



Real Radicalism: Duany and Koolhaas by Ellen Dunham-Jones

ALTHOUGH BOTH ANDRES DUANY and Rem Koolhaas have seriously challenged conventional architectural values, Duany is typically viewed as a reactionary and Koolhaas as a visionary. The reasons underlying such responses are as revealing of the biases within academia as they are of Duany and Koolhaas. A comparison is therefore useful.

Here are two architects who briefly worked together, share an interest in the strategic process of urban design, and were passionately inspired by prewar development models — town planning along civic art principles for Duany and the surreal artifice and congestion of the humming metropolis for Koolhaas. Both are among the limited circle of architects who have seriously researched contemporary suburban development. And both have defined the pre-eminent designed alternatives to edge city sprawl to date: the rooted forms of the small town and the dynamic program of the metropolis. Both models are mixed use, compact, dependent on private capital, and inclusive of the work of multiple designers. But here the comparison ends.

While Koolhaas celebrates the architectural and personal freedom of the peripheral growth around Atlanta, Duany bemoans the social behavior imposed by car-dependent planning. The exhilaration of the modern nomad's freedom of movement is depicted by Koolhaas in the sketches for Eurallie's underground "Piranasian Space" of criss-crossing escalators, a picture-window to the side of the highway, spiraling car ramps, and slithering TGV and metro tracks. In contrast to Koolhaas's endorsement of the modern, movement, and ephemerality of life, Duany's energy is put into

slowing people down to a pedestrian pace, and designing the public/private interface to encourage sitting and communal/civic interaction. Duany's use of codes and building types to define the streetscape as an enduring, figural public realm runs completely counter to Koolhaas's detachment of migrant program from formal specificity. By divorcing program from form, Koolhaas retains control of his beautifully stylized forms but concedes the determination of program to the "uncontrollable" forces of the state and market. Duany, except for control of the form at the public-private juncture, concedes the forms to the market (and its insatiable appetite for traditional styles), while vigilantly maintaining control of the mixed-use, mixed-income, pedestrian-oriented program through direct efforts to challenge the legal instruments of the state and market. Through the rewriting of zoning codes and design guidelines, Duany alters public policy, reconfiguring the sandbars that shape the wave Koolhaas so famously surfs.

Who is more radical? Koolhaas's articulation of individual freedom, at the scale of nomadic movement as well as of the individual designer producing masterpieces, places him — ironically too comfortably — in the realm of radical thought. The neotraditional style and its association with conservative, communitarian thought and "family values" mask the radicality of Duany's project (other New Urbanists, particularly his partner Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, should also be given full credit for the promotion of this agenda). This project is both an all-out assault on the bureaucratic practices that make mixed-income neighborhoods illegal and sprawl conventional, as well as a more subtle

challenge to the role of the architect as a signature stylist of unique objects. Although my point is not to devalue Koolhaas's ever-new formal inventions and inversions, or, perhaps more significantly, his critical writing's challenge to the profession's tactics, I do want to recognize the ways in which Duany may more profoundly destabilize conventional practice.

The inability or unwillingness of academia to recognize Duany's work as a critical project reflects a number of institutional biases. First is the unfortunate but widespread practice of dismissing work that isn't stylistically "progressive" or fashionable, regardless of the less visible social or planning aspects. This failure to distinguish between tradition and convention blurs the understanding of the status quo, which a critical position purportedly seeks to subvert, and it denies the possibility of critique operating from a neotraditional stance. Similarly, contemporary architectural theory's emphasis on interpretation of the layered meanings of cultural artifacts and deliberate resistance to closure as necessary to the development of a critical position bars consideration of Duany and New Urbanism's work. Their quantitative research into the demographics, transportation patterns, and legal instruments producing sprawl, and their prescriptive prototype counterproposals leave little room for critical textual interpretation.

Although New Urbanism will not solve all of the problems of the world, its critique of the conventions of sprawl deserves to be better understood. Not only can the built environment benefit, but the schools too might shed their blinders and re-engage themselves in critical practice. ■