urban space, connect places, and create hierarchy and meaning. If urban design were simply a matter of the repetition of old patterns, as it seems the practice of design review encourages, there would be no opportunity to design new responses to changes in the world, like the advent of computer communication and shopping malls.

*Design review is a superficial process.* Of course, the effectiveness of design review is limited by the type of things commonly reviewed: reviewers focus on the surface materials and stylistic quality of buildings, and the concealment of cars and signs. Yet the condition of the urban and suburban environment has more to do with the use of ubiquitous and automobile-scaled typologies—K-Marts, strip shopping centers, gas stations, fast food chains, endless pavement—than whether K-Mart has blue metal or yellow awnings or even tasteful signs. Landscaping, buffers, fences, and other popular design review requests are just ways of hiding the problem, not fixing it. The catalog of what is wrong with our environment is a catalog of what is wrong with our culture: the dominance of greed and consumption, the lack of public responsibility (on the part of both residents and builders), the deterioration of the inner city from poverty and crime, the energy waste of sprawl and automobile domination, and the abuse of the natural setting. To the extent that government is allowed to think that it is "taking care" of the "ugly" problem through the institution of design review, it is a diversion of political energy from environmental, social, and economic problems and, not insignificantly, it is a diversion from the necessity for genuine urban design. The design review solution is in fact reminiscent of the urban renewal solution: urban renewal postulated that the solution to the unsightly and deteriorating inner city was to tear it down and build new office buildings and high-priced housing.

## The invitation to debate

This is a fascinating topic because there seems to be no end to the ideas it engages: power, freedom, beauty, morality, justice, discretion, authenticity. After five years of being a design reviewer and five years subsequently of studying it, I have come to be concerned with the enormous effect that widespread design review will have on our cities and towns, on the profession of architecture, and on the public life and freedom of our people. These effects are just beginning to be clear. What is not clear is whether design review, a very powerful government tool, can be directed in a way that answers some of the problems addressed above. Its potential for abuse and misdirection is very strong, and even dangerous. Yet the need for thoughtful urban design in American places grows every day, and the rights of the community to expect local government to contribute to good design is unquestionable.

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