

Zeitschrift: Trans : Publikationsreihe des Fachvereins der Studierenden am
Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Herausgeber: Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Band: - (2003)

Heft: 11

Artikel: 10 points toward a perf city

Autor: Somol, R.E.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-918863>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 07.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

a synthetic and highly organised landscape. The appearance of the residual reveals that the enclosed and controlled zones hold extra-curricular powers that can only effectively transform in the absence of a patron within the residual. The genealogy suggests that the controlled and known zones can function as urban design tools because they produce two kinds of urban frontiers: the outward expanding (extensive) and the inward transforming (intensive).

R.E. Somol and Orange Studio

10 Points Toward a Perf City

Passaic seems full of holes compared to New York City, which seems tightly packed and solid, and those holes in a sense are the monumental vacancies that define, without trying, the memory traces of an abandoned set of futures.

Robert Smithson

... excavate the land instead of striating it, bore holes in space instead of keeping it smooth, turn the earth into swiss cheese.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari



Leisure World 1968



Group swimming: Leisure World

1. Archipelago of holes

The holey model operates simultaneously in a state of perpetual completion and emptiness. The appearance of a new enclave has a finished status in itself and neither contributes to nor detracts from any a priori conception of completion. The archipelago of holes is in a perpetual state of equilibrium; the addition or subtraction of a hole never affects the overall network. In OC, unlike the gridded city, development precedes planning; event instigates infrastructure. Build it and they will plan. The archipelago of holes revolves around four conditions which update the traditional urban concepts that are insufficient to explain OC. If traditional readings understand the city as a series of binary opposition (part/whole, figure/ground, public/private, planning/development), the four emerging concepts here are singular terms with an implied gradation. Filled with the most conventional architecture, the holey model finds in the concepts of *Scalelessness*, *Field*, *Accessibility*, and *Experience* a potential for relativity and variable relationships. Where architecture is boring, urbanism becomes sparkling. The holey model stands neither for nor against congestion or emptiness. It pursues instability based on the ease of accommodating change. Through gradation and the nesting of lifestyle islands, the holey model suggests a new metropolitanism. (research: Diego Arraigada and Ioanna Bouyioukou)

2. Islands of extreme difference

OC's territories and networks are marketed on familial principles. But this careful construction supports thriving zones of the inverse: territories that operate quite successfully without familial, or even generational, differentiation. OC is the swinger capital of the country, home to an enormous gay and lesbian population, maintains some of the largest military bases on the West Coast, and serves as the final destination of retirees looking for a life beyond grandchildren. Behind the guard station, fence or wall thrive ways of life seemingly anathema to the county's conservative and functional family reputation. These alternate institutions are supported by posturban spatial

principles and infrastructural networks. What happens on the other side of the community wall is of little concern as long as the immediate neighbors appear to follow the rules. In OC, social experimentation follows spatial isolation. As an endless assemblage of seemingly undifferentiated islands — residential, military, commercial, or educational — dramatic demographic anomalies present in certain islands are easily absorbed with no damage to the system as a whole. The benefits of this bland or superficial system is precisely its ability to tolerate and incorporate islands of extreme difference while allowing each individual element to proceed undisturbed. (research: Bianca Siegl)

3. Corporate socialism

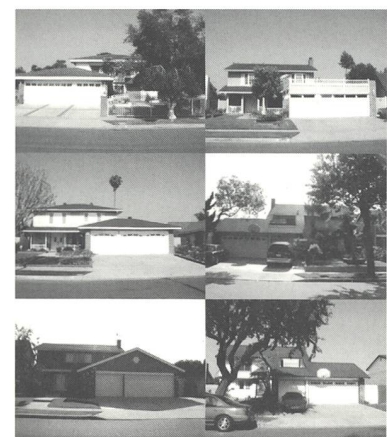
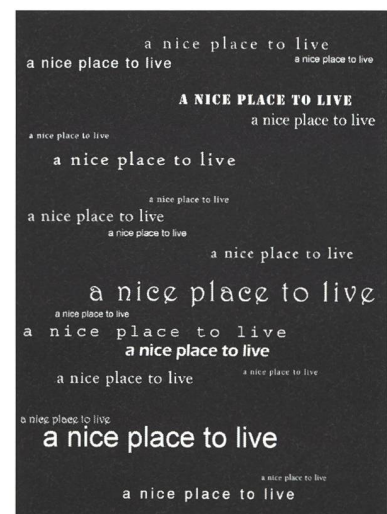
Rather than overtly ideological, the postmetropolitan is opportunistic with regard to its mixture of political techniques and initiatives. This mixture, perhaps, accounts for the fact that Orange County declared bankruptcy in the mid-90s after county officials invested public funds in the junk bond market. In the inverse direction, perhaps — and just as the CIAM dream was purportedly being imploded at Pruitt-Igoe — a collectivist modernism was being reincarnated through the private developers of the Irvine Ranch. The “utopian” development of Irvine, achieved through an official policy of “planned living”, recuperates some of the socialist ambitions of CIAM, though now provided for by corporate sponsorship. The combination of collective rules for appearance and maintenance, the basic nucleus of planning revolving around the dwelling unit and sub-development, and the attention to a balance of work, recreation, circulation, education and living, demonstrates the surprising survival of CIAM goals through other means in the case of the Irvine Company. (research: Sharon Shafer)

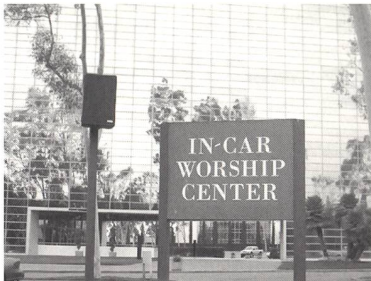
4. PEE (“Put Everything Everywhere”)

The city motto of Fountain Valley, one of the thirty-odd municipalities that constitute OC, is “a nice place to live”, variations of which serve as mottos for many of the other communities. In order to promote this implied manifesto of “niceness”, the city promotes the distribution of commercial vendors as a way to serve its predominant residential spread. The theory is that if a particular store works in one part of town it should be replicated in other areas of the city, thus removing hierarchy and making areas similar to one another. Here identity is a function of similarity. As an alternative to NIMBYism (“Not In My Back Yard”), the implicit program of PEE (“Put Everything Everywhere”) aims to distribute separate uses throughout the city, thus producing overall evenness (at the city scale) and high local difference. While NIMBY creates a low level of interaction and participation due to its rigid zoning, PEE supports increased interaction and adjacency where the posturban field can absorb change. PEE operates between the overall OC scale (with its islands of extreme difference) and the block scale (of extreme juxtaposition) to produce a super-generic middle scale, where everywhere is “a nice place to live”. (research: Christine Heiden)

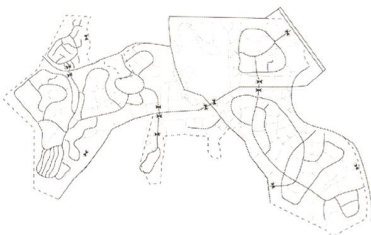
5. Uniform uncertainty

While voids or holes may be seen as negative elements in traditional planning, they form a significant corollary to the PEE doctrine (see above), the fact that *anything can go anywhere*. Uncertainty is built into the system though a distribution of voids that can become anything; development (and withdrawal) occurs across the field as a whole. As a programmatic wild card, the void is not static and offers opportunity without limit. A civic center, commercial development, research park, or school, e.g., may appear anywhere. Feedback and interaction are multiplied, while distinctions emerge amidst a dynamic evenness. (research: Christine Heiden)

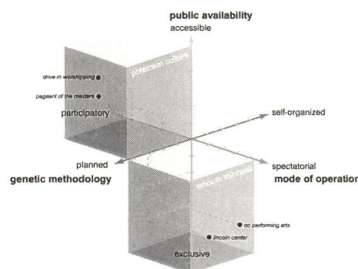




Philip Johnson: Crystal Cathedral



Access to gated communities



Situated pooled culture

6. Extra-normal

In terms of statistics and reputation, OC occupies the middle of the bell curve, overstocked with the usual, routine, common and standard. Its M.O.: boring is better. But it is precisely this infrastructure of homogeneity that allows the extreme to develop (politically, socially, economically, and so on). Multiplying itself, using what's there, the normal reaches its critical limit and emerges as extra-normal (X-n). Freed from the stigmatism of having nothing to offer, and sometimes because it has so much of nothing to offer, the X-n enclave becomes destination and desire. The extra-normal thus escapes the fates of its conceptual cousins, the everyday, the uncanny, and the generic. It does not reproduce the same (everyday), expose the critical difference (uncanny), or acquiesce to its statistical fate (generic). The extreme-mean is the catastrophe (or revenge) of the bell curve; no longer Ozzie and Harriet v. the Wild One, but their simultaneous co-existence: the Osbournes. It has no need to either *normalize form* (the reproduction of the same signature spectacle everywhere) or *formalize the norm* (the regulations of new urbanism). (research: Leilani Trujillo)

7. Accessibility

The public/private distinction — the traditional opposition that fuelled most of the last century's urbanism — is no longer a valid way to understand the holey model. Instead, the urban experience is perceived through the navigation of spaces with different degrees of accessibility and gradual transitions through greater or lesser access restrictions. Closeness to things is not measured by proximity but by accessibility. Just as what used to be known as public spaces are emerging as destinations, some of which you may have to pay something for, so too the privateness of private property is also less strong: your friendly community, e.g., helps you decide — or has already decided — the style and colors of your house. Each part of each enclave has its associated degree of access. Its perimeter can regulate its permeability and can support specialized circulation devices such as intelligent roads. High accessibility spaces can be located within low accessibility ones and vice-versa. An urbanism based on accessible space generates new spatial and programmatic relationships and enables potentially richer social interactions. Space gives way to a gradient of users and activities. Deeds of ownership are replaced with pass cards. (research: Diego Arraigada and Ioanna Bouyioukou)

8. Pooled thinness

Against the top-down or irradiation model of cultural transmission (e.g., the dispersal and implantation of "cultural centers" in apparently deprived areas), pooled thinness is an epidemiological model of cultural formation and exchange that relies on participants inventing shared interests and playing with differences to complexify the discussion and experience of their common obsessions over time. It occurs in homes, stores, bars and clubs — sites of the least resistance — more than museums and official institutions of culture. Rather than evaluating (and dismissing) postmetropolitan areas on the basis of traditionally centralized (aka, urban) models of culture, new formations like those offered by OC are better understood as providing rich reserves of pooled thinness. This is the landscape of the garage band, the next fashion trend produced in-house, a topography for the invention of new sports, and the container for diverse and idiosyncratic collections. Pooled thinness deploys the logic of eBay — reconstituting and channelling what was once junk or noise as a new form of knowledge and collection—against that of the NEA, which tends to transform the unique object into junk through its reproduction everywhere. (research: Erin McCook)

9. Universal materialism

The fastest and most dominant producer of identity in OC is the color green. Following graders and extensive networks of irrigation, the perfectly landscaped territory is the sign of civilization, value and security. What would be residual in other situations operates here as a plane of consistency from which everything else is made possible: whether speculation, experimentation, or redundancy. While the “kit-of-parts” ideology (whether academic, as with Christopher Alexander, or commercial, with KB Homes) takes its cues from the seeming centrality and articulation of the single-family house, the lessons of OC suggest a peripheral shift in attention to the “universal materialism” of green, the ability to produce difference by intensively exerting diverse pressures on the same material substrate, making one kind of “stuff” assume multiple obligations and situations. Though most evident in the verdant background that holds everything together, the logic of universal materialism flows through all aspects of OC, even in those places (like home construction) where its lessons are most repressed by obsolete notions of (small) “difference”, a domestic version of the themed lessons of Disney where the different is ultimately rendered as the same. Universal materialism promises an alternative future where the same changes states as required to accommodate difference. (research: Alexander Lehnerer and Stephan Renner)



10. Hyperdesign

Design is a coloniser. Extending its line from “designer objects” to “designer lifestyles” to “designer environments”, design emerges as an urbanisation technique that, through the logic of capital and urban development, has advanced into a total operation characterised by extreme spatial prescription, control, complexity, and organisation. Design has accelerated into Hyperdesign: its perfect manifestation can be found in the Gated Enclave, a site that is absolutely dense with design. As a carefully constructed package synthesising inhabitants, architecture, landscaping, rules and marketing strategies into visual coherence and relational obedience, the gated enclave can be understood as an environment that is *comprehensively designed*. Here, architectural “appearance management” maintains the visual coherence of the gated territory in order to sustain its identikit credibility. Design is deployed as a centrifuge that blanks out differentiation leaving the gated enclave to read as 100% backdrop. But in order to effect backdrop as backdrop, design needs to be continually practised. Appearance management is not restricted to preliminary catalogue matters of colours, shrub height and grass species, but also extends into time and space through an imposed micro-behaviour management where activities such as carwash and garbage collection are spatially and temporally prescribed. For the inhabitant to engage with the laws of appearance management means to engage design-in-reverse: to practice design through negation. Design collapses into a surface condition upon which the inhabitants play out their daily life practises. These practises are so thick that they produce another kind of conceptual interior — the exterior itself becomes a species of its interior — within which inhabitants exercise the dual role of creators and curators. In this way, Hyperdesign offers a new kind of environment that elicits new forms of participation and performance. (Penelope Dean)



Photograph: Marc Räder

Robert E. Somol is Assistant Professor of design and theory at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Penelope Dean is an architect and Ph. D. candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Diego Arragada, Ioanna Bouyioukou, Penelope Dean, Christine Heiden, Alexander Lehnerer, Erin McCook, Stephan Renner, Sharon Shafer, Bianca Siegl, and Leilani Trujillo were participants in the research studio “Endless Orange” conducted by Robert Somol at UCLA in 2003.