The Periphery and the American Dream

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With the rediscovery of the periphery by architects and urbanists, a once vibrant, but recently dormant debate has been reactivated and (post)modernized. The contemporary polemic considers that the urbanistic paradigm currently operative across the metropolitan region and particularly in suburbia is producing an environment that is less than ideal. This article (re)presents some of the more salient aspects of the debate and considers several prominent alternative strategies in order to derive greater insight into a perplexing cultural dilemma: the prolonged inability of architects and urbanists to effect transformation that is synchronous with the polemic’s predominant socioeconomic and environmental perturbations. In conclusion, it advances a culturally specific strategy that offers a partial resolution.

All people, things, institutions and environments that are innovative and avant-garde at one historical moment will become backward and obsolescent in the next. Even in the most highly developed parts of the world, all individuals, groups and communities are under constant relentless pressure to reconstruct themselves; if they stop to rest, to be what they are, they will be swept away.

—Marshall Berman

Urbanization and the Periphery

During the latter half of the 1980s, a decade in which a kind of Disneyland aura prevailed in America, one in which confidence in the present and future lay in a highly edited (re)presentation of the past, concern about the nature of peripheral urbanization gradually reemerged from its erstwhile obscure position on the sidelines of a professional and academic debate about architecture and urbanism to take its contemporary position at the locus of an expanded polemic. Although discussion has been concentrated on the central city and its interaction with modernity and postmodernity, development on the urban fringe, even though occurring at an accelerating velocity, received only the most cursory of informed attention. While a minority of scholars, for the most part historians, attempted to comprehend the complex nature of peripheral urbanization, the vast majority of America’s architectural, urban design, and planning elites, fundamentally Eurocentric by inclination and edification, continued to treat both process and product with neglect at best and contempt at worst. In particular and with rare exception, the vanguard of America’s architectural community had until very recently surrendered the destiny of the borderlands to a cadre of developers, traffic engineers, neighborhood associations, and their surrogate, the planning professional.

The relocation of the “place” of the periphery from the perimeter to the center demonstrates a shift in the perspective of America’s architectural elite, professional and academic—a shift that is representative of the substantially increased involvement of architects with development on the edge of the metropolis, especially in relation to the increasing proportion of commissions that involve “planning” studies versus building projects. This is partially the consequence of the rise in the commissioning, by public- and private-sector clients, of master plans and urban designs for edge-situated communities, in itself a reflection of the rise of the “entrepreneurial” polis, evidenced not only by the intense competition for private investment occurring between the central city and its hinterland, but also by the increased rivalry between disparate metropolises across the nation.

The enhanced interest in the periphery is also symptomatic of the precipitous decline in the prestige of planning, a profession whose waning authority, once considered objective and rational, is being reassessed, creating new opportunities for architect-urbanists. Freer trade, the globalization of capital, a shift in the focus of municipal administrations, and other structural changes have inevitably changed the accustomed rules of the game on which much of the planning profession was predicated—so much so that the concept of planning as blueprint has been usurped by that of planning as framework. Concomitantly, the role of the public-sector planning professional is being redefined from that of police officer to that of strategist, promoter, and manager engaged to encourage economic growth and to help shape the environment to make it more conducive to the evolving requirements of private enterprise.

From a philosophical perspective, the renascent interest in and involvement with the periphery has also coincided with a reinterpretation of its meaning. Until the advent of the industrial age, the periphery had been understood as the demarcation of the city limit, where built form confronted unbuilt territory, where the artificial confronted the natural—a zone of circumscribed political intent. Recently, the periphery has assumed an expanded connotation, representing considerably more than the locus of peripheral urbanization. In contemporary discourse, the periphery is perceived to have transcended the narrow confines of any specific territory, process, or attendant morphology, symbolizing instead a condition or a state of mind.

From Urb, Suburb, and Exurb to Suburban Metropolis

Throughout the twentieth century, debate about the periphery of American cities has been particularly intriguing as a result of the constancy of the issues, even though the rhetorical emphasis has subtly shifted

focus over time, embracing, discarding, and then reexamining familiar sociocultural, economic, political, and/or environmental themes. The discourse reached a crest in the sixties, focusing especially on the environmental effects of sprawl. It later ebbed, sinking, in relative terms, into obscurity until, following a decade of socio-economic and political restructuring, it resurfaced in the mid to late eighties.

The American city, an entity about which it is difficult to generalize, has been subject to processes that have resulted in its existing in a state of flux ever since the advent of the industrial age. Although not easily delineated, there have been stages when the nature and extent of change have been especially remarkable. The latest stage, which achieved vigor in the postwar era, is notable as one of decentralization. This process has occurred in phases, the most recent of which has been particularly influenced by an acceleration in the national political-economic trends of rationalization, deindustrialization, deregulation, and privatization. These tendencies have reinforced the continuing mutation of the American city from the erstwhile monocentric city comprised of dominant "urb" and dependent suburbs, to the subcentered city with peripheral retail-commercial realms, to the polycentric suburban metropolis, a patchwork assemblage of the traditional center, differentiated suburbs, and variegated exurbs, which are autonomous, highly competitive districts interconnected by a comprehensive network of arterials and freeways and animated by the process of "metropolitanization."7

Intriguingly, the suburban metropolis, still emerging as a concept, no longer simply comprises a single duality between a contracting center and an expanding periphery, but increasingly comprises pluralities, a phenomenon exemplified by the method by which both the center and the fringe are being transformed. In spatial terms, metropolitanization is generating a middle landscape that is remarkable for both its fragmentation and the postmodern ordering principles that underlie that disintegration. Throughout its postwar history, development on the periphery, in contrast to the center, has manifested a dichotomous urban design: on the one hand, residential precincts, begun in the suburb and pioneered on the idea of the individual; on the other hand, retail-office-industrial realms, engendered in the urb and founded on the idea of the collective. Whereas spatially proximate, when considered from a sociocultural perspective, the two contexts are distant and noninteractive. However, both share a similar design philosophy, as they are the loci for the disparate products of architecture and urbanism, those that are conceived generically and then assembled as bricolage: preordained architectural objects arranged at random on, and in opposition to, the ideology of the plan.8

The rise of the suburban metropolis exposes some of the inherent conflicts and contradictions in the unfinished project of modernity. Notable is the paradoxical aspect in which the principal tendencies are discerned to be unfolding: on the one hand, "de-densification" and decentralization of the central city, processes that are generally perceived as contributing to a suburbanization of the urb; on the other hand, intensification and centralization of the periphery, processes that are comprehended as reinforcing an urbanization of the suburb.9

Paradoxically, this would imply that there has occurred simultaneously both a
“rise and triumph” and a “rise and fall” of the suburb, a supposition that, although intriguing, exposes the terminological confusion that exists at this stage of the city’s evolution, a conundrum arising from the attempt to delineate the contemporary city according to definitions of the past. Ever since the terms urbanization and suburbanization achieved their modern meaning in mid-nineteenth-century England, each has been considered to be emblematic of a concomitant and rival value structure, morphology, and typology. In the American context, where the urban has seldom existed as a cultural project, the suburban has become the hegemonic ambition, representative of the nation’s collective identity. The urban, defined oppositionally, has necessarily come to signify the marginal. Hence, although there has been a suburbanization of the central city, it could not be argued that there has been an accompanying urbanization of the suburb, as this would necessarily imply an urban ascendency over the suburban.10

Of critical significance, it is apparent that the emerging suburban metropolis, an admixture of scientific rationalism and bourgeois romanticism, of liberalism and conservatism, an aggregation of individual “projects in the making,” has been transforming well in advance of its theorization, a phenomenon contemporaneously substantiated by the virtually indistinguishable nature of American urbanism and suburbanism. If perception is affected by beliefs and experience, then it is evident that the capacity to imagine the periphery and its potential will remain circumscribed.

The periphery, variously conceived as edge city, middle landscape, perimeter center, or technoburb but consistently perceived by the majority of Americans as suburbia, presents a demonstrably ironic environment—one that promotes diversity at

The Contemporary Debate

Although the borderlands have long been in a process of transformation from dormitory communities to more complex components of the emerging suburban metropolis, the contemporary debate has come to concentrate on an elucidation and articulation of the most recent phase of that metamorphosis. One of the more compelling aspects has been the realization, shared by an increasing percentage of those participating in the creation, inhabitation, or utilization of this dynamic context, that the process of metropolitanization is generating environments that offer few of the benefits of either the urb or suburb, while replicating most of the problems of both. In effect, instead of building New Jerusalems in the borderlands of America, peripheral urbanization is reiterating the tragedy of paradise lost.11 Pragmatically, this is evidenced by recent surveys of California residents and workers, who cite the following concerns with middle landscapes: traffic congestion, exorbitant land and housing costs, a deteriorating physical domain, an increase in crime, a decrease in services, and a shortage of acceptable educational institutions.12

Some critics have come to regard the “scientific” rationale behind peripheral architecture and urbanism as intrinsically inappropriate, enumerating the deficiency of its attendant morphologies and typologies. In particular, residential precincts are increasingly criticized for an innate inflexibility, automobile dependence, and excessive use of land.13 Both residential precincts and retail-office-industrial realms are disparaged for the doctrinaire segregation of land uses and the impoverishment and privatization of the public realm. Housing typologies are condemned for their inadaptability; their incompatibility with the transforming nature of demographics, the family in general, and the evolved and evolving status of women in particular; and their exacerbation of the crisis of affordability. Decried as well is the dearth in choice of tenure.14

Recent economic and environmental critiques have illuminated the apparent
unsustainability of the contemporary paradigm for peripheral urbanism, demonstrating that metropolitanization, in general, is occurring with an intensity and at densities too low to be viable in the long term and revealing that, in the absence of mitigating strategies, economic expansion on the periphery, where the majority of Americans now live and work, continues to exacerbate economic contraction in the center. Environ-
mentally, peripheral urbanization is dis-
paraged as contributing toward the erosion of a rapidly depleting stock of exurban farmland, the continued destruction of hinterland natural areas, and the spreading of associated air and noise pollution throughout the region, due to a reliance on the automobile.

The debate also continues to investigate, from a sociocultural perspective, the decision of a majority of middle-income residents to escape from the center to the rhetorically cleaner, safer milieu of the periphery and the impact that this predilection has had on the collapse of the urban as a legitimate idea.16

It is evident, then, that most scholars believe that the contemporary paradigm for peripheral urbanism is producing an environment that is less than ideal. Among the design professions, this is most clearly illustrated by the array of alternative urbanization strategies being promoted, for the most part formulated in response to the development industry’s consternation about the advent of neighborhood-sponsored no-growth referenda and development moratoriums.

Alternative Strategies and the Community

The most prominent of the alternative strategies correspond to one of three dominant approaches: the “engagers,” whose propo-
nents, inspired by Rowe and Koetter’s College City and Venturi’s Las Vegas, seek to positively engage the contemporary paradigm’s metaphysical qualities; the “formalists,” whose advocates desire to adapt the contemporary model through aesthetic strategies; and the “suburban villagers,” whose protagonists, in an utter repudiation of the contemporary model, propose compact, higher-density developments accessed by collective transport.

Although a progressive collection of professionals concur that the contemporary paradigm is flawed, it is apparent that most edge city residents do not, as yet, share that conviction. Although concerned about the nature of the retail-office-industrial realm in relation to its impact on congestion and crime, most residents have not expressed a profound discontent with the residential precinct context, where their attention has always been focused; to the contrary, it appears that this environment continues to be culturally successful, as it remains emblematic of the suburban ideal. As such, whether comprised of single-family detached houses or attached condominiums, it is a landscape that residents fight to “protect.”17

This is corroborated by the advent of special-interest groups, euphemistically called community associations, which are exceptionally effective coalitions of dissimilar citizens who have organized not so much as proponents, but rather as opponents, intent on preventing anything that could affect the “nature” of their territory and impact on the security of their investment. In effect, disparate groups of residents have more fully engaged one of the most fundamental tenets underlying planning legislation in America: the preservation or enhancement of property values.18

What has particularly alarmed local governments and is of increasing concern to the development industry is that this proscriptive right was supposed to be invested in the hands of the state and, through restrictive covenants, a minority of elite property developers. Although apparently consistent with the sociopolitical ideal of modernity in that it is perceived to have resulted in a further democratization of American society, it is a form of empowerment that is highly specious. As community groups attain power, they challenge the “objective” influence of the state; in the process, the majority of citizens, apolitical by nature, are thus marginalized. Hence, not a tyranny of the majority, as pressed by de Tocqueville, but rather tyranny of a minority.19 Ironically, the rise of neighborhood associations, rather than enhancing pluralism, aggregates to all-powerful lobbies yet another layer of elites who have benefited enormously in the past and stand to continue to benefit in the foreseeable future from a perpetuation of the contemporary model.

Thus, the process of peripheral urbanization can no longer be directed as it once was, in a proactive sense, by a public sector ostensibly functioning in the interests of the collective. Rather, it must now
operate in a reactive sense, to the advantage of the individual representing the interests of fragmented constituencies. In the age of the entrepreneurial polis, planning as practice and development as product, although never having functioned by divine ordinance, have been demonstrated to be exceptionally vulnerable to the alliances of community groups, whose very ascendancy has further eroded the waning authority of the state. It is therefore a new age in which the idea of planning as benign practice is condemned as mere rhetoric, especially as a result of the debunking of the myth of consensus, the essential principle on which modern planning had been premised. Planning, innately political, increasingly reactionary, under attack from a fracturing public, realizes that the most effective way to restore its authority is to return to its roots and reconstitute itself as a vehicle for economic development.

In light of ascendant sociocultural, economic, and political proclivities, contemporary peripheral urbanism will likely remain operative and continue to receive the support of elected representatives unless, or until, America’s dominant culture, and the requirements of capital, are adversely affected.

The Periphery and Postmodern Commodification

To many scholars, the most perplexing aspect of metropolization has been its almost surreal resistance to criticism. That the nature of the periphery is so contrary to the expectations and perturbations of an intellectual and professional elite has led many analysts to surmise that the contemporary nature of metropolization must be the "natural" order of things. It is difficult to argue otherwise because, despite the best efforts of scholars and reformers and the vast literature compiled and disseminated to those of influence, the product of peripheral urbanization remains essentially the same, only more so: more freeways, more retail realms, more office clusters, more industrial parks, and more housing precincts, increasingly segregated and privatized, scattered across an ever-expanding territory.

This last aspect is especially enigmatic, as the sociocultural context of the periphery has been fundamentally altered between the first wave of postwar expansion, when affluent suburbs of single-family homes were created and inhabited by nuclear families, and the present era, in which the fringe has mutated into a heterogeneous environment in which the once dominant nuclear family is now in the minority, the majority of residents are transient, and the single-family detached house, although still the dominant house form and preferred residential typology, has for many become an increasingly unsustainable dream.

Advocates of reform must therefore first contend with a truism in America. Unlike the center, which grew incrementally and was the locus of a plethora of landowners and developers, the periphery, as a consequence of large-acreage farmland being corporately acquired for development, was "packaged" and commodified for resale as a product. Concurrently, a set of circumstances was initiated, consciously and unconsciously, that conspired to ensure that both the objects and the landscape of the borderlands have been gendered not as commodities in the modern sense, but rather as cultural artifacts in the postmodern connotation. It is a condition shared not only by the development industry and financial institutions, which create the territory, but by a majority of the American middle class, who choose to reside or invest there. Hence, as long as the periphery remains not only the safest and most lucrative environment for individual, family, and corporate investors and as long as the emerging suburban metropolis remains ac-
cessible in terms of space and time, then that most insidious of rationales, "the marketplace will only produce what the public desires to consume," will remain operative. If, however, any one of these key factors becomes or is perceived to become inoperative, then the contemporary paradigm, like any postmodern commodity, will be subject to change, although the nature of that transformation will, in all likelihood, continue to be highly circumscribed by the predilections of the dominant culture.

The very "success" of the contemporary paradigm and the problems it has engendered appear to present such an opportunity. In the most intensively developed regions of the East and West Coasts, the once wholly alien concerns of declining property values, congestion, crime, and escalating maintenance and security costs have begun to take their toll, not only on the borderland's retail-office-industrial realms, but also on the hitherto sanctity of the residential precincts. In the latter instance, although neighborhood associations have been mobilized as a first and effective line of defense against "incompatible" development, their effectiveness with respect to other concerns has been considerably less impressive. As a result, this most recent phase of "life on the new frontier" has begun to challenge basic assumptions about the certainty of progress.

The development industry's reaction to changing circumstances has been interesting, not least because of its affinity to that of another industry: the automotive. With the cachet of their product under attack, developers have been experimenting with new product lines. Although a few have retooled to meet the challenge of changing circumstances, the vast majority are only willing to attempt new styling. Hence, the commissioning of a host of varying and competing peripheral urbanization strategies, highlighted by the advent of such phenomena as "transit-oriented" and "traditional neighborhood" development.

The suburban villagers' strategy, as demonstrated variously by Calthorpe-Solomon-Kelbaugh's pedestrian pocket proposition and Calthorpe's transit-oriented development concept, although ideas that have advanced in the "progressive" climate and unique circumstances of the West Coast, particularly in California, have yet to win a widespread endorsement by the development industry. This is partially a result of the villagers' repudiation of bricolage and their embrace of higher density, mixed-use development, a concept deemed radical by three elements: (1) the development industry, a notoriously "prudent" enterprise grown accustomed to the ease of production afforded by segregated zoning and that continues to associate innovation with unwarranted risk; (2) a political bureaucracy that generally eschews proactivism, whether originating from within or from without the public sector; and (3) a skeptical public, unaccustomed to the benefits and as yet suspicious and even fearful of the cultural connotations of density.

The formalists' approach, as highlighted by Duany-Plater Zyberk's traditional neighborhood development (TND) strategy (recently retitled the New Urbanism) and by the recent work of Peter Calthorpe, has been to aesthetically adapt the planned unit development (PUD) aspect of the contemporary periphery. The TND has garnered a tremendous response: (1) by enabling industry to obtain development permission in especially restricted jurisdictions through a shrewd postmodern.
repackaging, by rendering projects more cost-effective through a relaxation of planning standards, by privatizing erstwhile public space, permitting greater resistance to a continuing decrease in public services, and by legislating "restrictive covenants," enabling it to be less vulnerable to fluctuations in property values; (2) by convincing an innately "conservative" political bureaucracy that it is an essentially conformist formula; and (3) by appealing directly to the sentiments and aspirations of a particularly up-market segment of America’s dominant culture.28

The engagers’ tactic, as exemplified variously by Kieran-Timberlake’s perimeter center and Rowe’s middle landscape and as demonstrated by Fishman’s technoburb and Garreau’s edge city, has been to engage the contemporary paradigm’s metaphysical qualities: the first three through a critical engagement of both those qualities and the culture that generated them, the latter through a celebratory engagement that verges on jingoism.29 The engagers differ from the TND approach by not seeking to mask the postmodern condition and by focusing their efforts on a reconsideration of nonresidential precincts of the periphery, especially the retail-office-industrial realm and its attendant linkages. Although the theoretical aspects of Kieran-Timberlake and Rowe have yet to be tested, their advocacy of critical engagement would quite plausibly be well received by industry, the political bureaucracy, and the public because it is sufficiently conformist.30

The Periphery and the American Dream

What, then, are the future prospects for the periphery and the emerging suburban metropolis? First, it is necessary to recognize that American urbanism is fundamentally a cultural project, not one of aesthetics nor of technology, but rather one of ideology: of values, motives, and ambitions unfolding within a milieu. Suburbia, both as product and condition, has since the late nineteenth century consistently been positioned as America’s dominant ambition. As a society, America has always cultivated a propensity toward the eulogizing and mythologizing of its accomplishments, possessed a characteristic denial of "reality," and manifested the altogether dubious tendency to draw on and revise its history in order to justify its present and imagine its future.31 With suburbia as the principal aspiration substantially realized, it has assumed its role as America’s crowning achievement. Unfortunately, it is one accomplished at enormous social cost. For suburbia to achieve the ascendancy it has, the orthodox idea of "urbia" had to be sacrificed, a price that the dominant culture, for which urbia never held much currency, has been more than willing to pay. In America, the experience of suburbia is one of quest and conquest.

This is not to suggest that American society and its dominant culture are not subject to change. To the contrary, they are in a constant state of transition, but it is a passage remarkable for both its temporally deviating and undeviating aspects, resulting in a simultaneously contradictory coexistence.32 The experience of America, however, suggests that the cultural changes that are deemed legitimate are those considered to be within the boundaries of convention at any moment in time. As demonstrated since the advent of the industrial age, through the eras of mass immigration to the city centers, to the "white flight" of the sixties and seventies, the power of America’s dominant culture ensured and continues to ensure that the subcultures that exist or develop outside of these limits will be generally considered illegitimate. As urbanism is a cultural project, then an urbanism representative of the aspirations of the "other" would, in turn, be deemed incompatible and undesirable.33

Hence suburbia, for better and for worse, has come to be perceived, experienced, and imagined by the majority of Americans as the only legitimate manifestation of the "good life" and the "American way," a not inconsequential predicament. The image of suburbia was set into the American consciousness through advertising and the media as early as the late nineteenth century; it has remained relatively constant, even though the experience of suburbia, long transformed from backyard to freeway
culture, is otherwise. Suburbia continues to be imagined as an iconic environment and perceived as the repository and fulcrum of the American dream, ostensibly because of the crucial and enduring linkage engendered between a metaphysical landscape and the underlying myth of America.

Second, the contemporary experience of suburbia, despite increasingly evident shortcomings, continues to be enhanced by the prolonged socioeconomic decline of America’s central cities, where the perception, experience, and imagination of urbs remain linked to that of deterioration and failure. There remains a distinct antipathy toward urba, not because of its architectural or spatial qualities, which in many medium-size municipalities are virtually indistinguishable from those of the periphery, but because of what it continues to represent: disorder, corruption, subcultures, crime, and violence.

Third, as urbanism is a cultural project, it is by definition dynamic and imbued. Hence, as the nature of the periphery and the suburban metropolis have been influenced by the disposition of the dominant culture, so too the character of the dominant culture has been informed by the condition of the periphery and the suburban metropolis. This circumstance, little appreciated, signifies that although it is possible to shift the status quo of American urbanism, it is possible only to do so if there is a corresponding shift in the dominant culture. Given the nature of American society, with its decentralized power structures and entrenched interests, that would imply the need for a massive expression of willingness to initiate and tolerate change. Despite the obvious desirability of substantial reform, that expression clearly remains absent.

Hence we have the reasoning of the critical engagers. Although far from monolithic in their approach, they share the belief that it is only possible to effect a qualitative change if it is viewed by the dominant culture as being relevant to and compatible with the expressed value system. Critical engagement represents both a strategy and an intellectual position in opposition to the perpetuation of the status quo; as such, it is more than a merely expedient and potentially cynical exercise. It is one that understands the desirability of “progress” but considers it to be a chimera—one exposed, especially during the postwar era, by the project of modernity.

Critical engagement seeks to deconstruct the operative peripheral urbanization paradigm to achieve “change with continuity.” This is intended to be accomplished through an exploitation of the inherent untapped potential of the periphery specifically and the suburban metropolis generally.

One of the more imaginative concepts being explored from this perspective considers the potentiality of the infrastructural corridors that connect disparate enclaves across the metropolis. These interstitial spaces, comprised of territories situated within or adjacent to major rights-of-way, are among the few conceivably “neutral” zones remaining in the increasingly tribalized metropolis, and as such not only offer a possible locus for strategic interventions, but also for the derivation of a correspondingly vigorous “architectural” urbanism.

Although interstitial projects would likely enable many of the debate’s environmental concerns to be addressed, the prolonged experience of America and American urbanism suggest that it is equally probable that these quasi-neutral zones would become yet another contested territory if the socioeconomic composition of the interventions were deemed to deviate too considerably from the “norm.”

Although it is probable that critical engagement would not provide the ultimate “resolution” desired by architects and urbanists, it would appear to present an opportunity to achieve at least a partial resolution, one that could effect a transformation more synchronistic with the polemic’s predominant socioeconomic and environmental concerns. As such, it is an intellectual position and strategy decidedly more appropriate than those of either the formalists or the suburban villagers.

Notes


2. Throughout this article, I consider modernity and postmodernity from a position similar to that of David Harvey. Harvey, and others, contends that although there was a “sea change” in political-economic practices around 1972 and a shift in the dominant frames of reference adopted variously by intellectuals commenced shortly thereafter, post-modernity—rather than auguring the emergence of a postindustrial or post-Enlightenment society—is more likely a phase within modernity: change with continuity. Although political-economic practices have changed and despite a philosophical ambition to “abandon” the Enlightenment project, modernity’s institutions and many of its institutional structures remain firmly in place. Perhaps postmodernism’s greatest contribution is the perspective it affords with respect to the cultural (as opposed to the social), differentiation, and skepticism. See David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), especially pp. 3–118, and 121–89.

3. For a concise review of the transformation of the periphery’s morphologies and typologies, see Peter G. Rowe, Making a Middle Landscape (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). For a detailed history and interpretation of the process of peripheral urbanization from an “urban-centered” perspective, see Kenneth Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

5. Ibid.


7. Although Robert Fishman posits that the suburban metropolis has been superseded, a surmise that I contest, his environmental and cultural interpretation of the rise of the suburban metropolis, as exemplified by Los Angeles, is insightful. See Robert Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 155–81. The definition of metropolitanism that Université de Paris urban theorist François Ascher employs comes closest to representing the condition of contemporary American urbanism. From a lecture delivered at the Architectural Association, Feb. 9, 1993.


10. Fishman, Bourgeois Utopias, pp. 3–17 and 182–207. In his history of suburbia, Fishman contends that there has been a rise and fall of suburbia as there has been a transformation in its erstwhile dormitory nature. I maintain that this interpretation, although reflective of the physical changes on the periphery, obviates suburbia as a cultural project. For the problem of "reading" the city and the cultural and temporal limitations of terminology see William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, "From 'Great Town' to 'Nonplace Urban Realm': Reading the Modern City," in William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, eds., Visions of the Modern City (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987), pp. 1–39.

11. For a concise review of pastoralism and its connection with suburbia, see Rowe, Making a Middle Landscape, pp. 244–47. For an in-depth consideration of the relationship between culture and modernity in nineteenth-century America, see Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), especially pp. 1–33.


14. For a review of the social history of suburbia as it has affected the family in general and women in particular, see Dolores Hayden, Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984). For a review of the social history of housing in America in general and suburbia in particular, see Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), especially pp. 240–61.


16. Although there exists a vast literature on the decline of the urban, a number of authors adopt sociocultural perspectives that are particularly relevant to the contemporaneous situation. See Mike Davis, City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (New York: Vintage, 1992), especially pp. 161–263; and Jerry Herron, After Culture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), especially pp. 117–201.

17. See Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier, pp. 283–305.


20. See Boyer, Dreaming the Rational City, pp. 282–90.


26. See Rowe, Making a Middle Landscape, pp. 3–64.

27. For an articulation of the pedestrian pocket concept, see Peter Calthorpe, "Pedestrian Pockets: New Strategies for Suburban Growth," pp. 7–20. The experience of Calthorpe's recent project in Laguna West (Sacramento), California, is emblematic of the obstacles confronting architects and urbanists who espouse a reformulation of the contemporary peripheral urbanization paradigm. Despite its "progressive" aspirations, many derived from the earlier Pedestrian Pocket concept and Calthorpe's work in sustainable development, the project as realized is little more than a California version of the traditional development strategy.


29. For a journalistic review of contemporary peripheral urbanization as it is unfolding in selected cities across America, see Joel Garreau, Edge City: Life on the New Frontier (New York: Doubleday, 1991).


31. For a critique on the condition of dominant American culture in the prewar era, see James, American Civilization. For an anthology of alternative cultural histories of America, see Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., The Power of Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

32. For a perspective on the cultural implications of change and constancy, see Amos Rapoport, House Form and Culture (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), pp. 78–82. For a discussion of the predicaments of cultural intransigence, see John K.


34. See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 3–11.


36. See Virilio and Brauch, "Marginal Groups," p. 76.