

Urbanism: Urban Design and Heterotopias

DAVID GRAHAME SHANE
Columbia University and The Cooper Union

Urban Design is a strange and imprecise mixture of Architecture and City Planning whose practitioners envision and construct small fragments of cities, without being able to control the larger City or every Architectural intervention. It is interdisciplinary by nature and necessarily looks at the geography, sociology, economy and politics of an entire city as the setting for the design operation. It examines the culture of the city and the designer tries to act in response to this perceived larger cultural environment. The response may take many forms, but Urban Designers draw on Architecture for their design skills and projective abilities. Architecture is the constructional base from which they work as they engage the city at a variety of scales and in a variety of modes.

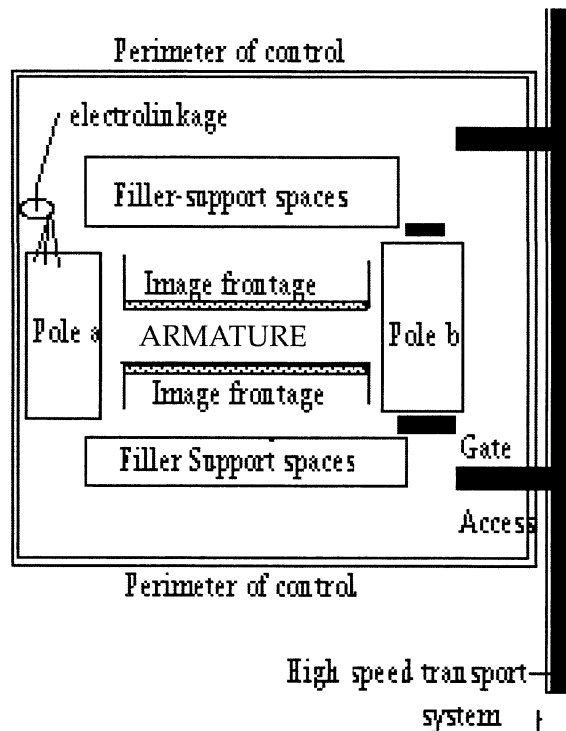
The Urban Design process creates enclaves which act as heterotopias in relation to their surrounding city. Enclaves are differentiated from the rest of the city as new pockets of growth or old areas re-equipped with a new image. Their creators want to differentiate their work from its surroundings, to make it attractive, new, successful, different. In this process the designers mirror and distort the codes of surrounding developments in order to create their own novel solution. While effective formulas repeat, the developers and designers have to refine and adapt for every new project. Each refinement operates within a larger, bi-polar, field of urban semiology. Each development unit combines with its neighbors to form a disjunctive urban ecology with planned and unplanned relationships.

Urban Design creates fragments or enclaves in the city. Urban Designers control the differentiation and refine the differential field further with each development. Enclaves may be organized by stakeholders and gain legal status for a variety of reasons, to protect a community, an activity, a historic piece of fabric, or even to shield an owner's special interest in high or low density development etc. The differential field can be based on historical, ethnic or marketing strategies adopted by a variety of stakeholders in the Post-modern city. This paper briefly examines the historical migration in meaning of an inner city enclave (Covent Garden, London) within such a heterotopic system over time. Covent Garden is then compared to a mall (the Houston Galleria), which also acted as a heterotopic enclave within the larger city-region of Houston's post-war, suburban expansion.

What is an enclave?

Enclaves are areas of control and order in relation to the rest of the city. Their public order is different from the vast majority of our urban experience which may appear to be chaotic and have no code. Their orderly nature reverses the normal, messy nature of urban life. Their inverse code mirrors and distorts the image of the normal everyday experience of private, domestic living arrangements, with its fortuitous mixtures and messes that defy categorization. These enclaves act like mirror reflections of their society, both recognizably the same yet distorted, with their codes reversed in the mirror space. In contrast to the private, domestic areas, the heterotopic armatures and enclaves of the city are disciplined and ordered by global, national or local stakeholders with a mission, whether commercial, cultural, political, sometimes medical or moral. These spaces are deliberately and markedly different from their surroundings. They relate to others of their typological morphology or genealogy. This "reflexive", mirror-like, differential function is fundamental to their initial conception, even if they are later absorbed into the larger, messy texture of the city.

Enclaves possess peculiar characteristics which set them apart from the rest of the city. They are defined by both conceptual and real perimeters, boundaries of control. Entry through the perimeter may be porous and the perimeter invisible, or it may be controlled, fortified and gated, as in a Gated Community or fortress. The gates act as points of control, excluding some and including others in an effort to establish a particular community within the boundaries. In most cases enclaves include image spaces designed to attract a particular community, often organized as linear armatures with controlled scenographic perspectives, sometimes incorporating a forum or square. Thus an immigrant enclave may incorporate features copied from a home community, as well as facilities connected back to that community of origin. Such displacements are fundamental to heterotopic enclaves. The Covent Garden enclave, for example, included an Italianate square, while the Galleria mall incorporated both vertical and horizontal "street" armatures as key image spaces. In Post-modern Las Vegas the power and the distortions involved in this urban scenographic displacement of image spaces becomes especially clear in the new casinos like the Venetian, the Aladin, the Belasco, New York, New York and Paris. Replicas of the Rialto Bridge now occupy parking



ARMATURE & ENCLAVE IN MALL MODEL

Fig. 1. Enclave structure with image space.

lots documented in *Learning From Las Vegas* and a simulacra of the Grand Canal, complete with singing gondoliers, now float on the third floor as shopping malls over casino gambling hall inside the Doge's Palace.

What is a Heterotopia?

"A single real place made up of several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible."

– Michel Foucault.

For Foucault heterotopias contained several contradictory elements within one shared perimeter. The origin of the idea came from medicine, where one cell might play host to a living tissue from another culture, the two co-existing in a strange symbiosis. This ability to house contradictory elements within a single perimeter gave the heterotopia great flexibility in times of change, enabling its owners to facilitate and accelerate change within its boundaries (change could also be resisted within the controlled perimeter). The idea of displacement, the shifting of one tissue into another cell, was crucial to Foucault's concept. This analysis could clearly apply to the displaced urban imagery of the Las Vegas casinos.

Foucault focused his research on the regulatory machinery of the state, prisons, hospitals, asylums etc, which provided "Compensatory" discipline for those unfortunates who did not conform the codes decreed by the rational ordinances of a rational society. These are specialized enclaves in which specific

knowledge is efficiently applied in a highly controlled, closed world (while also retaining contradictory elements such as religious chapels). This "Compensatory" category has also been extended to factories and place of production by later scholars. This disciplinary machinery has survived today in the security arrangements of malls and stores, as well as the hidden cameras of the casinos and their hefty bouncers.

Foucault also had a second category of heterotopias which he never developed in such an extensive survey as the "Disciplinary". These secondary, "Illusory" heterotopias, were much more fluid and unstable in their internal order. Here the "Compensatory" system was reversed and chaos reigned. Values could change in a second, codes could be flipped and the world turned upside down in an instant. Foucault's model for this world was the "Theater of the Absurd" of Artaud or Ionescu, in which all social conventions were questioned beyond the existential minimum. Foucault cited the theater, cinemas, bordellos, casinos and the stock market as belonging to this "Illusory" category. Other scholars have extended this category to shopping arcades and malls, places of consumption. Clearly the Las Vegas casinos are also spectacular heterotopias of "Illusion".

In this portrait of heterotopias as specialized enclaves their dual aspect has emerged. Enclaves have both a regulatory side and an illusory image making side. On the one hand there is the legal department, which is concerned with rules and regulations, enforcement, inspections, the disciplining and punishment of offenders. This is the side concerned with the underlying "Disciplinary" code. On the other had there is the designer and marketing arm which is concerned with the image of the city, the desire and manufacturing illusion. While Foucault scarcely considered this latter aspect, it has become increasingly impor-



Fig. 2. Heterotopia of Illusion. The Venetian, Las Vegas.

tant in the market driven and highly mediated environment of the Post-modern city. Differentiation is crucial to survival in this environment and the capacity of “Illusory” heterotopias for marketing places, aiding in place production and advertising images has made these enclaves especially important to scholars of the Post-modern city.

Urban Design in the City-Region and Global Networks

The fragmentary system of Urban Design has only emerged as a distinct discipline in the last 50 years in western and industrialized nations. Modernist city planning presumed a synoptic overview, that everything could be planned and designed by a central, state, agency or intelligence (Patrick Geddes’ Watchtower). Manfredo Tafuri pointed out that after the Depression of the 1930’s state planning was the rule in Marxist, Fascist and Democratic countries (Roosevelt, T.V.A. etc). It was presumed that the city was transparent and the centralized organ of government could control everything, like the central jailer in Bentham’s Panopticon (Foucault). The segregation and separation of functions provided the crucial gap which powers the heterotopic system of Post-modern Urban Design. Ebenezer Howard provided the crucial diagram for this system of segregation in his book on *The Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (Fig. 4). The city was seen as a polycentric city-region, with satellite new towns set in a ring around the “mother city”, surrounded by the gap of the Green Belts. Howard foresaw the demise of the center city and the rise of a system of self-sufficient new towns around the periphery, forming the city-region. A brief review of the Utopian projects of Le Corbusier, Mies or Hilbesheimer reveals their preference for the center, segregated functions, Total Design, aerial perspectives, panoptic views etc. Robert Moses, with his gigantic model of New York City, belonged to this tradition. The New Urbanists also look back longingly to such dreams of tightly planned and controlled environments.

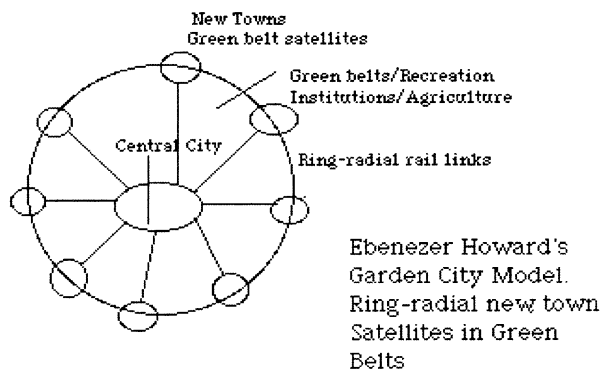


Fig. 3. Ebenezer Howard's Ring-radial, city-region system.

Disciplinary codes predominated as all functions were carefully segregated in mono-functional zones for maximum efficiency. Communication and transport systems connected these enclaves and privileged the center. Kevin Lynch in *Good City Form* described this system of urban production as the “City-Machine”, in a diagram which showed how each part is self-contained, linked by channels of communication, can be easily replaced and has no sense of the whole (Diagram 2). These enclaves, whether planned or free-market, all contained strong urban armatures (linear sequences/narratives) to counteract Modernist notions of free flowing, universal, non-specific space. They had clearly defined perimeters, a sense of enclosure and were clearly differentiated from their surroundings, neighbors or competitors. These enclaves might contain housing, commercial uses, industrial uses, recreational uses etc.. segregated from all others.

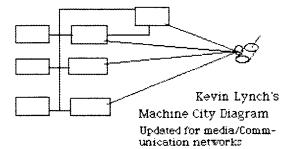


Fig. 4. Lynch's “Machine City” modified for satellite communications.

The planned and unplanned decentralization of the Post-War years gave a peculiar twist to the Modernists’ utopias, one that broke the dream of total control and the privileged center. A polycentric urban dispersal was prompted by many concerns, varying from fear (as a defense against atomic attack after Hiroshima) to the political (the desire to create a large, stable, property owning middle class). The unintended consequence was the draining of the inner city of population, jobs and industry. An intended consequence was the creation of enormous, peripheral, linear, *Edge Cities* (described by Joel Garreau in 1991) based on new media communication and transportation systems (such as the automobile and TV.). To the inhabitant traveling at speed, the city became a system of more or less dense urban fragments. These urban enclaves were dispersed throughout the landscape around the highways, railways, airports etc around the older central core (Fig. 5).

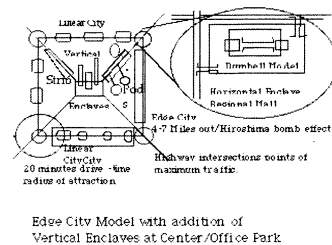


Fig. 5. Edge City and mall enclave.

Many authors have pointed to the linear nature of these peripheral cities, ranged along a spine or armature of a highway, taking advantage of the high speed automobile travel to restructure urban functions within a regional landscape. In this city mobility, access and travel time replace close pedestrian proximity and public transportation in the center city. With the increased mobility and isolation of the population, the communications media (telephone, radio, television, the internet etc.) come to play a bigger and bigger role in making links between people, making for virtual communities and encouraging the development of heterotopias of "Illusion" linked to the media. This isolation makes us very dependent on the media, allowing our perceptions of the city-region, its inhabitants and locales, to be easily manipulated by those with a clear agenda or large financial backing. Thus the image of the city in the Post-modern city takes on a meaning never intended by Lynch, but easily understood by Marshall MacLuhan.

The City-region as a Heterotopic System

It is not hard to read Post-modern American, European, Latin American or Asian cities, as "City Machines" formed by a series of enclaves of specific typologies or pathologies, linked by transport and media systems. Enclaves in this system act as heterotopias, spaces of high efficiency and great specialization, which temporarily serve as urban attractors, pinnacles of profit, social control, fashion or decay. The distance between these enclaves creates a heterotopic system in which comparisons and communications are brokered by the media. Howard's Garden City, Kevin Lynch's Machine City and Garreau's Edge City, all set enormous distances between their urban enclaves and connect them through communications networks. Umberto Eco outlined the consequences of such a reliance on media in "Hyperspace" in *Travels in Hyper Reality* (1986), while *Learning from Las Vegas* emphasized the Pop Monumentality and megascale exaggerations of the Strip. Jean Baudrillard in *America* found that the symbolic realm of the nation, based on a system of speed and absences, was dominated by the spectacle, the "Hyper Real" event, powered by advertising and marketing.

Division, distance, differentiation, exaggeration and hyperbole are all fundamental to heterotopic urban systems. These involve the displacement of icons, the attraction of opposites and the overcoming of distance through communication systems, which connect the dispersed city-region and global system together. These communication systems function as an additional mirror system, a feed-back loop, articulating issues within the system through distorted images. In *Sim City* the Mayor must pay constant attention to the newspapers, which articulate the citizens desires according to a conservative, pre-programmed agenda. The media loop, as a mirror system, necessarily involves distortion, code reversals and inversions. In Las Vegas it is no surprise the Venetian alters the position of the Rialto Bridge, so it faces the Campanile and the Doge's Palace. Such displacements are part of the dream world of media trans-

ference, where symbols and icons can be recombined. Inside a heterotopic systems such displacements are normal, defining the relationship with the neighboring Paris or Treasure Island (like the distinction between Little Italy and Chinatown in Downtown). Such transpositions differentiate each fragment within the heterotopic system of city in terms of place promotion, urban semiology and image.

Heterotopias of "Illusion", with their multiple compartments of time and space inside one perimeter, can easily link to this system of mass communication. Once the initial displacement has been established the desire to transcend distance, hybridize and heal the divisions, drives the economy of this "Compensatory" and "Illusory" system. Thus the attraction of opposites, as well as the attraction of similarity, establishes communities. Immigrants dream of riches in the metropolis, there some group together in enclaves and try to recreate their old, lost community. Displaced images and institutions from the "home" country are re-created. Similarly people living in low density city-regions are attracted to high density experiences, either in suburban malls or high-rises at the city center, as well as in theme parks. Casino owners appeal to suburbanites with images of the dense city, turn day into night with their illuminations, provide fountains in the midst of the desert.

Foucault was aware of the semiology of the city developed by Barthes, its "floating signifier" was paradoxically and ironically incorporated in Foucault's sketch of a heterotopic system. At the end of his radio talk Foucault specified the ocean liner as the perfect heterotopia, travelling between "ports and brotels". This image, linking the heterotopia to a Modernist machine interacting with trade and empires, work and leisure, implied but did not articulate the fundamental connection between capitalism and heterotopias. Between metropolis and colony, between European and colonized, an enormous, reflexive gap existed which was exploited by the merchants and sailors on board the ocean liner. This gap, this enormous differentiation, created desire and powered the consumption/production cycle in the capitalist system. This gap also fuels the Post-modern enclave created around highly differentiated armatures or images. Thus the casinos offer the American public, the majority of whom now live in the suburbs, the chance to visit the city in their safe, themed simulacras. The casino owners advertising and promotions in the mass media systems of the suburban city-region further articulated this gap, amplifying the system of displacement, refueling the desire to possess the "other", the forbidden city (32 million visited last year).

Two Case studies: Covent Garden, London and The Galleria, Houston

Covent Garden, when it was built in 1632, was in marked contrast to the medieval fabric of contemporary London, with its half-timbered construction, overhanging upper stories and pronounced roof gables. Covent Garden, in contrast, was built with standardized, modular, brick facade. Chaotic, mercantile indi-



Fig. 6. Covent Garden, London.

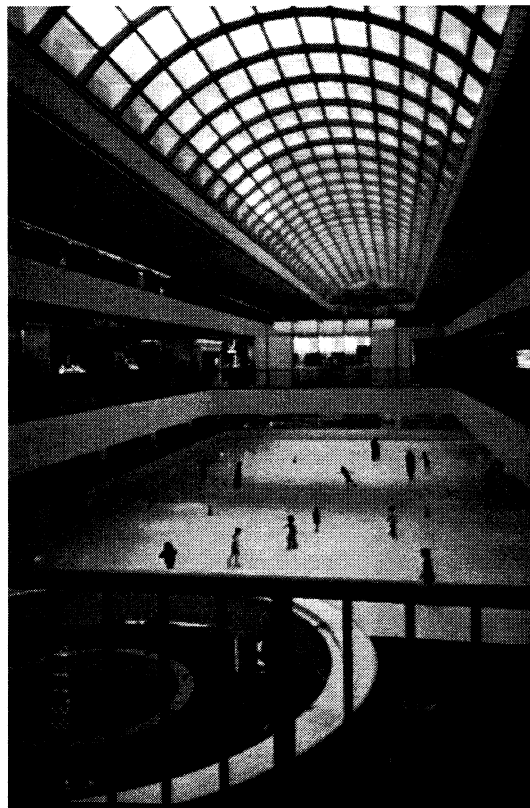


Fig. 7. The Galleria Mall, Houston.

viduality was repressed in favor of a larger, bourgeois and aristocratic order, following Inigo Jones' designs, imposed by the King who controlled development permits on the edge of London. The main street approach from the east was built as a stage set, with its long axis leading across the square to the oversized, colonnaded portico on the east end of St. Pauls Church. The giant doors to this portico were nailed shut, because the altar was at the east end of the church, which could only be approached through a garden from the west.

The Covent Garden development stood out for its scale of conception, axial ordering, scenographic image space. The style of house construction and well ordered mode of life imagined for the enclave, made it attractive as a fashionable, high class residential enclave for the wealthy. It sponsored a pattern of growth for London's westerly expansion in the area of the "Great Estates" (beloved by Summerson and Rasmussen). What was once exceptional became normal over time, as the center of London shifted westwards to the larger and more fashionable estates further out in the West End. The Covent Garden enclave in this process descended the social scale, becoming the theater and entertainment district (Covent Garden Opera House, Drury Lane theaters etc.) and red light district of London. To boost falling revenues a fruit and flower market was established in the once fashionable square, bringing working class housing. To modernize this messy situation, in the nineteenth century the Bedford family build a proto-industrial, steel and glass market shed in the square and cut roads to better give access, like Garrick Street. Nor is it surprising that, with the removal of the market in the 1970's that the once pristine, steel and glass market building should be reborn in the Post-modern, post-industrial era as a historical fragment, to be a popular Festival Market, a historic, downtown mall for tourists and out-of-town visitors.. Here a leisure oriented youth culture, building on the Carnaby Street enclave which was linked to the rise of the Beatles, continued the district's heterotopic tradition in bars, night clubs and highly specialized boutiques, advertising agencies and internet oriented shops.

Like the Covent Garden, the first regional, commercial, shopping malls stood in stark contrast to the acres of mono-functional, single family housing which surrounded them in post-war America or the low density new towns in Europe. A shopping mall, like the Galleria in Houston, had its own internal order and priorities, its axial scenographic armature, its hidden service areas and a singular function expressed with great clarity and purity. Its owner, like the Earl of Bedford, protected it from the rest of the messy city, in this case rejecting residential uses entirely. Thus the Galleria, like Covent Garden, was reflexive of the surrounding single family houses and garden apartment complexes. It mirrored them and reversed their codes, where they allowed only residential, the Galleria only allowed commercial uses. Through this exclusion the owners of the enclave established its difference from the surroundings, as the Earl of Bedford had done in London. With their air conditioned, Olympic size skating rink below the central armature, the own-

ers and designers also established their difference from the mixed uses of Downtown, and from the competing suburban malls of the period. Against the tropical heat of Houston the enclave proposed an air-conditioned oasis in a blaze of publicity.

Just as Covent Garden sponsored a pattern of London growth westward, the Galleria also expanded to the west. Galleria 2 is a vertical, Portman style atrium. Galleria 3 is a multi-layered, department store and parking complex. Galleria 4 is a compressed and truncated recapitulation of Galleria 1. All of the Galleries have been altered and reconfigured to compete with surrounding malls and maintain a high occupancy rate. In addition the Transco Tower was built as a beacon, the tallest skyscraper outside a metropolitan core at 1000 ft. Together the 4 Galleries, their attached hotel and office towers and 9000 parking spaces replaced downtown Houston as a retail center over 15 years. The 4 malls together formed the first mega-mall over a million square feet of retail space. 60% of all tourists visited the complex more than Downtown. The Galleria was the predecessor of the Mall of America, with a million square feet of retail and Camp Snoopy theme park at its center (42 million visitors in 1999).

Conclusion: The Triumph of the Heterotopia; The Limits of Urban Design

This brief survey has highlighted only enclaves of investment. Clearly the urban and suburban ghetto, an area of disinvestment and racial segregation, also qualifies as a heterotopia which is also highly mediated in terms of negative press reports. In the semiology of the city such enclaves would form the negative pole in contrast to the enclaves of investment. The relationships of such heterotopic enclaves mark the shifting fashions of desire in the city, as populations migrate to and from the center. All these enclaves participate in a constellation of "Heterotopias of Illusion", forming the mediascape of the Post-modern city. In this situation Urban Design takes on a mediated dimension which is rarely considered in discussing the newly founded discipline where "Heterotopias of Illusion" now predominate. The new discipline brought aesthetic controls to the large urban fragments and investment packages created by the dominant system of finance, planning and functional segregation. Its success has also revealed precisely its limits. As the city dispersed into the city-region new urban centers were required and the center also had to be re-equipped for an altered regional role. Urban Design coordinated the internal aesthetics of these urban enclaves as "Heterotopias of Illusion", an exercise perfectly mirrored in the exaggerated scenography of the Las Vegas casinos, whose obvious delights and limitations reveal the problematic of this mode of spatial production.

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