

present and familiar. The last of these possibilities—which can include both amusement parks and prison camps—always understands architecture as an agent of transformation because, by being inventive, it brings something experientially new to a situation. And because it changes the situation, it begs the question of the terms of participation, of the means by which a user or inhabitant is persuaded to take part, of the difference between coercion and consent. Here is the central dilemma for utopia, for master planning, for any architecture that proposes to make things better: what exactly is meant by “better”? and better for *whom*?

The language of pattern seeks to deal with this problem either by the quasi-statistical suggestion that the durability, “timelessness,” and cross-cultural reproduction of certain forms are markers of agreement or by more direct psychological or ethnographic observations and measurements of contentment and utility. Urban design borrows the aura of such techniques of corroboration to validate the grafting of a particular system of taste onto a limited set of organizational ideas. This entails a giant—and absurd—conceptual leap. As framed by the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU)—the Opus Dei of urban design—pattern is not understood in the manner of Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* but rather that of *The American Builder’s Companion*. These patterns do not emerge from the patient parsing of the networks of social behavior in some specific community but from pure millenarianism—from the idea of the utter singularity of the “truth”—that produces tools not for analyzing patterns but for imposing them. The validity of these patterns—promulgated in insane specificity—is established tautologically. Because obedience produces a *distinct* uniformity, one to which particular values have already been imputed, urban design argues that its codes are merely heuristic devices for recovering traditional values and meanings *already* encoded in the heart of every real American, faith-based design.

Urban design has successfully dominated physical planning both because of this resonant fundamentalism and because it has, from its inception, been able to appropriate a number of well-established reconfigurings of “traditional” architecture. Urban design’s remarkable timing allowed it both to claim to embody the meanings of the historic city and to fit into a space already replete with a range of tractable and demanding prototypes—or patterns—produced by the market without direct benefit of academic theory and prejudice. The current urban design default is, for the most part, a recombinant