

hybridity, the basic terms of the argument about urbanism have remained remarkably consistent from the nineteenth century to the present. What has shifted—and continues to shift—are the political and ideological valences associated not simply with each formation but also their rapid pace of conceptual and ideological reconfiguration, and the promiscuity of meaning and representation that attach and slip away from each. These migrations of meaning are crucial: the way we make cities marks our politics and possibilities, and the struggle over their form is, as it has ever been, deeply enmeshed with the future of our polity.

Today, U.S.-style urban design—global exemplar from Ho Chi Minh City to Dubai—has arrived at a set of concerns and strategies, as well as a formal repertoire, that is as limited as those of CIAM, though with an ultimately even more chilling social message. The current default is essentially a splicing of Modernist universalist dogmatism, City Beautiful taste, and the cultural presumptions of neoliberalism, producing its urbanist double spawn: gentrification and the neotraditional suburb. Not since the Modernism of the 1920s has a visual system so successfully (and spuriously) identified itself with a particular set of social values: The elision of an architecture of stripped traditionalism (a pediment on every Shell station and 7-Eleven) with the imagined happinesses of a bygone golden age has been breathtaking.

It was surely no coincidence that this specificity grew out of a more general turn to the right, the new Republican majority that took to historicist expression as a means of instant authentication and prestige, all with a redemptive gloss derived from a thin idea of the social authority of convention that culminated in the mendacity, indifference, and sumptuary Hollywood taste of Reaganism. New Urbanism was the perfect theory of settlement for the Age of Reagan, the urbanistic embodiment of “family values,” forcefully enshrined at the very moment that American culture was moving in the direction of transformative diversity. The New Urbanists’ success is surely the result of making common cause with a right-tinged social theory, the Puritan-inspired vision of a “shining city on a hill” that ascendant neocon intellectuals and the burgeoning religious Right thought to so embody the values of a “traditional” America, and the New Urbanist idea of a single set of correct urban principles is surely balm to those upset with the dissipation of real Americanism under the assault of an excess of difference, the threatening pluralism of an America no longer dominated by WASP culture, a place of too many languages,