



FIGURE 7.3
Diagram of the Form of the Typical American City. The high-rise core (hatched area) is surrounded by a belt of parking lots and highways created during urban renewal (stippled areas)—a ring of lost space that segregates downtown from residential neighborhoods. This diagram is based on the form of downtown Syracuse, New York.

rules were clear. Buildings were subordinate to the more powerful collective realm—to an implicit vocabulary of design and a deference to the larger order of things. The ‘manners and rules of a place’ gave instructions on how to connect.² One of the challenges to urban design in our times is to redevelop a sense for the rules and, in doing so, to bring back some richness and variety to public life—important ingredients in cities of the past.

In criticizing the form of the modern city, the intention is not to imply that the architecture and urban design of the last half-century has been an utter failure or that the works of many great designers should be rejected out of hand. Functionalism, which laid the groundwork for our loss of traditional space, became obsessed with efficiency, but, like any great historical movement, it was most concerned with meanings and the problem of giving man an existential foothold. The ethics of modernism have proved inadequate, and its synthetic vision and pre-emptive dogma no longer constitute the dominant

frame of reference in city design. Renewed interest in historicism and the traditional city, which were neglected by the Modernists, has reintroduced the grammar of ornament, metaphor, and style, which can reunite the many aspects of building as an art responsive to the larger issues of contemporary society.³

Zoning and urban renewal

The loss of traditional qualities of urban space has also been the result of zoning policies and urban-renewal projects implemented during the 1950s and 1960s. These closely allied approaches to planning were well-intentioned, if ultimately misguided, responses to urban decay. The impulse was to clear the ground, sanitize, and promote human welfare through the segregation of land uses into discrete zones and the substitution of high-rise towers for ground-level density. Urban-renewal projects rarely corresponded in spatial structure to the evolved