

visiting of suburbia—which was showing strong signs of dysfunction and fatigue—gave urban design’s project both relevance and register by establishing it as an instrument of a broader critique of the sprawling spatiality of the postwar city. Like the threat to city life posed by the obliteration of neighborhood character, the attack on suburbanism was both formal and social. Strip development was reviled for its chaotic visuality and its licentious consumption of the natural environment. Highways were defended from obtrusive billboards and honky-tonk businesses via “beautification.” Suburban living was criticized for its alienating, “conformist” lifestyles. Racist and sexist underpinnings were assailed. Tract houses were denigrated for being made out of tacky-tacky and looking all just the same. Cars were unsafe at any speed. Even the nuclear family was becoming fissile, chafing at life in its split-level castle.

However, like Modernist urbanism, suburbia was not simply the automatic outcome of market forces and its hidden persuaders but had a strong utopian tinge. Heavily ideological realizations of the American dream of freestanding property, new frontiers, and unlimited consumption, the suburbs felt, to millions, like manifest destiny. However, as they leapfrogged one another farther and farther into the “virgin” landscape, their destruction of the very qualities that had defined them became an increasingly untenable contradiction. The critique of the one-dimensionality of suburban sprawl that arose as a result was both social and environmental, and it reciprocated on both levels with the development of more deeply ecological views of city and region. This was advanced by such observers of the meta-scale as Jean Gottman, by a series of mordant observers—from Peter Blake to Pete Seeger—of suburban forms, and by social commentators—like Vance Packard, Herbert Gans, and Betty Friedan—who analyzed their patterns of consumption, conformity, and exclusion. And the boomer generation—invigorated by rebellion and fresh from its intensive introduction to the newly accessible cities of Europe—confronted its own oedipal crisis and increasingly drew the conclusion that it could never go home again to the pat certainties of its parents’ uptight lifestyles. As it had for centuries, the city represented an alternative.

But comfort and consumption had been too thoroughly embedded, and the vision of the city that emerged as the model for urban design was highly suburbanized—suburban conformities reformatted for urban densities and habits. The incrementalism of urban design, although conceptually indebted to the generation of activists that had