fishman: The time has come to turn to the audience to continue this conversation.

Questioner 1: I think you're both fighting the American dream – the attached car and detached house and the notion that if something doesn't work out, one moves out to more and more space. So I think the idea of coming together and talking about suburbia means first of all critiquing the American dream.

Calthorpe:

The reality is, the American dream is a myth. Most people actually now know it. You can shake your head, but I work with people who spend billions of dollars on those questions. They come to me now and they say, We got it wrong, it's no longer a single family world. I'll give you a really powerful example: Newhall Ranch, one of the newest master-planned communities in LA. These are the people on the failing edge of urbanism. They brought you Orange County, they brought you all the

worst of what Lars talked about, and they come now and say, “We got it wrong. Our market is no longer the young family with kids. Our market is an urban market of young single people and older empty nester people. They want townhouses. They want walkable environments, they want urbanism. Can you give it to us?” These are the people who do the market analysis and do the surveys.

It’s a huge hangover myth that suburbia is what people want. People also no longer want just the car. They want the car and also want walking and transit. They want all of the above. They don’t want black-and-white choices. These are all market studies that are being done now that are driving huge investments across this country. I think that discussion is already there and I think we’re at a stage now of trying to confront the question: If that’s the case, if the American dream really is transformed, what do we do, and what are the appropriate urban design forms? It’s a timely question; it’s not a hypothetical question; it’s not something you have to wait for a bunch of studies about. It’s here today. The people who are developing Newhall Ranch can entitle twenty thousand units to be built there over the next fifteen years. Their entitlement is for eighteen thousand single family dwellings. I’m now redesigning and taking it back to the city of Los Angeles, and two-thirds of it is going to be attached housing – up from about 15 percent. Those are massive shifts, already in place. Lars is right, it comes back to the home. If it’s two-thirds attached homes, then the question is, what is the home? If the starting point is multifamily housing, what is the urban form that America takes? Is it those walls in front of the townhouses? No. It’s something

totally different. Is it pure historicism? It's a very interesting field where we don't have to go all the way back to that fundamental debate. We've been having that debate for fifteen years now. We're beyond that.

Lerup:

I think that one of the saddest consequences of the suburban escape is the separation of the city and suburbs in more ways than physical. It's also a bifurcation of governments. For example, in a city like Houston, we have a progressive mayor, who will be there for a certain amount of time, while the guys that are running the county next door are sitting there for life. They are against any change. That means only in the city of Houston will we see innovation. We will have a very different opportunity to make something from the beginning of this escape from the city, embedded in the way we are. The way we think about urbanization is very problematic.

Questioner 2: What I admire most about your work, Lars, is that it takes the problem of freedom to be essential to any discussion of the city. You seem to be talking about the city at a moment in time when our lives are becoming increasingly pre-planned and pre-packaged, and we are confronted with choices which are pseudo choices, or non-choices. It seems to me you are talking about a type of urban possibility which recognizes and embraces chaos, because chaos is part of ourselves. It recognizes that cities have to have a certain vitality, and a certain unruliness and a certain untidiness by nature, and that the energy flows in the city and the contradictions and the messiness and the danger of cities are part of ourselves and part of what makes the city a valuable enterprise, and part of what preserves our freedom. My question is how is it possible to embrace the chaos and get rid of its pathology? Or is it possible, so to speak, to eat the fruit and spit out the pits?

Lerup:

I have enormous respect for folks like you who have taken the step to be out there. I really

「 don't have good answers to that. Ultimately I will probably end up sort of repeating myself because the immigrant experience, the personal experience of what happened to me in this country is spectacular. I was liberated from a trap that was bogging me down in Europe. America has been beautiful to me. So there is something about that desire for liberty that is embedded in the way I think about things. It is a contradiction, just like distance itself. Overcoming the distance is a contradiction in itself. I live that contradiction; I believe in it. If I'm forced to make a decision about it, I will. But in the meantime I will speculate that liberty will somehow remain. If my immigrant dream is going to end up in a cul-de-sac in a subdivision, it's depressing. So instead I live in a cul-de-sac in the form of a high-rise building, which is quite nice. So I can't get out of that dilemma. Maybe that's why I stayed. Not only did Peter teach with me, but if I had been a little nicer I might have been an employee in his office. We would both live in nice big houses in Berkeley. 」

Questioner 3: I'd like to turn the question to Peter in a somewhat different form. I was at the University of Pennsylvania recently, and the planning students were in revolt because they didn't want to do master plans any more. They are planners and they don't want to plan. Especially as you say, as you just did, that the critical scale is the regional scale, it was very impressive to see the Los Angeles plans. It nevertheless raises this issue of freedom, of how much we can do plans.

Calthorpe:

I find this debate mystifying, to tell you the truth. I don't find any freedom out there at all. If you do what Lars said, really analyze the suburbs, it is a completely regimented and

controlled environment. Every piece of it is controlled by the various specialists. Arterials are controlled by the traffic engineers, the subdivisions' configuration is controlled by civil engineers and developers. Life by multiple choice is not freedom in my book.

Creating more urban environments will greatly enhance freedom. If you are talking about developers going out and being able to do whatever they want, wherever they want, and that freedom creating vital, interesting, unexpected landscapes, that's not happening either. When I hear that question, it comes back to me that if you haven't taken the time to study suburbia and understand the mechanisms at work, then you don't know it's highly controlled in terms of what you can do where. It's highly controlled for the user and it's highly controlled for the developer and people who are creating it. There's no serendipity there at all.

Calthorpe:

Do you mean the mobility that says, If it doesn't work here I can go somewhere else; or the mobility that says, I'm going to drive today from the house to the shopping center?

Calthorpe:

But why does everybody seem to assume that to achieve urbanism you have to take mobil-

Lerup:

I agree with that, but you have to overlay mobility, the enormous mobility we have gained in the last century for most of us, a kind of flux that is overlaid on this regimented formula. But liberty can be achieved there. You can say, "I don't like this house. I'm going to move to Omaha." That kind of mobility is what has created a sense of freedom.

Lerup: I mean the motorized sense of freedom.

ity away? The really unique, wonderful thing about American urbanism is that it's always mixed with the automobile.

Calthorpe:

There's the false choice that you have to be in the domain of the software and this elusive spontaneous universal access. I do have universal access. I can get on airplanes, I can use my cell phone. It's quite astounding the mobility we have. I don't see the contradiction in the idea that at home or in the city there is simultaneously a physical presence of diversity and access.

Lerup:

One of the problems I have is the way all architects are so obsessed about hardware, but in fact we are pieces of software. Architects have to begin to operate in a software world, and not be so obsessed with hardware. The hardware is insignificant in the light of what you are doing now.

Lerup:

My point is very simple. Think of the thirty million people in this country who have no mobility. These are the ones we should really help. Isn't it amazing when you think of the incredible boom we had, we still have the same amount of poor people? They haven't moved at all.

We have a vocabulary that we can now name. That's where all this work that you are doing is incredibly important. The equation is changing. It's not the single young family any more. It is a more complicated society; it's getting older, it's even changing its ethnicity. In Houston we have a Hispanic city. Can we change that? No.





Calthorpe:

I want to get back to what this gentleman raised, which is about interacting with the unexpected, having the unexpected be part of the domain we are dealing with. My point is that the existing suburban environment, this very messy process (which, if you study it, isn't messy at all) renders almost no unexpected events or interactions. The urbanism that we need to seek out will deliver much more. You go to Stapleton, and as a designer you'll hate it because it's very nice, it looks so pretty with white picket fences, the ad nauseam New Urbanism. But if you walk around and talk to people there, because of that income disparity that is already embedded in that community, and because they walk and you have a neighborhood school they can walk to and they have parks they can get to on foot, they actually encounter each other and they have more unexpected experiences than in the traditional suburban world. I consider that the foundation of freedom, to have those unexpected events in one's daily life. That's urbanism. And it can happen with picket fences.

Doug Kelbaugh: I think social mobility is still part of the American dream, to move up socially and economically remains a great American success story. You left Europe, Lars, and a lot of people left for it. Do you think it's possible to have social mobility and also a sense of place in urbanism? Do you need the physical mobility that America so celebrates to have the social mobility? Could you simultaneously have the sense of place that Paris or Stockholm has, and social mobility?

Lerup:

I don't know. Mobility allowed Americans to buy those new houses. That is connected to our production, making things, and it seems to me that it is difficult to answer where they

have come. It has a lot to do with work; we have productivity increasing enormously in this country, but not jobs. It's very complicated because it is hitting at a large class of people that are permanently unemployed. Those are the kinds of issues that are affecting the way we are as Americans.

Questioner 4: To Peter: Have you ever done a project where you have decreased the developer's idea of land density?

Calthorpe:

I have done projects where we have decreased the land area dramatically, but not decreased the density. We always increase the density because that's also a measure of diversity.

Questioner 4: I understand, but what I am suggesting is that New Urbanism is based on essentially an economic trick, which is as old as re-zoning. Land that has conceptually and within local codes been conceived of as low-density, single-family housing is bought at prices that reflect that intention, is developed at intensities that create much larger capital flows profitable to developers and ultimately, I suppose, to you and to your firm. There is a massive economic engine that drives this and I imagine that the ideology rides behind it, as ever, to the bank.

Calthorpe:

There are many developers that won't hire me because I will insist on diversifying the housing product, and they've done what they call their residual land value analysis. Their highest and best residual land value comes out of large-lot single family. In many markets today they will not render a higher value by higher density. Higher density doesn't always produce higher value for the developer by a long shot. As a matter of fact, that's why our kind of projects aren't ubiquitous.

Questioner 4: Not ubiquitous indeed, because the bulk of development continues on an older model. I wonder if I might ask a simple question. There seems to me to be three fundamental categories being put on the table: One is urban, Manhattan-style density, or European – extremely high density; New Urbanism which seems to be based on an English village model; and then suburbia, always in lectures like these seen from helicopters and planes, deadly stuff, I would dare say.

There are some beautiful older suburbs close to towns and campuses, full of old trees, they have beautiful old yards, and the houses are close to each other. They achieve a density and a variety which is not all banal, nor are they English villages built from scratch. Why do we not micro-analyze that very quality of suburban life?

I believe that urban-suburban life is possible with one-and-a-half cars, shall we say, at three units to the acre, with little fish ponds and the whole thing. It's either blatant suburbia, or it's a new urban village, or it's New York? Those are not the options.

Calthorpe:

The problem is that everything gets stereotyped easily. Urbanism isn't just a cute village plan. In my mind urbanism is absolutely independent of density. You can have very low density urbanism. The qualities that you agreed to in the neighborhoods we're talking about are still there. Is it walkable? Those older neighborhoods tend to be more walkable. They at least have sidewalks, which is not currently always the case. I think, Lars, you physically demonstrated the notion of front and back in terms of the relationship of facing the street. These are design principles we all adhere to.

Lerup:

In my first book, I did a very close study of Berkeley. I am all for that type of analysis, clearly. My whole argument today is that we should pay much closer attention to what we have, and understand it in a way that is not always negative and in fact productive. Out of that maybe we'll see some new space that we never thought about. That is the promise that I see in analysis.

Questioner 6: If architects are not urban designers, who is, and what makes an urban designer? And how do you differentiate urban design and urban planning?

Calthorpe:

First of all there is no profession of urban designers. There is a profession and license for landscape design, for planners, for civil engineers, for structural engineers, for traffic engineers but not for the most important profession, urban design. There is a huge void there and you put your finger right on it. That's the missing link, until there are people who have the sensibility of urban design, and by that I mean somebody who understands architecture, ecology, economics, planning, and landscape design. The key word is designer. I care about physical design when it comes to things like the organization of space.

There is a profession waiting to be born, that is not a kind of catchall. Sometimes people slip out of architecture and become urban designers, but that's pretty rare because they are so fascinated with the building. Sometimes good landscape designers become urban designers, but they are not trained to. There is a lot of empathy in the planning field, but very little talent or skill for it because they have no design training, so I think you've put your finger on what is the missing link in all this. We don't have a profession to address these problems in the way they need to be addressed.

Lerup:

If we followed suburbia in the beginning – these are very complex matters – if we looked at early subdivisions in Houston in the 1940s when a lot of new subdivisions were created, some of the developers hired architects, be-

cause most developers actually hung on to their subdivisions. Then they realized it was better to just set up the subdivision and distribute it among a bunch of builders who didn't hire architects. They hired building designers instead because the fee on those buildings was 5 percent. There was the beginning of the atomization of the building industry. The architect was written out of it, and realized there's no way to make a living at it. I would have taken 8 percent or 5 or even 3 percent. But in fact it was a much more consequential economic effect that was going on in suburban development. If architects had stayed in there and somehow dealt with that squarely, we could have had a chance to design suburbia.

Those original suburbs in Houston were actually quite good. It was around 1960 when they started to fall apart. Between 1945, with the first freeway in 1950, the Gulf Freeway, and into the early 60s, was a moment when there were some interesting things happening in building types, a lot of Villa Savoies that were actually very economical office buildings. You made a small office building and you parked underneath, and they were rolled out along Richmond Avenue and places like that. They lasted for a very brief moment because the land prices changed. Every city has a complex story behind its evolution, and we need to begin to pay attention to that. We can't do it by looking only at the physical; we have to look at the whole perspective.

Fishman: Urban design might not be a profession yet, but I think we are in the presence of two genuine urban designers, and I can think of no better compliment to pay them.





Robert Fishman





Peter Calthorpe began the discussion section of this debate with the statement, “Unfortunately, Lars and I do not disagree.” He was essentially right – except for the word “unfortunately.” Their broad areas of agreement energized rather than vitiated this debate, because they enabled us to see how difficult, ambitious, and perhaps impossible their shared ideals of urban design can be.

Lars’ vision of the renewed “wet prairie” that would replace the Houston subdivisions reminds us that both Lars and Peter were formed by the ecology movement in its earliest and most idealistic period of the 1970s. Both have internalized the key message that our built environment has reached a stage of crisis in its relationship to the natural world; both have drawn the conclusion that this crisis must be a fundamental starting-point for architecture and urban design. They both seek a design philosophy and practice that challenges conventional practice; operates simultaneously at all scales; and responds with appropriate vigor and imagination to the overwhelming dangers of the ecological crisis itself.

Compared to the Everyday Urbanism of the first debate, both Peter and Lars call for design solutions whose ambitions extend well beyond the local and the improvisational that is the strength of Everyday Urbanism. Compared to the Post Urbanists of the third debate, both Peter and Lars refuse to celebrate the flow of technological change, and seek instead to radically alter that flow in the cause of both social and ecological values.

As Peter especially emphasized, a design philosophy of this ambition will inevitably be distorted in practice. At the scale of the indi-

vidual project, the market and the developer rule. At the regional scale, acknowledged by both Peter and Lars to be critical, the problem is that no one rules; instead there is a chaos of broad market forces, interacting with competing and often impotent layers of government. Finally there is the limiting force of American culture, which, as Lars brilliantly analyzed, seems to mandate a physical distancing at the same time that Americans devote tremendous energy to overcoming that distance.

Although, in design terms, Lars would seem to be the radical and Peter the conservative, one could argue that – especially at the regional scale – Lars is the more conservative. In my reading, he essentially accepts and even glorifies the existing Houston regional ecology – what he calls the “speed zone” formed by the automobile moving at high speed over the landscape, with its concomitant marginalization of the pedestrian scale. This “conservatism” at the regional scale forces him into more ever-more-radical design solutions at the scale of the district or subdivision. His “wet prairie” leaves the plan of the conventional suburban subdivision essentially intact; but the flat roofs of the detached houses and supporting landscaping radically alters and mitigates the suburb’s ecological impact on the land.

By contrast, Peter believes that the structure of the region can be fundamentally altered to stop sprawl at the edge; to promote mass transit alternatives and thus to maintain dense transportation corridors and a vital center. Within this radically re-formed region, he then finds a crucial place for traditional urban design solutions based on pedestrian-scale neighborhoods. Hence the paradox that Peter

introduces at the very beginning of his talk: far more than Everyday Urbanism or Post Urbanism, New Urbanism responds directly to the American consumer's desire for what he calls "a sense of scale and history and uniqueness." Indeed, the resulting neo-traditional neighborhoods have left New Urbanism open to the charge that it is merely "retro" and "nostalgic." And yet New Urbanist principles, especially at the regional scale, are radical, indeed utopian.

Lars, as I would interpret him, is more consistently modernist in his orientation. Despite his stated objective to put as many miles as possible between him and Europe, he carried with him the intellectual legacy of the great European modernists who saw technological change as driving fundamentally irreversible changes in form. (Even if these new forms, like the "wet prairie," are technological attempts to heal the inadvertent consequences of other technologies.)

Peter, by contrast, is more pragmatic in his willingness to adapt solutions from the past, e.g., revived light rail systems, or splitting arterial highways into smaller, one-way streets to create a miniature grid – all to produce a mix of past and present. Hence the force of the sharpest exchange of the debate, when Peter responded to Lars' invocation of "the motorized sense of freedom" with the question: "But why does everybody seem to assume that to achieve urbanism you have to take mobility away? The really unique wonderful thing about American urbanism is that it's always mixed with the automobile."

Not surprisingly, the audience raised many of the fundamental objections to both Peter's and Lars' positions: the difficulty of

challenging the “American dream”; the seemingly inevitable relationship between urban chaos (bad) and urban freedom (good); the positive values in suburbia, especially the older suburbs. Here it is worth taking seriously both Lars’ and Peter’s responses. However alarming the general trend toward ever-greater ecological crisis, there are some important counter-trends that might indeed become the basis of a renewed architecture and urban design. As Peter emphasized, market trends themselves have begun to work against conventional suburban design.

Both in his initial statement and in his responses to questions, Peter drew from his own practice to show how he built on those trends and, in social terms, went well beyond them: mixed-income developments in the suburbs; new communities in the inner cities; pedestrian-oriented districts along the split arterials; and, the most challenging work-in-progress of all, a regional plan for Los Angeles. In this context, Lars very interestingly acknowledged that Houston’s “inner city” is now growing faster than its sprawling “outer city”; and that this hybrid pedestrian/motorized district – the “stretched inner city,” as he calls it – is “the hope for the American city as far as I am concerned.”

The last question from the audience raised a fundamental issue for all three debates and thus formed a fitting conclusion to this one: “If architects are not urban designers, who is? And what makes an urban designer?” As Doug Kelbaugh observed in his introduction to this debate, both Peter and Lars worked against the grain of architectural education to make themselves urban designers. Peter’s call for a true profession of urban design made up

of people “who understand architecture, ecology, economics, planning, and landscape design” is, as he very well realizes, a call for a new kind of education. Similarly, Lars’ concluding blast at an architecture profession that largely abandoned suburbia is a call for a new kind of urban design practice. Daniel Burnham would have been pleased: there were no little plans in this debate.

Contributors

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