

Perhaps the most obvious of these deflections comes from the enormous success and influence of New Urbanism, but there are many others. Growing numbers of architects and urban designers, for example, are feeding off the extremely volatile and fearful environments being created by the security- and surveillance-obsessed new urbanism. Building prisons has become a subspecialty especially for young architects; gated and guarded communities and other Common Interest Developments (CIDs) now dominate new housing construction throughout the United States. Surveillance cameras, roadblocks, razor wire, and other ways of creating defensible space are increasingly made major priorities for neighborhood revitalization. Bunkerlike designs are demanded to protect public buildings, hotels, shopping malls, and pedestrian promenades as well as private homes. And mini-police stations protectively punctuate increasingly privatized public spaces. The clients for these constructions cannot be denied, but there must be some awareness of talents wasted and opportunities lost.

A related distraction comes from servicing the needs of the super-rich, an ancient practice for architects but now expanded significantly due to the bloated wealth of the upper 10 percent. More mansions than ever before are being built in American cities, and larger areas are being gentrified and boutique for those still committed to city life. Oddly enough, because of this urban commitment, gentrification has become a more positive force for urbanism than it has been in the past, at least in comparison to the spread of walled-in and fortified “privatopias” designed for those seeking escape from urban threats and civic responsibility. Urban designers can take the lead here in enhancing projects that connect more effectively into the larger urban and regional fabric and do not foster greater isolation and exclusion.

The weakening of the welfare state and the erosion of national programs for dealing with urban and regional poverty in the United States and many other industrialized countries have led to still another distraction: the rise of a highly competitive form of localized “entrepreneurial” planning and urban design aimed at attracting investment, jobs, and tourists. City marketing and the search for miraculous “Bilbao effects” have become a major growth sector for city and regional planners. Even more spectacularly, this has thrust iconic urban architecture into the spotlight all over the world, pushing further aside the critical need to deal with the deepening problems of social polarization and festering inequalities. At the very least, urban designers must break through these distractions to take advantage of