

elements? Is it the bifurcation of functions, a lack of overlapping textures and details, the compartmentalization of activities, the intrusions of the automobile? Is it too much newness or the “lack of human scale”?

You snap out of it. You are in Venice, a city besieged by tourists and short on residents. The local economy is based on visitors’ capital. The air quality is poor. The water smells and looks nasty. The city is sinking. It is sustainable due only to human stubbornness, not any contemporary criteria of environmental sustainability. Ah, but it is *so beautiful!*

Such vacillation between wishing to perpetuate the venerable urban condition and a clear-headed response to contemporary needs (without reflexive reference to “the good old days”) exemplifies the dialectical nature of urban design.

Consider the meaning of *new* as a prefix to urbanism, as in the currently popular “New Urbanism.” Those unfamiliar with the phrase may surmise that it is a call for a new kind of urbanism, something bold and unprecedented, as sought by the leaders of the Modern Movement in the early twentieth century. For the New Urbanists what is referred to by the *new* is a renewed appreciation for traditional urbanism, a return to urbanism on the part of those disillusioned by the suburbs. To others the *new* in New Urbanism might refer to a repositioning of urbanism, an acceptance (in the face of overwhelming evidence) that low density, peripheral spread, motorized mobility, and decentralized functions are here to stay. Thus, the *new* can refer to unique conditions of contemporary urbanism: shopping malls, office parks, “edge cities,” theme retail and entertainment complexes, and other such historically unfamiliar environments that must be addressed creatively rather than dismissed as aberrations.

One might surmise that such diversity of meaning was intended by whoever invented the term *New Urbanism* and is responsible for its success as a slogan. It combines the allure of the new with an opposite tendency: keeping what is less new but more comforting. Demand for the new in city making is not very common (except for improvement in standards of living), and when it appears, it is more equivocal relative to change in form. Change is exciting *and* unsettling. Indeed, a culture assaulted by new products, technologies, and lifestyles seeks antidotes to change in other spheres of life. Traditionally, our homes and neighborhoods have offered respite from unrelenting external change. It is understandable that an era of ever-hastening innovation