

## CNU BOOK XII.

Around twenty five years ago, when the world was suffering through the acute phase of architecture's post-modern pandemic, Kenneth Frampton compared the plight of architects to that of Odysseus in Book XII of the Odyssey. The survival of Architecture, he argued, demanded a course between what he called "the Scylla of uninflected modernism and the Charybdis of historicist kitsch." He meant to be amusing, but I took his warning seriously and throughout my career I have tried to chart just such a course. It is also how I have tried with mixed success to steer the good ship New Urbanism which has had its own share of perilous adventures that have continued to this day. New Urbanism in fact seems on the verge of something that combines many of the perils of the Odyssey's Book XII. We too are sailing between monsters that threaten to devour us, only these new monsters also have the qualities of the Sirens from the earlier part of Book XII, with sweet songs so seductive that we might happily just sail ourselves into their embrace and simply disappear so completely that we no longer exist even in memory.

One of these powerful, infinitely alluring mythic beasts is named *Sophalsis*, which in ancient Greek means "Smart Growth". In the mythological order of things, New Urbanism often claims to be the father of *Sophalsis*, but this offspring of ours has become so huge and cannibalistic that she threatens to consume our very flesh in ways that nourish her but eradicate our separate identity completely as we sail blithely into her oh-so-sweet embrace.

The other mythic monster we face is named *Archaïos Oikodemos*, which roughly translates as "classical architecture". Some Olympian gossip has it that *Archaïos Oikodemos* is really the father of New Urbanism, but even if that is true, there is a serious Oedipal and reverse Oedipal problem here that sixteen years on the analyst's couch has failed to resolve. The long years of aimless yakity-yak about style is a big reason that so many now feel that talk therapy is a profound waste of time.

It would be a complete bore to recount what has been said in that analysis of the troubled relationship between New Urbanism and its mythic father *Archaïos Oikodemos*, but let it be said the threat that the father poses to the son is a real one. It is ground I have covered before at CNU conferences in hyper-extended metaphors that are just as strained and pretentious as this one, and I promise not to take you on that journey today.

Instead what I want to do is make the case to you the crew of the good ship New Urbanism that we must sail on, as resourcefully, with the same devotion to our own identity and self-preservation that made Odysseus the original hero of Western literature, for if we are simply metabolized into the sweet gullets of the monsters either side of us, something unique and important to the world will disappear.

The real point of this talk is, of course, like almost all lectures given by architects, to show some projects that I have been working on with the intention of convincing you that they are pretty good. But one important trick I have learned from years of giving lectures like this is not getting to the point for a long time.

I will show you some recent projects, and I will try to convince you of their worth. But first, I want to lead you on a wayward narrative that goes all around the world and forward and backward in time in order to set the frame for these projects and for what we are trying to do with them. I will attempt to show what I think they have to do with the special identity of New Urbanism, as distinguished from its close relatives - public policy about growth on one hand and an architectural movement on the other.

First I want to talk about cities and how they grow.

City growth is an inescapable fact of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it has been for a long time. While for many cities, growth is inevitable, the form that growth takes is not. I want to make the case that there are three main ways in which cities can grow, each completely different from the others. (1) Cities can sprawl and decentralize; (2) cities can erase themselves and build anew; or (3) cities can regenerate themselves more densely within their own structure. In most cases, which path cities follow is a matter of public policy; it is a collective choice that people make, not the workings of some historical process. Sprawl and erasure were the dominant modes of urban growth chosen almost everywhere in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both of these ways of city building were promulgated with such force, with cultural and economic roots so deep and with effects so lasting and pernicious that each has generated an entire literature of counter polemic, of which New Urbanism is part.

The generation of my teachers and mentors believed that sprawl and erasure were absolutely necessary and beneficent. They were every bit as sure of themselves as we are. After WW II, they seized their chance and they built their dream world, just as all of us try to do all the time. Despite our many limitations, architects and planners are astonishingly resourceful and persistent creatures and in many

cases our dreams do actually come to pass eventually. But large numbers of people in much of the world have learned to *hate* everything about that post-war dream world, to *hate* sprawl and to *hate* the erasure of historic cities and historic architecture.

This talk's subject is the third way of city building: reconstruction and expansion within the basic form, if not the physical boundaries of existing cities. The argument for this way of building acquires force when it is compared to the utter uselessness of the other two models for the calamitous beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Absolutely no one on earth argues any longer that the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century automobile dominated city of sprawl is a good thing or that it represents a sensible strategy for the times that lie ahead. For the moment, in most circles *Sophalsis* rules.

Erasure is a somewhat different story, because the brutal urban strategies of clearance and reconstruction that failed so colossally a generation ago seem never quite to go away. The ringing polemics that had such seductive force in the 1930's seem to ring on and on, with wave after wave of crazy people proposing, celebrating, sometimes even building the very things the world learned to despise forty years ago. The deepest, most tenaciously defended bunkers of erasure planning are set in certain schools of architecture. From these bunkers, a world-wide conspiracy communicates in the secret codes of critical theory –gibberish to most people, but a form of jive talk that is comforting to those who speak it.

What neither the sprawl builders, now going broke out on the metropolitan edge, the jive-talking architecture professors in their bunkers, nor part of the American Congress debating stimulus spending have come to terms with, is that we are at the beginning of a time of radical involuntary change. As Jim Kunstler has convinced us , we face the complete retooling of American industry, the American landscape and the American city to equip our society for the age after oil. There is no choice in the matter, the post-oil economy and the post-oil city are upon us, with effects as profound for the 21<sup>st</sup> century as railroads were for the 19<sup>th</sup> and the automobile was for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It's true that zooming around freeway ramps in a nifty handling car is great fun, but it is something to look back on (fondly, if that sort of thing ever interested you), but not to look forward to.

But what we *can* look forward to, our own dream world, may not be so bad. Thanks to Alice Waters and Michael Pollan, there is now an organic vegetable garden at the White House. That is totally amazing, because, think of what it portends. In the times to come, people in many places, and not just in cool places like Denver, may be healthy and fit, spending parts of each day exercising and eating yummy

fresh food. People in more places may be able to walk from one thing to another. More of us may have workplaces where we breathe fresh air, and know the seasons from the nuances of light.

Obama's economists may even succeed in finding the new green substitute for the economic formula that has ruled the world for so long, the formula that says the well-being of everyone depends upon the ever-increasing consumption of material junk. Our frantic preoccupations with the production and consumption of goods may calm down to the point that, from time to time, some of us may actually read, write or think. Perhaps that is a really crazy dream, but whatever its final form, the 21<sup>st</sup> century city of our dreams will be new, but not altogether new. Many parts of it will be like things used to be before the onslaughts of sprawl and erasure, but that requires a certain kind of knowledge.

That is why New Urbanism is important. We are the repository of that certain kind of essential knowledge of city building that no one else really cares about: Not the USGBC, not Smart Growth America, not the Institute for Classical Architecture, and certainly not most schools of architecture, the architectural press or the museum world.

Our subject matter heretofore has been considered the exclusive domain of a geeky few, but I believe should now be a required course for the builders of the post-oil city. The entrance to the subject, its primer, is the urban block - its history, its characteristics both physical and social, and its future. The block is the underlying DNA of the city, and more than that. The formation of urban blocks both reflects and shapes the very structure of society. The eternal lament of architects and planners, that they are prisoners of forces larger than themselves, does not apply completely to the urban block. It is the scale at which those of us who do nothing more than design can have some real effect on the way things are. The form and history of the urban block is the special province of New Urbanism, the straits to sail through between *Sophalsis* and *Archaioi Archodomos*.

Unlike individual buildings (the monomaniacal focus of almost all architects), blocks are not the passive victims of whatever is around them. Unlike buildings, blocks do not depend upon the decontextualizing gaze of the photographer's lense to be of interest or to communicate their intent. There is probably not an architect on earth who has never cropped a photograph of his work. Cropping the image of a building is in some ways an admission of shame, embarrassment or failure. It is confirmation of disharmony between objects and context. It says that the virtual experience of the cropped photograph is purer and more meaningful than real experience *in situ*. Something is deeply wrong when the virtual is somehow

better than the real. We should take the cropping of images of buildings we have made as a warning sign, a signal that we have spent our time on something that is overwhelmed by the reality around it.

No cropping is needed when it comes to blocks. Blocks stand up to their surroundings, shape their context and are a context unto themselves. And unlike larger patterns of urban form, the building of urban blocks need not involve a vast consensus that endures over time or the mysterious workings of history. Blocks can be straight forward projects like buildings - one sponsor, one architect, one source of funds, one set of decisions, all at one time.

Understanding blocks requires the opposite of cropping. Aerial views, drawn or photographed are best. It is a frame larger than perspective. It involves the mind as well as the unedited gaze - the cartographers' intelligence added to what is merely pictorial. It is an understanding that requires additions to daily experience, like an aerial photograph, not subtractions from daily experience, like cropping. The urban block is the building block of the regenerative city, an element of its language, like grammar; and like grammar, one must master it to be fluent

Part of this study of urban grammar is to see how the story of the urban block, or the absence of anything resembling an urban block, has played out in cities where sprawl, erasure or regeneration have been dominant. I will start our journey round and round the block with Paris and use Paris as an example of a place where planners thought that sprawl was a fine idea and not without some good reasons.

In the 1920's and 30's and 40's, Paris flirted with the idea of erasing itself, like an elegant girl flirting with heroine or suicide. Like the elegant girl who decided that her fancy life wasn't so bad, Paris thought better of it. Paris has remained herself, with a vengeance, and only the most perverse would argue that the world isn't better for it. But things might easily have turned out differently, if Hitler, Le Corbusier or any number of other madmen had had their way. (I don't think there have ever been mad *women* who seriously proposed the destruction of Paris).

But what if General Dietrich von Choltitz had not summoned the courage to lie to Hitler when he was asked the famous question, "Is Paris burning?" And what if anyone else had taken Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin to replace the historic center of Paris with a grid of identical high rises as seriously as he took it himself? Hitler and Le Corbusier were not the only people to propose the razing of Paris. French

fascination with New York skyscrapers in the 1920's led to a whole series of photomontage fantasies superimposing New York's biggest buildings into the most precious parts of Paris.

In the end, perhaps because those images were so horrific, big new modern buildings were banished to the edge of the City. To accommodate huge office floors for corporate business, manufacturing at the scale of modern industry and the population influx to the prospering capital, Paris created the satellite of La Defense and the vast environment of the *Peripherique* surrounding the City. These are architectural free-fire zones where the tight bond between the form of buildings and the form of the city is severed completely. That is the most important difference between sprawl and cities; the severed bond is what defines sprawl. Once the bond is severed, the urban block disappears.

For three glorious centuries, from 1550 to 1850, Paris managed radical changes without severing the bonds among streets, blocks and buildings. It is the Paris of Henry IV to that of Napoleon III that people write songs and make movies about. Gene Kelley never danced at La Defense. The culminations of those three centuries were the magnificent boulevards Baron Haussmann inserted in the Paris of Napoleon III, slicing through the medieval fabric of the City. What makes the boulevards of Paris magnificent, however, was the ability of the City to regenerate its tissue around these radical incisions almost immediately. Haussmann's interventions were huge, but they depended upon the actions of a legion of very small builder/developers and the virtuosity of their architects to reconcile the public face of the new boulevards with the irregular parcels of land they created. Nineteenth century building programs and building standards were flexible enough that the repair of blocks was relatively easy and almost instantaneous.

But I ask the architects in this audience to imagine what the infill of Haussmann's Paris would have been like if every apartment needed two fire exits, an elevator, 1.5 parking spaces, handicapped access and a prescribed amount of daylight for every room. Paris has none of that, but the fact remains that Paris with its tight bond of streets, blocks and buildings is beautiful and life-sustaining and the *Peripherique* is a horror show, where streets and buildings don't even greet one another in passing and there is no such thing as a block.

The reconciliation of urbanity and building typology— real cities and modern buildings - is a profoundly different, unavoidable and much more complicated game in our day than it was in those in the three centuries of Parisian glory. My own career has been largely devoted to this complicated game since I

discovered the great fascination of playing it more than thirty years ago. It is a game which I contend embodies the central idea of New Urbanism

The severed bond between the form of buildings and the form of the city is the one crucial trait that sprawl and erasure share with one another. It is why most modern architects are more comfortable with either sprawl or erasure than they are with the regeneration of the historic city. It one reason they don't like us. For architects, it's their *thinghood* thing. The love of *thinghood* is a unifying theme that stretches all across the multiple generations and multiple isms and sub-isms of the modern movement; it is modern architecture's main idea. *Thinghood* is somewhat like *manhood* – a point of pride, something to be asserted and defended, something male adolescents think of as terrific. It is why Rem Koolhaas is fond of the pithy epithet, *fuck context*.

*Thinghood* – the autonomy and integrity of building form is the main idea that I was taught in architecture school. In itself, it is not something bad. Quite the contrary. It is why we revere the buildings of Louis Kahn, Mies, Frank Lloyd Wright, all of the modern masters. But with very few exceptions, in very few places, the modern masters never came to terms with the historic city. Instead they embraced the city of erasure or the city of sprawl, both of which permit the eradication of blocks and the uninflected autonomy and integrity of building form they believed in so passionately. The tension between New Urbanism's central idea and modern architectures' central idea leads more often to destructive mutual hostility than to complex, interesting resolution. That complex interesting resolution seems to me what being a New Urbanist architect is all about.

## 2 Beijing.

Paris represents a kind of purposeful sprawl as the answer to the problem of reconciling the building programs of a modern capital and the historic city. Beijing represents the other 20<sup>th</sup> century choice - a great historic city that decided systematically to erase itself to become modern. At a crucial moment, the planners of Beijing had the same options as the post-war planners of Paris and they chose erasure over decentralization or regeneration. There were some thoughtful Chinese architects and planners who believed it didn't have to be that way. Immediately after the 1949 success of the Communist revolution, the China's most eminent architect and architectural historian Liang Sicheng foresaw the pressures that the great imperial capital of China would be subjected to, if and when China became a

modern industrial state. Liang Sicheng is shown here with Le Corbusier and the rest of the International All-Stars on the design team for the United Nations building. The story of the life of this prophetic architect, who was ignored and then viciously persecuted in the Cultural Revolution, is as poignant and as tragic as the story of Beijing itself. Liang proposed preservation of the historic City, converting its magnificent walls to an urban park as has since been done to the medieval walls of Lucca and constructing a new capital immediately west of the historic City.

In the early 1990's, as China's fantastic housing boom was getting started, Liang Sicheng's protégé, Wu Lianglong, built a beautiful prototype for the urban regeneration of the residential fabric of Beijing, the Ju'er Hutong. This lovely project combined two local traditions, the courtyard house and the hutong, or residential lane, into a dense but thoroughly practical and livable new pattern. It was built and then deliberately rejected as a model, as China has eradicated its cities and replaced them with hundreds of millions of new housing units in endless mile after mile of slab blocks devoid of any trace or memory of urban life. Some Chinese academics now pedantically claim that the trouble with the Ju'er Hutong was that it placed a premium on what they dismissively call "use value" as opposed to "exchange value". In other words, the fact that people loved it did not offset the fact that it didn't make as much fast money for speculators and government land expropriators as the slam-bam-thank-you-ma'am rape of Chinese cities that has gone on since the early nineties.

The Beijing Olympics were a culmination of more than fifty years of the urban reconstruction through massive expropriation and willful eradication of an ancient and magnificent urban structure. Fortunately, there is at least one beautiful movie and several books that document the physical place and the way of life that were systematically eradicated. I think one can say that the culmination of that culmination occurred during the Olympics on world-wide television in the last minutes of both the men's and women's marathons. That is when what has been done, why it was done and what it is like were visible in the most dramatic fashion to the whole world. Anyone who has ever run a full 26.2 mile marathon knows how the last mile or two can take on the quality of a nightmare, where you are attempting to move your lactosis frozen body through space with all the force of your being, but the finish-line keeps receding like a rainbow. Maybe the winners of marathons don't experience that nightmare, but all of us other schleppers who have ever raced to exhaustion do. In Beijing, the city planners multiplied the nightmare of the end of the marathon a thousand fold, and they democratized the nightmare by making sure that everyone, not just marathon runners, can have a taste after the



Olympics of what it is like to move their body through space that has lost all dimension, spatial or temporal, including all record of the city life that flourished there for a thousand years.

Herzog and DeMouron's spectacular Bird's Nest, the main symbol of the Beijing Olympics is where the marathons finally ended. The approach to the Bird's Nest, the space created to frame that icon in splendid isolation on world-wide television, formed the last mile and a half of the marathon route. It is a totally vacant expanse of paving where recently tens of thousands of people played out their lives in a dense historic neighborhood. An ant crossing a runway at O'Hare Airport would have more to look at and more to measure his progress by than those runners struggling the last mile and a half to the Bird's Nest. If in the name of progress, modernization and iconic architecture, they have created the ultimate pedestrian dystopia, perhaps there is something to learn about the consequences of urbanism by erasure.

III. . Beijing is the most extreme example of a form of urban reconstruction that many places have attempted: *intensification by erasure*. Hong Kong, between about 1950 and 1995 was the most extreme example of the opposite: *intensification by adaptation and regeneration*.

It is hard even to imagine an urban circumstance more intense than Hong Kong, yet its hyper-density has been built on the urban form, the map, of a fishing village. New building typologies emerged to adapt new economic conditions to the existing structure of streets, lots and blocks. They developed their own fire codes and construction techniques to build tall high rises on the tiny, sometimes irregular blocks of the fishing village. As an intricate network of life-sustaining public spaces in a spectacular natural setting, Hong Kong is without equal. Hong Kong changed radically but as it changed it became more Hong Kong-like and more interesting, - up to a point, but that is another story.

New York is perhaps the most interesting and complex case of all. The New York of the teens and twenties was like Hong Kong, home to the newly invented skyscraper and the site of radical regeneration, with great works like the Chrysler and Empire State buildings built within the block structure of the New York grid. The final achievement of that era was a masterpiece of the regenerative city, Rockefeller Center which opened a new world of spatial imagination and monumentality within the old block structure. Then came Euro-modernism and the era of Robert Moses, 35 years of erasure of New York's block structure as brutal as that of Beijing. Then in 1961, Jane Jacobs slew the mighty dragon

and paved the way for a new generation of radical regeneration that continues to this day and includes New York's most recent buildings The Time/Warner Building and Columbus Circle, Norman Foster's Batman-like Hearst Tower, and Renzo Piano's Morgan Library, a small masterpiece of urbanism that I will use as a segue to our own work.

The Morgan Library is not only an exquisitely detailed modern building, it is an act of block repair that links together a series of historic buildings and provides a new public space as a poetic homage to the special urban character that only occurs in the middle of Manhattan blocks. By framing and honoring that character and putting the life of the Library in a glass pavilion in the middle of the block, it makes us see the beauty and vitality of New York in a new way.

## Part II. Case Studies for the Regenerative City

### 1. Repairing the Freeway Scar in San Francisco: Market/Octavia and the Embarcadero

#### Broadway Family Apartments

In 1989, God gave to San Francisco the mixed blessing of the Loma Prieta earthquake. It did some terrible damage and some fabulously good damage, wrecking beyond repair two of the City's most disruptive and stupidly conceived elevated freeways. We were the urban designers for the repair of the Central Freeway Corridor and are architects for sites in both the Central Freeway corridor and for the parcel where the infamous Embarcadero Freeway ripped into the historic neighborhood of North Beach. These projects are urban regeneration and repair at its most literal.

In the Central Freeway Corridor we established building typologies and design guidelines that repair all the blocks the Freeway had shattered, Our other Freeway repair site is called Broadway Family Apartments, and it attempts to do with low-income housing what Renzo Piano did so eloquently with the Morgan Library, that is capture and organize the space of a mid block as it repairs the perimeter of a block and knits disparate buildings together. The mid-block is a series of passages and courtyards that link the program elements - child care, community space, lobbies, mail and administration and the street.

It is build at the edge of the Northeast Waterfront Historic District and it has a kind of literal contextualism, rigidly, but I think not inappropriately, imposed by the San Francisco Landmarks

Commission. One of the things I like best about this project is the sense of the City around it that you have from within. Contextualism is not only from the outside in.

## 2. Mosaica

For a very long time, more than thirty years, a principal source of my design ideas for San Francisco building has been the original surveys of San Francisco as they were laid out in 1847, 49 and 51. These surveyor's maps were so fundamental in establishing the character of the City that any architect who cares about that character needs to know something about these maps. We have just finished a new mixed-use, mixed-income project, with the unfortunate name Mosaica, on the large block of 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, Florida and Alabama in media gulch. It shows a couple of the things that we have learned from the City's first surveyors, Jasper O'Farrell and William Eddy. San Francisco is a series of colliding grids that ignore topography. The subdivision of the grid into lots of ten varas or approximately 25 ft establishes the basic and enduring building typology of much of the City fabric. The subdivision of blocks by mid-block lanes in the parts of the City laid out by Eddy establishes an intimate sub-scale that is a large part of the City's charm. The character of many neighborhoods today is based on that original structure of blocks, lots and lanes, but older neighborhoods have some blocks where, for one reason or another, the land was aggregated and the lot lines and lanes were erased. Today it is most often these aggregated parcels are where one gets to build, and almost always today one is asked to build to a program that won't fit into the old structure of small lots. Whether it is low-income housing, housing for the rich or the work place, the organizations that build things today are larger than those that built on the nineteenth century pattern of lots. Contextualism, if one believes in such a thing, doesn't happen automatically, when the underlying economics of the city are different from those at the time the city was conceived.

The Mission District is one of those old neighborhoods where the original structure is very much intact, housing a robust mix of everything; poor people, yuppies, artists, artisans, clubs, places to eat - a very cool part of the City if you don't know it. Our large block had been aggregated as a bus storage yard and this was hotly contested turf. Many different people and groups had their own ideas about what should happen to it; all of them were passionate about preserving the character of the neighborhood though they disagreed about what that consists of, and all of them were highly skeptical that a big new project could be a good thing.

We led a very long and in the end remarkably congenial neighborhood design process in which we hammered out the program with the lots of neighbors and, after multiple alternatives, arrived at a block configuration that seemed to make everyone happy. By the time everyone in the neighborhood liked the program, it contained an amazing mix of things with a phenomenally complicated patch work of funding: 93 Low income family rental apartments, 24 apartments for formerly homeless seniors, 21 subsidized ownership units and 13 market rate ownership units, 11,500 sq ft of subsidized artisans workshops and parking for 138 cars.

Getting all of that program on the site and making buildings that fit within the budget of subsidized housing requires very simple double-loaded corridor stacked-flat buildings which, with no manipulation would be completely out of character with the delicate, funky Mission District. There are two design ideas that both come from the old city maps that I think make the project work. First is development of the mid-block space. There is a publicly accessible new lane that passes through portals in the buildings and secure common courtyards that are open to the streets and pass under buildings to the mid-block lane. The second idea is to articulate these big buildings in a way that allows them not to overwhelm the neighborhood most of which is still based on the old 10 vara lot lines. The device is what we call nested bedrooms, that make vertical articulations in the architecture that are more than skin deep. I'll run through a series of images that show these two ideas in action.

The sociologist and writer Nathan Glazer has produced a book of essays called *From a Movement to a Style*, in which he talks about how modern architecture has lost its way. He discusses how formal and technological ideas about building were once rooted in the broad themes of remaking society after the catastrophe of World War I. And he talks about how those same formal ideas and enthusiasms have hung around and devolved into intellectual and stylistic *chic*. He talks about the confusion of architecture with art and the distortion of art by Marxist aesthetic theory. He sees architecture consumed by the culture of an *avante garde* that can only survive in a posture of perpetual disdain for society and the cities it builds. His argument explains the hostility contained in the gnomonic utterance, *Fuck Context*.

I like to think of the last project I will show, David Brower Center and its companion housing piece Oxford Plaza, as a tangible opportunity to put that history on rewind, and put architecture back to work on big themes.

The program and funding are even more complicated than Mosaica: 30,000 sq ft of office and 10,000 sq ft of conference center as a LEED Platinum building, billing itself as the spiritual home for the Bay Area's environmental community, a gallery, a restaurant, 8,500 sq ft of retail, 96 units of low income family housing with some parking and a city parking garage. The site for the David Brower Center and Oxford Plaza were suggested by the City to help heal the historically frayed edge of downtown Berkeley as it meets the campus. This is smart growth at its smartest and an obligation to be green at its greenest as the starting point.

Beginning the design of the David Brower Center with all the aspirations and expectations that were attached to it was as intimidating as design tasks get. At first, I was paralyzed by obligation; I forgot everything I knew and produced a series of sketch designs that may have optimized everything, may have done everything our impressive consultants recommended, but were truly awful, banal, ugly, and spiritless.

Then one morning, I had a design session in our office with two colleagues who pointed out that the burden of ambition around this project had disconnected my hand from that well-stuffed part of my brain where the history of modern architecture lies in state. As soon as they said that, the room magically filled with dancing ghosts: Hans Sharoun and Eric Mendelsohn, Michel De Klerk and his friends in Amsterdam, and some living people like the great English green architect Michael Hopkins, whom I respect as deeply as Hopkins respects Lou Kahn. When I sorted out the ghosts and got them to behave, I saw that there were of two kinds of ghosts: One group was all about surfaces and planarity - planes that are warped, twisted, punched and colored in various ways. The other group is about tectonics – things holding up other things or connected to other things. These are the sketches I made right after the meeting to which we invited the ghosts. Housing which is made of metal studs clad in stucco dances with the planar ghosts. The Brower Center which is a big concrete frame dances with the tectonic ghosts.

The sketches have the essential formal ideas of the project and bend some rules about the optimization of performance. First they show the David Brower Center with exposed columns for the first three floors, a modernist tectonic expression that we know creates small thermal bridges, a minor compromise of the optimal skin. Second they show column spacing that has everything to do with proportions and very little to do with maximizing structural efficiency. The sketches show the bracketed

photo-voltaic cornice that flips as a trellis around the east façade as it goes from south to north. Planarity for the housing and tectonic expression for the David Brower Center o. Planarity meets greenness in planes that are punched, warped, and folded in relation to the sun.

Tectonics meets greenness in the section of the Brower Center - very simple systems for low energy heating, cooling ventilation and daylighting and power generation. The expression of these simple systems added to a modernist sense of tectonics becomes architecture.

But in addition to architectural expression, in addition to greenness, in addition to its smart growth contributions to downtown, I think of the Brower Center as a New Urbanist project because of its formation as an urban block. A sequence of linked indoor and outdoor spaces, framed views of the landscape and buildings around it and newly defined and active streetscapes, those are the features the Brower Center shares with the other two projects, and I think of as New Urbanism.

The triple calamities of the beginning of this century – climate change, peak oil and the near collapse of consumer capitalism – offer for the first time in two generations a sense of redemptive common purpose to everyone involved in the building of the world. Instead of the fractiousness, esoteric preoccupations and stylistic debates we now have a job to do, a job that is as clear as winning World War II. Society is asking us to provide an alternative to sprawl and erasure; Society is asking us to build the regenerative city. We have lots of friends in this undertaking, but for us to play our part we have to be clear about what we and we uniquely bring to the conversation. LEED and the USGBC have started the process of making buildings perform better, they have done nothing yet to create architecture that proclaims poetically, beautifully, powerfully the spirit of the regenerative city. The Smart Growth movement, *Sophasis*, is doing its part, but its part is also only part. Certainly our friends who find inspiration in the history of architecture are doing their part, whether their particular passion happens to be 1580 or 1930. The aggregation of beautiful and sustainable buildings into patterns of spaces for beautiful and sustainable cities is our job. The complex, endlessly fascinating resolution of the tension between things and places is our job. It is why the study of blocks seems so very important to me and central to the special identity of New Urbanists. Sail on.







The sociologist Nathan Glazer has cobbled together a group of essays of uneven quality under the great title *Modernism: From a Movement to a Style*. In the best of these essays, he traces the devolution of a broad social movement to reconstruct European society and culture from the wreckage of World War I. He claims that the threads that bound this movement came apart sometime in the 1920's while the formal devices of its architecture and the posture of perpetual invention that accompanied them have lived on as a form self-renewing but essentially meaningless avant garde. I think that many New Urbanists buy this argument ; in fact some of us made the same claim sooner and better than Professor Glazer, though perhaps not with such a pithy and catchy title. What New Urbanists have been reluctant to recognize, however, is that we have done something very similar to ourselves. New Urbanism has come close to devolving from a movement to a style, and not a very great style like Art Deco or the Secession. Don't get me wrong; I don't dislike style. Quite the contrary; I have the greatest respect for stylists in many disciplines and I think of stylishness as a high virtue.

New Urbanism as a style, however, has some real problems. First, it is not something we ever agreed on. It is not and never was what bonded us to one another. Second, not many New Urbanists are good stylists or are particularly stylish. Frumpy and earnest is more our mode than chic, for better or worse. Yet among us there is a passionate subgroup who are as deeply committed to the revival of classical architectural traditions, skills and building techniques as they are to New Urbanism. In fact they see them as one and the same thing It is the misguided conflation of neo-classical architecture with New Urbanism that threatens both. First, most New Urbanists are lousy neo-classicists. It is simply not in our

souls, not by training, not by inclination, and more fundamentally not through the building culture in which we are forced to survive.

The New Urbanist Style, if I can call it that is a horrible conflation of semi-literate neoclassicism, with the realities and banalities of building culture in our not very exalted time. In the collision of Vitruvius with Hardy-Plank and Drivlt, Vitruvius is the casualty - maimed so far beyond recognition that his spiritual guardians in the ICA won't even claim him as their own.

This is not a version of the *architecture doesn't matter, we have bigger fish to fry* argument. Bad architecture wrecks good urbanism. There is no such thing as a good urban place with lousy buildings. I challenge anyone to show me one. Any kind of bad architecture wrecks good urbanism and conversely, many kinds of skillful, literate architecture bring good urbanism to life.

The claim here is that New Urbanism is not Smart Growth, though they hold one another in a close embrace. The same is true of architecture. New Urbanism depends upon a certain level of architectural excellence, but it is not the same thing. What I want to spend this session doing is defining and illustrating this thing which is neither Smart Growth nor architecture, but is deeply entwined with, and is actually dependent upon both. It is something which in fact ceases to exist, vanishes into ether as soon as it is conflated with either.

I have named this talk *Round and Round the Block* because I believe that the city block occupies a special place in the definition of this thing that is not just growth policy and not just architecture. The urban block has its own history, its own set of skills to master and should be the subject of its own connoisseurship and scholarship.