

## **Review: Repairing the American Metropolis: Common Place Revisited**

By Douglas Kelbaugh

Reviewed by [Ryder W. Miller](#)  
San Francisco, USA

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Douglas Kelbaugh. *Repairing the American Metropolis: Common Place Revisited*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002. 272 pages. ISBN 0-295-98204-7(trade paper); 0-295-98230-6 (cloth). US\$29.95 trade paper; US\$50.00 cloth. Acid-free and recycled from 10% post-consumer and at least 50% pre-consumer waste.

David Kelbaugh retells and explains the guiding historical/philosophical and ideological trends that have impacted modern architecture and urban design. Here told are the movements which have shaped what we see in our urban environment, the buildings themselves being a dialogue between Modernism, Postmodernism, Deconstructionism, Phenomenology, and so forth. Also explained are the Green Building, and Environmental and Solar Architecture. There is also discussion of High-Tech Architecture and Historic Preservation and Critical Regionalism of which Kelbaugh writes "In the end, respect for place, nature, history, craft, and limits will precipitate a Critical Regionalism" (p. 93). But Kelbaugh, Dean of the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, also explains their faults and limitations (as well as a Typology: the Architecture of Limits).

On the Urban Design side, the work also advocates for the utopian New Urbanism in contrast to the less pragmatic Post Urbanism and Everyday Urbanism. Kelbaugh writes, "Imperfect as it is, New Urbanism is substantially and, in many cases, spectacularly better than conventional suburbs. ... In so many ways New Urbanism is a win-win proposition. Sound design and community planning, healthy and sustainable ecology, economic and social diversity, and good governance can all fit into the New Urbanist canon. Rarely do so many ethical, environmental, social, and economic entries fall on the positive side of the ledger" (p. 180).

Kelbaugh relays the importance of environmental issues like urban sprawl and open space. He recommends regulating sprawl, to take advantage of opportunities to promote suburban infill instead, and to create open space. Kelbaugh suggests that we can eliminate costly urban sprawl by eliminating artificially cheap land and artificially cheap energy (gasoline).

Kelbaugh eloquently defends the need for Open Space: "Shared open and enclosed space is a critical element in establishing a sense of community and

quality of life for residents; it becomes even more critical as levels of density increase" (p. 154).

The author warns that the work can be personal, that is, it exposes the architect who can usually only be gleaned from the designs of his/her buildings. Though personal at times, the work is fascinating and intellectual, showing how the history of urban architecture has been a dialogue between evolving historical philosophies and ideologies.

*Repairing the American Metropolis* is a sequel to Kelbaugh's *Common Place*. Alex Krieger, Chair of the Department of Urban Planning & Design for the Harvard Graduate School of Design, writes in the Forward that *Common Place* "both recorded and instigated more enlightened urban design and planning. *Repairing the American Metropolis* builds upon and refines its predecessor while broadening its lessons and audience. It is at once a primer on how architecture, urban design, and metropolitan planning can be pursued in a key that resonates with sustainability and wise stewardship of the environment, and a compelling polemic on why such thinking will produce better places to pursue our livelihoods and live out our lives" (p. xii).

The author ends by presenting policy suggestions to help foster healthier cities. Kelbaugh warns, "These changes and reforms are essential because the alternatives are stark, and the consequences of inaction are apocalyptic" (p. 204).

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