

to eschew any political authority to *plan* except what can be achieved through ostensibly subversive action (thereby reacting to the city as given by the market and the state), find instead a way to attract the urban subject to some seemingly transgressive object of desire, script an unlikely mix of characters and props, and wrap a frame around the whole ensemble. When it is needed, add irony liberally.

When Allan Kaprow invented the “Happening” on the cusp of the 1960s, he was reenacting, through an aleatory form of avant-garde total theater, modes of community, engagement, and chance encounter that had been disappearing from the city. That disappearance was accelerated in the postwar era for reasons already described: suburban migration, emerging cultural pluralism, and its backlash, xenophobia. But that was a half a century ago. Surely we are in another moment when it might be possible to locate other, less defensive conceptions of our shared existence in the city and how they can be manifested in form. Projects at scales not often enough considered by urban design point the way, such as Atelier Bow-Wow’s Micro Urbanism studies and even OMA’s Point City, South City, Project for Redesigning Holland, which co-opts the figure-ground to rhetorically ask questions about the deployment of density at the scale of an entire country. Yet, despite dominating the discourse on urbanism in the schools, Koolhaas and his brood, beyond their happening-in-a-container architectural works, have little interest in the central question for the urban designer today: how can the many interests that now contend for the future of any valuable site or condition in the urbanized landscape have their desires better realized by design, that is, how, by acting as an agent of democracy, can urban design help invent a better city?

Landscape urbanism, a neologism of relatively recent vintage, has promised to take up the torch where the dense-Dutch invasion (and McHarg) left off, providing a needed challenge to urban design orthodoxy. Landscape urbanism’s most vaunted agenda is to articulate a sustainable urbanism capable of retrieving wasted areas by solving the functional problems of watershed management and toxic remediation in an aesthetically pleasing way. This neofunctionalism aside, I prefer to locate landscape urbanism’s potential in its Robert Smithson-like ability to take the abject detritus of the postindustrial urban condition as a site of imagination, prompting new design procedures coupled to an aesthetic for approaching emptiness, the shifting durations that now attend urban projects, and the programmatic hybridization of the