

for New Orleans, were there to “give hope,” and the hope giving was a perfect occasion around which government officials and business people could make deals. The designs by Geuze, Van Berkel, and MVRDV made this economic exchange digestible for the news media, like local folk dancers during a state visit. Of course, we as members of the Dutch urban planning community can be proud of the ingenuity and heartfelt involvement of Geuze, Van Berkel, and MVRDV and of the outstanding lobbying skills of the director of the NAI. We will probably all profit from this high-profile event. But it leaves us with a feeling of emptiness.

Is this the kind of hope the citizens of New Orleans need? And which citizens are we talking about? During this exhibition, a fierce political battle was being waged between those who want to readmit to New Orleans only those inhabitants who have a job, pay the rent, and contribute to the tax base, and those who want to accept the fact that the poor, black, and unemployed have the same right to the city as anyone. It is an age-old question: should a huge catastrophe be used as an occasion to clean up an otherwise unwieldy social mess? This question lies at the heart of twentieth-century urban planning but seems irrelevant to the Dutch designs for New Orleans. If these designs would spark debate and a choice of sides in this issue, they would not grease deals between Dutch companies and American policy makers. To be relevant in cultural and economic exchange, urban design seems to have no choice but to be irrelevant to the real issues. Creating a diversion is its ambition, and innocence is its crime.

If we look at the kind of urban planning that will lead to real projects in areas devastated by Katrina—say, the eleven urban schemes of the Mississippi Renewal Forum—a completely different picture arises. A New Urbanist army descended upon the hurricane-ravished communities, and in workshops, charrettes, town-hall meetings, and public forums has created town plans that could be realized; they look like an idealized version of old Mississippi and have instant public support. Under the spirited guidance of people like Andres Duany and John Norquist, urban planning has reached a pinnacle of populist and political professionalism. It has also shed any ambition of being innovative, of thinking and proposing new visions, in the traditions of Modernism. New Urbanists *have* taken sides in the debate and have chosen an urbanism that filters out all painful aspects of the old city.

These post-Katrina urban design experiences present us with a