



After the City

Lars Lerup



After the City

Lars Lerup

*The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England*

© 2000 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

This book was set in Helvetica and was printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lerup, Lars.

After the city / Lars Lerup.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-262-12224-3 (hc : alk. paper)

1. City planning—History—20th century. 2. City planning—Philosophy. 3. Metropolitan areas. 4. Suburbs. 5. Architecture, Modern—20th century. I. Title.

NA9095.L47 2000

720—dc21

99-056867

Acknowledgments

I especially want to thank:

Sanford Kwinter and Stephen Fox for their brilliant admixture of criticism, enthusiasm, and editorial suggestions.

Michael Bell, Aaron Betsky, John Biln, Farés el Dahdah, Edward Dimendberg, Albert Pope, and Frederick Turner for their support, patient listening, and important comments.

Dung Ngo for earlier developments of text and image.

Kim Shoemake and Luke Bulman for their invaluable assistance with the look of the book.

Doris Anderson and Janet Wheeler for their support.

Roger Conover of the MIT Press, whose astonishing twenty-year list I am very proud to be part of, and my editor Matthew Abbate and designer Jim McWethy.

I also want to thank President Malcolm Gillis and former Provost David Auston of Rice University for their active support of a *working* dean. I can think of no better setting for creative work than this great university. I especially want to thank John Casbarian. His friendship and support of my creative work combined with his exquisite associate deanship makes my life at Rice a pleasure. I want to acknowledge all of the wild developers and builders who created Houston, without whom this book would not have been possible. Finally, I want to thank my family who have suffered stoically the ups and downs of the author.

Houston, November 1999

Contents

Acknowledgments, viii

The Metropolis: A Portfolio of Images, 3

I Introduction, 20

Tafari's Smile, 21

The Wanderer, Authority, and Doublespace, 29

The Straying Gaze, 29

Stones at Rest, 30

The Eye in the Center, 32

The Face of Power, 34

The Doublespace, 37

A New Map, 43

II The Suburban Metropolis, 46

Stim and Dross: Rethinking the Metropolis, 47

Houston, 28th Floor. At the Window, 47

Megashape, 49

Intention, 50

The Plane, the Riders, and Air Space, 50

Fields, 51

Sprawl, 53

Oceanic Grammar, 54

Entortung, 56

Stim and Dross, 58

Stimulators, 60

stimdross, 61

Sparta's Revenge, 64

The Other City, 64

Virgin Fields, 66

A Certain Distance, 71

The Protean Field, 73

Radical Mobility, 76

Voids and Vapors, 77

III Architecture Reconsidered, 84

The End of the Architectural Promenade: A Portfolio of Images, 85

Distraction versus Concentration, 86

Planned Assaults, 97

Ambiguity and Action, 110

The Metropolitan Architect, 116

Architects' Hands, 116

The Architect's House, 119

The Architect in the Metropolis, 120

Vehicular Behavior: A Portfolio of Images, 129

Design Machines, 139

Mechanisms of Closeness, 139

Household Vehicles, 143

Toward Fusion, 148

The Simple House, 150

IV The Frontier, 156

The Middle Landscape, 157

Frontiers, 157

Museum Geography, 160

Frontier Ecology, 166

Architecture and Biota, 167

Notes, 176

Bibliography, 190

Illustration Credits, 195

Index, 197

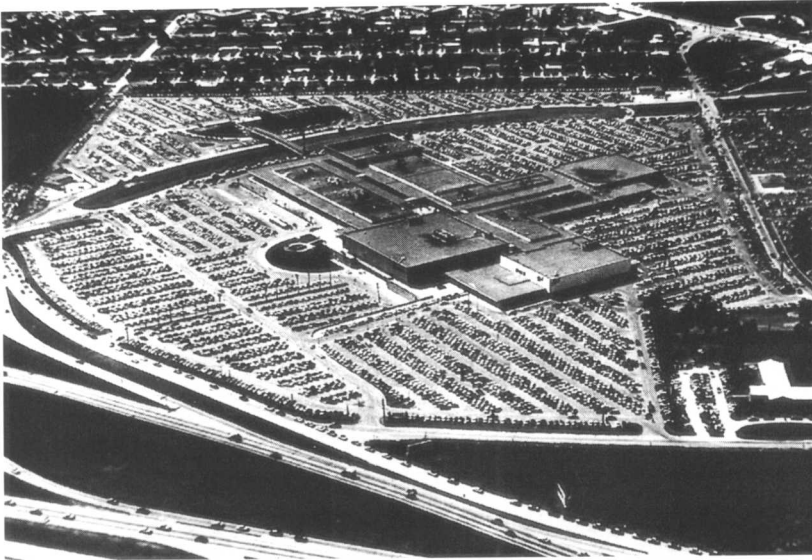
*After
the City*

The Metropolis: A Portfolio of Images



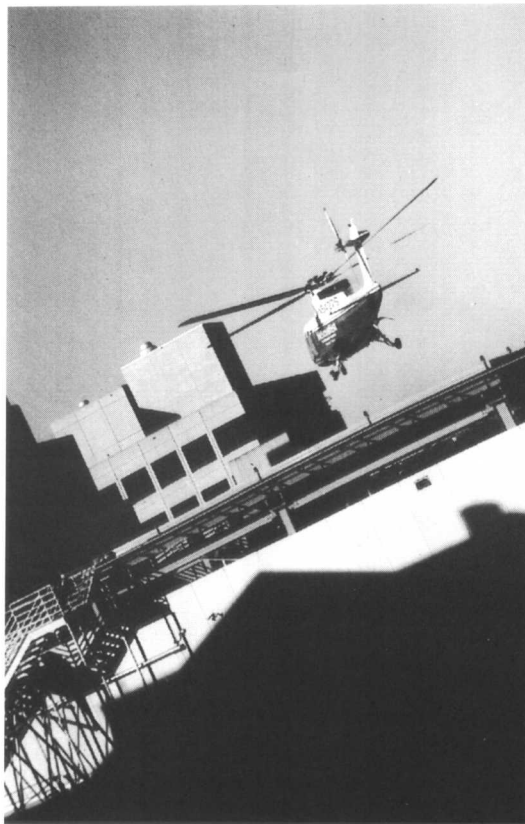
1 *Rear view*

A sudden glimpse, a distant bearing, a momentary stop on the eye's endless loop: roadway, neighboring traffic, instruments, your passenger. The optic pouch explodes instantly into the distance to envelop the megashape of downtown, retrieving it for short-term storage, mapping it onto the construction site of memory, only to cut the shape loose until the next encounter.



2 Gulfgate Shopping City

"Born to shop," the stimmers spill off the freeway to evaporate in the parking lot. The assemblage of car/credit card/shopper is the hypodermic of the shopping stream. Just as the medieval stirrup transferred the power of the horse to the horseman's lance, the shopping assemblage composes and releases pure buying power. Whatever the hour, day or night, the stimmers' time is always now. As a place, the mall is a feverish monad held up only by its intoxicating inside.



3 *Sick City, the Texas Medical Center*

A fleet of air and ground vehicles, elevators, and stretchers delivers the medical body. The ecology of prevention, care, and intervention operates on world time—twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Bodies come and go, live and die. Free parking at first visit. Brain scan, bone scan, MRI, PSA, hopes, illusions, and the eternal wait. Statistics vs. self.



4 Depth and height

The oil gusher is transfigured and petrified in the priapic tower—the emptying of the earth and the filling of the sky.



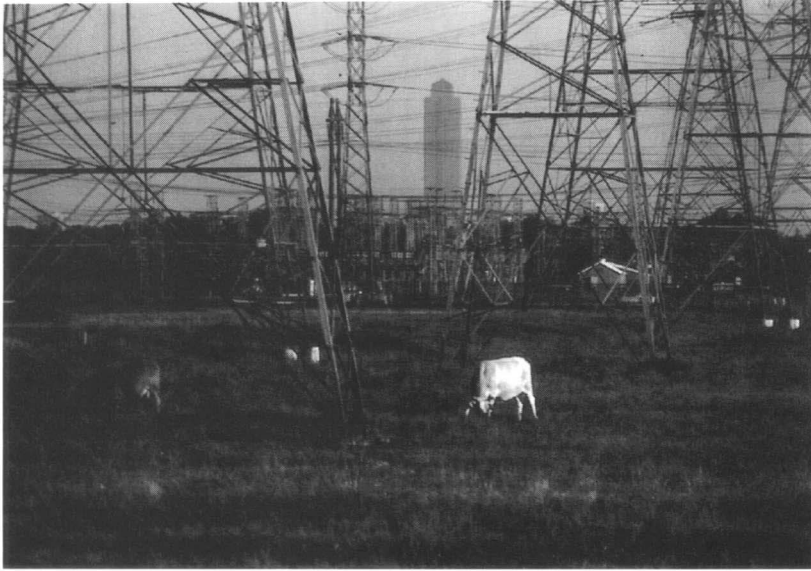
5 *Preparation and promise*

The prefiguration of the metropolis as a holey space soon to be filled. The clean slate includes the city floor, the weather system, and the facsimiles of what's to come (or what could be): the Warwick Hotel at the edge of Hermann Park.



6 *Minor air show*

Lifting out of the ground, the freeway abandons its base to join, ever so briefly, the air space. Helicopters join Suburbans in the minor air show.



7 Skeletons

The corner columns, essential to the skeletal structure inside the distant Transco Tower (designed by Johnson and Burgee), were removed from the early plans, at the client's request, to make the ubiquitous corner office more attractive. This required deeper and wider cantilevered perimeter beams that in turn limited the placement of lighting to the ceiling bay behind. Lighting is made possible by electricity delivered via the skeletal towers in the foreground, which also deliver electricity to the stoves in the homes in the middle ground, allowing the preparation of meat from cows almost identical to the cow in the foreground. Its erect position is made possible by another skeleton, visible only once the cow is stripped of its flesh.



8 *Air space*

Between desire and action: The huge and volatile air bag rests like a pillow over the metropolis. Deceptively inviting in good weather; even the weariest get no rest when Canadian air confronts its Mexican double. In Houston air has a special taste, a special promise, a special desire: a mixture of roughneck and astronaut dreams, of helicopters (heading for the rigs at sea) and space vehicles. Wealth and adventure. Texas action.