

is not just an issue of efficacy but also of aesthetics—a phased project designed by many hands will result in true variety and not the artificially induced variety conjured by compositional effort. More broadly, it is valid to distinguish between these two kinds of urbanisms, given the real problems confronted by the contemporary city. Perhaps the architecture-centric schemes by Eisenman and Mayne are meant to supply the “flash value” of media-oriented architectural production, just at a much larger scale. Certainly Daniel Libeskind’s galvanizing role at Ground Zero, whatever one may think of the actual proposal, proves the marketing value of this approach. But the second model for urban design, a model that distinguishes the role of urban design from that of architecture, may be the real territory for innovation.

Northpoint, Cambridge, Massachusetts:

An Unbalanced Focus on Open Space Creates Polarized Urban Frameworks

Northpoint, a forty-eight-acre former train yard on the border of Cambridge, Boston, and Somerville consisting of twenty irregular small city blocks is structured around an open-space network that integrates the Minuteman Bikeway leading to the Charles River and a series of “green fingers” that penetrate the blocks. The redevelopment of this site illustrates several emerging issues that have informed more recent large-scale development. The most salient are technical and political ones provoked by the environmental remediation of brownfield sites to make them both legal and palatable for real estate development. Landscape architects have taken the conceptual lead, partly given technical issues that include grading, hydrology, and the succession of natural environments over long periods. Innovators in this area include James Corner of Field Operations and the University of Pennsylvania, who has planned the conversion of Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island into an enormous regional park. Chris Reed, founder of StoSS and an instructor at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, has also recently won a series of design competitions that include phased ecological processes as both instigators of the aesthetic and the underlying pragmatic argument of the design proposals.

As part of the Northpoint master plan, completed in 2002, Michael Van Valkenburgh and Ken Greenberg proposed a 5.5-acre “central park” as the heart of the larger green spine that both gives value to