

Barbara's comments and the comments in the article remind me of James Howard Kunstler's amusing but accurate rendition of the "battle" between new urbanism and landscape urbanism. I reproduce the blurb I just prepared for the spring issue of EAP. Kunstler's chapter is in the recent Duany/Talen collection. Here's the blurb:

**Andres Duany and Emily Talen, eds., 2013. *Landscape Urbanism and its Discontents: Dissimulating the Sustainable City*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.**

This edited collection examines the explosive debate between "landscape urbanism" (advocating an emphasis on "ever-evolving, unstable ecosystems and their rapid changes and dynamic oscillations that overturn or rattle longer periods of static equilibrium") and "new urbanism" (a model of community design and planning emphasizing walkable, mixed use neighborhoods of common architectural style). Contributors to the eighteen chapters argue for one position or the other; a few authors argue that there might be points of agreement among the two approaches, though the majority of the contributors suggest little compromise is possible. Some of the chapters are accusatory toward the other approach; as an example, we include below, a portion of modernist critic James Howard Kunstler's bombastic but entertaining "The Zombies of Gund Hall Go Forth and Eat America's Brains."

Kunstler writes:

[An anxiety in relation to the 1990s successes of New Urbanism] was most acute at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD), the Vatican of modernism. After more than seven decades and countless iterations of dogma, and a vast record of built mistakes, it had little left to offer but a pretense of ideological correctness, in particular that it represented "the cutting edge" of design innovation reaching toward an evermore technologically dazzling future. The New Urbanism (NU) especially galled it, with its menacing porches and picket fences, those totems of bourgeois small-mindedness. Eventually, the GSD folk began to grok that the NU was about way more than these minor details, but rather a wholesale reordering of the human habitat into a coherent and comprehensible design theory that ran from the relations between buildings to the ordering of streets, neighborhoods and regions....

In elite architectural circles, mystification was the supreme weapon wielded by their warriors-of-the-cutting-edge. Harvard's Aegnor at the time was Rem Koolhaas, the Dutch architect who used mystification the way Stanford White had used a T-square. Koolhaas viewed the predicaments of overpopulation, resource depletion, financial instability, and consumerism as fundamentally hopeless, and had adopted the career strategy of going with the flow of the entropic zeitgeist, with all its delirious confusion. Hence the buildings he designed were intended to confound people who used them or saw them, to produce a delicious sense of anxiety, the characteristic emotion of the era....

[In 2009, to counter the growing impact of NU in urban-design circles], the Harvard GSD found its avatar in Charles Waldheim, an associate dean at the University of Toronto, a sedulous contributor to the professional journals, and an especially deft theorist conversant with all the post-structuralist lingo that had infested the humanities and fine arts programs since the 1970s. He had conveniently coined the term "Landscape Urbanism" as a way to make the profession [of Landscape Architecture] seem more up-to-date, edgy, and sexy, and in him Harvard found the perfect field marshal to carve out some of its own *territory* on the battlefield of urban design, where, so far, it had been subject only to humiliation.

He came out swinging immediately with an overt declaration that his new field was a "critique of the disciplinary and professional commitments of traditional urban design and an alternative to 'New Urbanism'." He accused the NU of failing "to come to terms with the rapid pace of urban change and the essentially horizontal character of contemporary automobile-based urbanization across North American and Much of Western Europe".... Waldeim assumed that the *horizontal* spewage of sprawl would continue indefinitely and that there was no need to arrest it, merely a charge to refine and improve it. He showed next-to-zero awareness of the global energy resource quandary, or its relation to the disorders of capital formation and all the related dilemmas of epochal economic contradiction. In essence, he was enlisted to serve Harvard's chief institutional aim: defense of the status quo, that is, the cherished old

dogmas of modernism The giveaway was in his statement that LU amounted to “a critical and historically informed rereading of the environmental and social aspirations of modernist planning and its most successful models” (pp. 125-26; 133-34).

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**From:** ACS is a new scholarly forum on architecture and spiritualit [mailto:AM-CARC-ACS-L@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU] **On Behalf Of** Barbara Ruys  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 19, 2014 12:39 AM  
**To:** AM-CARC-ACS-L@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU  
**Subject:** Re: NY Times opinion article: "Professors, We Need You!"

Dear ACS members,  
I enjoyed this opinion article. When I was in graduate school at Harvard in the 80's, it often seemed that the more obscure the verbiage, the more the architect was respected as a deep thinker. Some of it seemed to slipped into 'emperor's new clothes' territory.

I had to laugh at this observation from the article:  
"As experiments, scholars have periodically submitted meaningless gibberish to scholarly journals — only to have the nonsense respectfully published."

The encouragement for us to reach out to the general public and beyond the narrow confines of our disciplines is very health. I would love to know of blogs and other writing that our members are providing for the general public.  
warmly, Barbara Ruys

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On Feb 18, 2014, at 10:29 AM, Julio Bermudez wrote:

Dear friends

One of our ACS members has sent this link to a provocative (opinion) article that recently came out in the New York times (on Feb 15) but it's getting lots of discussion. I read it myself and I think it's worth your consideration:

<http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/opinion/sunday/kristof-professors-we-need-you.html?referrer=>

Julio

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*"leap and the net will appear"*