The Phoenix Public Art Department has agreed to curate an “urban art gallery” using these panels. This will change every six to twelve months, providing display space for local artists, school art programs, and local cultural groups. Additional vertical panels are displayed as vine screens to help soften the hard urban context. The panels are grouped with other architectural elements to block the south and west sun and form transportation hubs (bus stops) and/or create pedestrian “cultural rooms of retreat” from the harsh desert climate.

Prompts. The other major architectural element, the LampShade, is constructed from a single 8-inch diameter vertical rusted pole that supports a 9x18-foot light box. A standard urban unit, the parking space, provided the basis for the lateral dimensions of the Lampshade, while its height (12 feet clear to grade) was based on the need for a garbage truck to pass beneath. In the chaotic environment of the strip, the Lampshade’s standard vertical dimensions will establish an important new design datum.

By being able to combine covered parking, pedestrian lighting, and signage into one flexible unit the Lampshade does in one move what typically requires three. During the day it can provide shade for a multitude of activities, while at night it can provide illumination for pedestrian safety and evening events. In the demonstration project, the vertical faces of the Lampshade are adorned with an enlarged image of an Evergreen Elm branch—the species planted nearby. But merchants will also be able to paint the Lampshade to replace less effective signage (as well as provide shaded parking).

Single LampShades can be adapted to accommodate photovoltaic cells and battery storage for off-grid use. They can also be multiplied in a variety of configurations, depending on the conditions of a site. Bus stops, parking areas, commercial display, and outdoor eating are among the uses they could complement. In 2004, the Phoenix Department of Street Transportation established the LampShades as one of its standard details. New metropolitan urbanism is the fuzzy union of the built, the planted, and the natural (in the case of Houston the ancient prairie). It is an architecture both visible and invisible. Here Jeffersonian husbandry, now frozen in suburban landscaping replete with leaf-blowers and pesticides, can find new life by seeing the natural as the motor of a new urbanism.

In this return to the natural lies embedded the rejec-
tion of our total dependency on fossil fuels and the uto-
pi-an dream that one day grow out to provide air-
conditioning! Twin-fuel cars! The image of the new
metropolis that emerges from this new field-room is a lat-
eral domain with a quiet but scintillating intelligence—the electronic forest. Here metabolisms will swarm, or swim, in a new liquidity, suspended between the invisible and physical reminders of the public dimension of the metrop-
olis. In Houston these perma-stims will bustle with new
communication software, wireless hotspots, environmental controls for monitoring and guiding both public and pri-
vate traffic—invisible forces that will join an uncanny hard-
ware to struggling break out of its static confines to merge
with the endless trunks of the Zohemic Canopy.

When Suburbia Awakens
Lars Lerup

The ancient urbanism best portrayed by etched maps is passe. The new metropolitan urbanism has been liberated from those petrified inscriptions. But we have also left cin-
ematic urbanism behind, where trains once left crowded platforms in billowing smoke. The new metropolitan mode is handheld video urbanism, where a clip can stop, turn left, fade, begin again, grow dim, and be erased.

But all three are inadequate for the future: the first is too static, the second is too predictable—too noir; and the third is too erratic and self-indulgent. The peculiar sub-
urban potential amalgamation of Nature and culture—of lawn and house—with renewed environmental insistence holds the secret to a new metropolitan urbanism. Rolled
out, its horizontal coherence is weak but persistent, gentle and laconic; it is, when it can be, just there. Never fully complete, undramatic, always struggling against more powerful forces, it still holds its promise. It is this meta-

dolic intelligence that points the way.

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