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Where is the Urban Design Discourse?

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Reading Doug Kelbaugh's "Toward an Integrated Paradigm: Further Thoughts on the Three Urbanisms" (*Places*, Vol. 19, No. 2) brought to mind an attempt I recently made to distinguish current modes of urban design thinking. What Kelbaugh has identified as schools of thought, I tend to see more as "force fields." And where he identified three, I have identified at least six.

The context of my effort was a position paper for the "Urban Design: Practices, Pedagogies, Premises" conference held by the Columbia University Graduate School of Planning and Preservation, in New York, in 2002. My comments were intended to spark debate on the nature of urban design discourse in the various master-degree-granting urban design programs (among them, Berkeley), and in what appeared to be an expanding "market" of urban design practices.

I wrote that the last five (plus) years had witnessed the emergence of a remarkable number of publications that theorize about or analyze the urban condition and that propose approaches to its design challenges. I noted that these highly varied modes of thinking were consistent with the multidimensional considerations of the city—its layers of social, political, economic, experiential and aesthetic meanings.

I further wrote that any attempt to identify specific "force fields" in this contested discipline is dangerous and potentially arbitrary. Some certainly could be broken down into finer grains of distinction; whole regions may be missing; and still other different, perhaps "weaker" fields remain to be identified. Nevertheless, a lack of open dialogue was forcing students to reflect on these theoretical differences and arrive at their own conclusions. I therefore identified six "force fields"
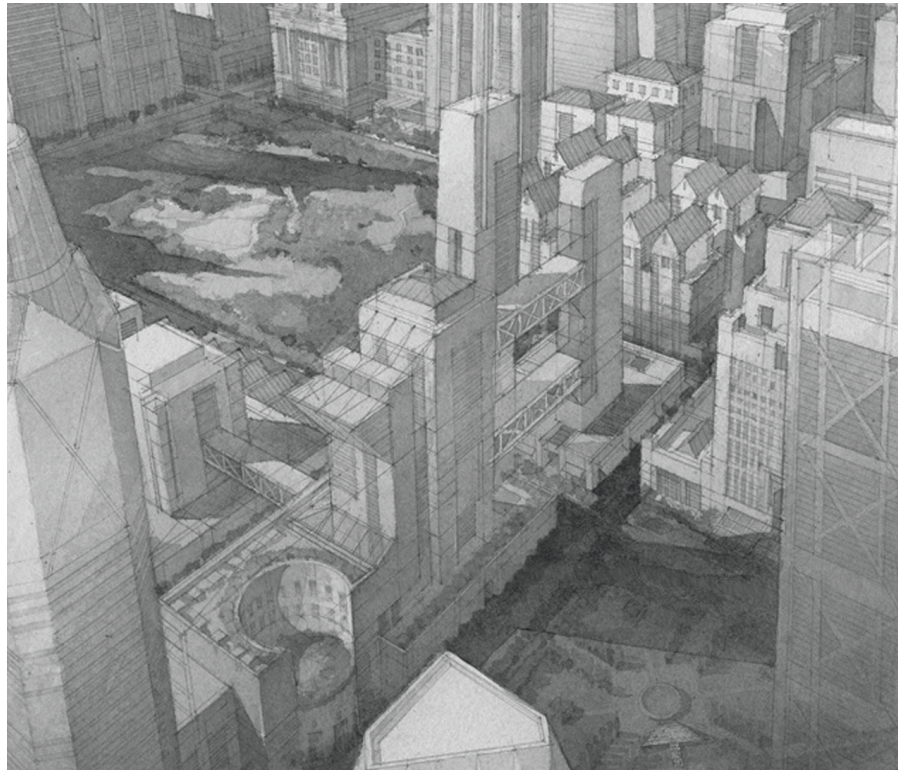
that appeared to have enough coherence to warrant examination: Everyday Urbanism; Generic Urbanism/Hyper-Modernity; Hybrid Urbanism; New Urbanism; Transformative Urban Morphology; and Urban Ecological Reconstruction.

The chart on the following pages encapsulates what I called a "highly fluid constellation." I attempted to show that each had its own internal assumptions, theoretical underpinnings or roots, analytical or representational tools, teaching pedagogies, and design practices.

Charting these positions revealed some interesting dynamics. For example, many of the outwardly opposing positions cited the same texts as theoretical roots (i.e., Jane Jacobs for New Urbanism, Everyday Urbanism, and Empirical Urban Morphology). How do variant read-

ings of these common texts spawn such different trajectories? Would articulating these differences shed light on what each group deems essential for a "good" city?

Why are many of the representational modes or analytical methods similar across "force fields"?

And what is the formative role and importance of the constituents served (or foregrounded) in shaping practices and pedagogies? How do the assumptions and values of "clients" or agencies sponsoring work (the people who have to say "yes") "legitimize" different theories and methods?

Above: Views of the "good" city depend on one's position with regard to the force fields detailed on the following pages. However, this imaginary view shows how different kinds of urban form can participate in a larger public dialogue. Drawing by Al Forster.

EVERYDAY URBANISM	GENERIC URBANISM / HYPER-MODERNITY	HYBRID URBANISM
PREMISES • Focuses on the everyday space of public activity, the common place. • Explores the completely ignored spheres of daily existence as a crucial arena of modern culture, seeing them as sites of creative resistance and libratory power. • The city is above all a social product; the goal is to make a work of life. • The temporal is as significant as the spatial. • Challenges the "proper" places of the city. It constitutes counter-practices; its tactics are the "art of the weak," incursions in the field of the powerful.	**PREMISES** • Denies traditional concepts of order and omnipotence. • Looks to create "the staging of uncertainties." • Searches for "enabling fields" or frameworks that accommodate hidden processes. • Discovers "invaluable hybrids." • Recognizes "bewildering immersion" in the overwhelming forces of urbanization fueled by the flows of global capital and consumption. • Advocates for a "new newness."	**PREMISES** • Believes that there is no such thing as the "traditional" or "modern" city. • Tears apart assumed dualities and introduces the "logic of hybridity" ("not only, but also"): a third place. • The new "identity" or "other" defies the norm and challenges the hegemony of a dominant majority.
THEORETICAL ROOTS • References the writings of Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Michel de Certeau, and Fredric Jameson. All these authors have linked theory to social practice in an effort to provide "a new meaning for life's experience."	**THEORETICAL ROOTS** • Postmodern, poststructuralist writings of Derrida, Baudrillard, Foucault, Jameson, and Lefebvre. • It casts a critical "gage" in an attempt to recover elements of the modernist project.	**THEORETICAL ROOTS** • Postmodern, poststructuralist writings of Derrida, Foucault • Cultural analysis of colonial and postcolonial conditions.
MODES OF REPRESENTATION • Diagrams of activities, their repetitive and cyclical or linear nature. • Photographs of everyday activities, documenting the "performance vernacular."	**MODES OF REPRESENTATION** • Through graphics and narrative, it challenges and interrogates all the traditional elements and modes of the city.	**MODES OF REPRESENTATION** • Primarily a theoretical construct. Affects the interpretation of "hybrid" architectural types and the "identity" of urban places. • No distinct mode of visual representation beyond those of traditional architectural and urban analysis. Primarily represented by narrative. Therefore, perhaps, "storyboards."
PEDAGOGIES • Studio problems focus on unofficial, visible but hidden, underexplored, sometimes marginal urban sites. • Students are asked to document the everyday life of these places. • Students then propose imaginative transformations of these unpromising sites.	**PEDAGOGIES** • Uses classic studio formats to explore the generic programs of late capitalist cities, i.e., the highrise, big-box retail, office parks, etc. • Programs are "XL" architecture as urban catalyst.	**PEDAGOGIES** • Embedded in cultural studies; does not have an "urban design" pedagogy as such. • Primarily interpretive, not generative.
ROLE OF DESIGNER • A radical repositioning of designs, shifting power from the professional expert to the ordinary person. • Immersed in everyday life rather than superior to or removed from it. • Illustrates alternatives; lets constituents build arguments for preferred solutions.	**ROLE OF DESIGNER** • Takes the stance of curious aesthetic observer (perhaps "ooyear") of late-capital urbanization. • Attempts to give aesthetic presence to urban chaos and octality: "the hypermodern dystopia of the city as a shopping mall."	**ROLE OF DESIGNER** • Attempts to create a "hybrid" language of urban and architectural form, one that is neither traditional nor modern, but a third form.
PRACTICES • Not necessarily mainstream; projects are community based. • Focuses on previously unrecognized activities. • Frequently led by critical, academically assisted practices/teams. Tactical rather than strategic.	**PRACTICES** • Best represented by the practice of Rem Koolhaas's OMA. • Incorporates social components of the city, like the street, in projects of "XL" architecture.	**PRACTICES** • The subject of global and multicultural practices
CONSTITUENTS • Disenfranchised and marginal groups, community groups, neighborhood organizations, "unsponsored" activities.	**CONSTITUENTS** • Large global corporations, large institutions, large developers.	**CONSTITUENTS** • Designers themselves, because it is a conceptual approach, subject to interpretation. Perhaps multicultural clients; corporations searching for a distinct identity.
IMPORTANT TEXTS • Chase, Crawford, Kaliski, *Everyday Urbanism* • Hood, *Urban Diaries* • Alexander et al., *A Pattern Language* • Scott-Brown, *Urban Concepts*	**IMPORTANT TEXTS** • Koolhaas, *S,M,L,XL* • Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* • Sorkin, *Wiggle*	**IMPORTANT TEXTS** • AlSayyad, *Hybrid Urbanism* • AlSayyad, *Traditional Dwellings* and *Settlements Review*, the journal of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments • Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

NEW URBANISM	TRANSFORMATIVE URBAN MORPHOLOGY	URBAN ECOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION
PREMISES • Opposes the dominant, car-dependent, single-use zoning, suburban model. • Believes in the nineteenth-century walkable, transit-accessible development model to support urban life. • Believes the proper focus of design is the walkable "neighborhood," with a "lexicon" (or hierarchical "transect") of streets, blocks, and building types, including a traditional range of public open-space types, from the "country" to urban sidewalks, parks, and squares. • Believes in a contemporary transformation of historical precedents and the creative/critical application of regional styles.	**PREMISES** • Believes in the empirical analysis of existing urban patterns and posits incremental improvements or revisions to existing types. • Conducts analyses of both the physical and social dimensions of the city and tries to interpret multiple readings and meanings.	**PREMISES** • Advocates a "postmodern ecological vision" described by Charlene Spretnak as crucial to humanity's survival. • Calls for a resurgence of body, nature, and place as a rejection of the abstractions of modernity.
THEORETICAL ROOTS • Team 10, Jane Jacobs, early twentieth-century town planning, Vincent Scully and Robert A. M. Stern, Kenneth Frampton's "Critical Regionalism" • Furthering the positive results of the Enlightenment, i.e., rational analysis and critique.	**THEORETICAL ROOTS** • Advocates the intellectual reconciliation of Enlightenment and postmodern agendas by refusing to choose between humanism and science, by insisting on preserving (and using) the positive achievements of both. • Roots in American "pragmatism;" complex mixture of phenomenological and structural; Team 10 critique of CIAM as a beginning. Includes the work of Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, Donald Appleyard, and Robert Venturi/Denise Scott Brown, Kenneth Frampton's "Critical Regionalism," and selectively, Colin Rowe's "Collage City," in its lineage.	**THEORETICAL ROOTS** • Derives from the Enlightenment's concerns for a more humane application of science. • Following Ian McHarg, seeks to understand and manage the complex interdependence of man and nature, not to dominate or exploit nature.
MODES OF REPRESENTATION • Figure/ground analysis, rendered plans of building and landscape types; axonometric views of building types, a "code" of mixed-use building types, etc.	**MODES OF REPRESENTATION** • Diagrams of activities and movement, "cognitive" mapping figure/ground analysis, diagrams of natural systems, typological analysis, empirical measures, three-dimensional representation, and simulation.	**MODES OF REPRESENTATION** • Layered two and three-dimensional mapping • Geographic information systems • Layered axonometric diagrams of ecological systems, including geomorphology, soils, drainage, hydrological systems, flora, fauna, ecological succession, and climatic processes.
PEDAGOGIES • Employs classic design studio models of analytical synthesis. • Analysis of historical precedents and types, including regional styles • Searches for appropriate prescriptive codes. • Programs range from neighborhoods to regions.	**PEDAGOGIES** • Follows traditional studio models of critical analysis and synthesis in interactive cycles. • Students usually tackle problems that are real in that they have been targeted for study or development by clients, agencies or institutions. • Projects range in scale from specific infill projects, infrastructure design, neighborhoods, and districts to regions.	**PEDAGOGIES** • Mapping the suitability of joint human-use and natural systems; mapping of historic conditions and ecological successions to discover latent restoration potentials • Ecological reconstruction as physical amenities for other redevelopments (i.e., Design Center for American Urban Landscape Projects) • Studios which explore the "greening" of urban open-space types like streets, parks, etc. Ecological processes as a functional and aesthetic design generator.
ROLE OF DESIGNER • Expert analyst and synthesizer • Client educator (especially about the efficacy of the agenda of the Congress for the New Urbanism).	**ROLE OF DESIGNER** • Designer is cast as expert analyst and is expected to develop design alternatives and build an argument for a specific proposal using empirical evidence and aesthetic insight and judgement.	**ROLE OF DESIGNER** • Expert analyst, illustrates ecological reconstruction as design and development potential.
PRACTICES • Include regional master plans, general plans, subdivision plans, neighborhood plans. • Best known through work of DPZ, Calthorpe Associates, and other Congress for New Urbanism members, but has become one of the dominant modes of urban design practice.	**PRACTICES** • Represents the more typical urban design practices. • Professionals produce infill proposals, area plans, strategic master plans, infrastructure designs, regional plans, design guidelines, etc.	**PRACTICES** • Ecological reconstruction and environmental planning have become major sectors of landscape practice (see the work of EDAW, SWA, Hargreaves, Pogenpoll, etc.).
CONSTITUENTS • Developers, planning boards, city councils, neighborhoods, regional agencies	**CONSTITUENTS** • Local and regional planning agencies, cities, institutions, corporations, citizen groups, etc.	**CONSTITUENTS** • Large public agencies, regional and local park boards; city planning departments and public works, developers, large institutions, organized citizen groups.
IMPORTANT TEXTS • Calthorpe, *The Next American Metropolis* • Duany et al., *Suburban Nation* • Congress for the New Urbanism, Charter for the New Urbanism • Kelbaugh, *Common Place* • Kelbaugh, *Pedestrian Pocket Book*	**IMPORTANT TEXTS** • Smithson, *Team 10 Primer* • Jacobs, *Life and Death of American Cities* • Lynch, *Image of the City; Good City Form* • Brown, *Urban Concepts* • Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City* • Kostof, *The City Assembled* • Bosselman, *Representation of Places*	**IMPORTANT TEXTS** • McHarg, *Design with Nature* • Spirn, *Language of Landscape* • Nassauer, *Placing Nature* • Morrish, *Civilizing Terrains*