

too many suspect lifestyles, too much uncontrollable choice. As Paul Weyrich, founding president of the reactionary Heritage Foundation, recently remarked, “New Urbanism needs to be part of the next conservatism.”

Of course, this oversimplifies both origins and outcomes. The broad acquiescence to the neotraditional approach that characterizes American urban design is also the result of its proclaimed embodiment—sometimes tenuous and occlusive, sometimes genuine and persuasive—of many of the elements of more progressive approaches to the environment that provided much of the amniotic fluid for its gestation. Indeed, the powerful attraction of neotraditional urbanism must be seen not only in its neoliberal, end-of-history arguments, in which historicism stands in for capitalism and “Modernism” for the various forms of vanquished collectivism, but also in its claims on the inescapably relevant politics and practices of environmentalism, a genuine universalism with a very broad consensus. Self-proclaimed as the nemeses of sprawl, as friends to the idea of neighborhood, as advocates for public transportation, and as priests of participation, the New Urbanism and much of the current urban design default would seem to be a logical outgrowth of many of the progressive tendencies so lively at their origins. A number of the tendency’s nominal proponents—Peter Calthorpe, Doug Kelbaugh, Jonathan Barnett (a UDG stalwart), and others—tilt to these positions as priorities, designing with greater tolerance, modesty, and depth. More, the CNU cannot be faulted for seeking solutions consonant with the scale of the problem: the idea of the creation of new towns and cities is crucial not simply to the control of sprawl but also to housing the exponential growth of the planet, urbanizing at the rate of a million people a week.

In fact, nothing in the charter of the Congress for New Urbanism, with its spirited defense of both urban and natural environments and its call for reinvigorating both local and regional perspectives, is likely to be opposed by any sensible urbanist. The controversy, rather, is over the dreary and uniform translation of principles to practice, the weirdly religious insistence on “traditional” architectural form, the dubious bedfellows, and, most especially, the weakness of most New Urbanist product, almost invariably car-focused, class-uniform, exclusively residential, and without environmental innovation. At this point, the clarion principles seem so much cover, much as the CNU’s vaunted instrument of community participation—the charrette (one