The Rise of Modernism and the Decline of Place: The Case of Surrey City Centre, Canada

by Shawn M. Natrasony
and Don Alexander
(Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada)

"In the post-war rush to turn town planning into an applied science much was lost – the city of memory, of desire, of spirit; the importance of place and the art of place-making…"

Leonie Sandercock

Introduction

Modernist principles have shaped city-building since the beginning of the twentieth century. Numerous authors draw a connection between modernist discourse within planning practice and the rise of the Fordist paradigm (Irving 1993; Calthorpe and Fulton 2001; Sandercock 1998). In following these principles, the North American built environment has taken the form of low-density sprawl. This development pattern is characterized by a dominance of single-family housing, a reliance on automobile transportation and a strict separation of land uses.

The profession of urban planning was a response to the worst excesses of the Industrial Revolution. It is a cruel irony that at the turn of the 20th century the problem was overly crowded cities, while at the turn of this century we continue to fight the sprawling pattern that was to 'liberate' us from the inner city. Intent on creating a new and better world, modernism instead provided a blueprint for placelessness. This paper is an exploration of the principles that grounded modernist theory in the creation of the built environment. To begin, three key attributes of modernism are elucidated. Next, Surrey City Centre is utilized as a case study to illustrate how modernism manifests itself in the built environment. There is a consideration of the events that precipitated the decline in the area as well as recent attempts to improve it.

In addressing the excesses of industrial expansion in cities, urban planning took on the same mechanistic outlook responsible for much of this unparalleled industrial growth and, in the process, created new problems. The emergence of Fordism at the beginning of the 20th century was a further elaboration of mechanism. Three key tenets of the Fordist paradigm informed the modernist approach towards city-building:

specialization, mass production and standardization (Calthorpe and Fulton 2001). Fuelled by North American consumerist tendencies, each had a profound impact upon the built environment.

Specialization

To address the problems resulting from massive industrial expansion, urban planning embraced what Jurgen Habermas has termed "the project of modernity." Drawing on the ideas of the eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophers, planning rooted itself in notions of "objective science, universal morality and law" (Habermas qtd. in Irving 1993, p. 475). Within modernism was a "belief in linear progress, positivist, technocratic, rational planning of social and geographic space; 'standardized conditions of knowledge and production and a firm faith in the rational ordering of urban space' to achieve individual liberty and human welfare" (Irving 1993, p. 476).

A significant individual embracing these values was the Swiss architect Le Corbusier. Beginning his practice in the late '10s, he wanted to correct the 'chaos' of the city and create an ideal order. His impact on modernist planning thought is incalculable, and his ideas were widely applied in cities during the 1950s and '60s. For Sir Peter Hall "the evil that Le Corbusier did lives after him" (1988, p. 204). The creation of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), in which he played a significant role, reinforced the strict professional separation of architects as an ego-driven profession and distinct caste, with their modernist ideas later mirrored in urban planning approaches.

Paralleling the impact of CIAM upon architectural practice was the influence of the post-1945 University of Chicago school of thought upon planning practice. During the next 40 years it became the model for the education of planning professionals with the creation of courses and ways of thinking that still hold influence today (Sandercock 1998). Such influences built on the earlier impetus of the City Efficient movement that had challenged the aesthetic priorities of the earlier City Beautiful movement associated with Daniel Burnham. Central to City Efficient is the belief that "[g]ood city planning is not primarily a matter of esthetics, but of economics. Its basic principle is to increase the working efficiency of the city" (anonymous author qtd. in Ley 1989, p. 50).

Today, the notions of 'efficiency' embodied in that movement, and its subsequent offspring, cannot be considered anything but a misnomer given the inefficient allocation of land uses and traffic in the contemporary city. "City planners adopted the thoughtways and the analytical methods that engineers developed for the design of public works, and they then applied them to the design of cities" (Melvin Webber, qtd. in Hall 1988, p. 322). Significantly, planning practice "changed from a kind of craft based on personal knowledge of a rudimentary collection of concepts about the city, into an apparently scientific activity in which vast amounts of precise information were garnered and processed" (Hall 1988, p. 317). At the most basic level, planning became "a science of codes, plot ratios, setbacks, percentages of open space, standardized road patterns" (Newman and Kenworthy 1999, p. 287).

The overarching vision of urban planning became "planning in the service of modernization," as personified by Robert Moses (Sandercock 1998, p. 27). Planners were seen as possessing professional expertise and objectivity. The central concern of

planning came to be understood as the production of alternative courses of action for top-level decision-makers with power. Such thinking still underlies much of what occurs in planning education and practice. Quantitative modeling and analysis, combined with the data-processing power of computers, has created an illusion of independence from the thing being planned. The disciplinary fragmentation of professional education and practice – amongst planners, architects, and engineers – was transferred and codified in the physical form of our cities and has resulted, along with other influences, in our communities' loss of wholeness.

Following a 1926 US Supreme Court decision to safeguard property values from noxious land uses and neighbours, zoning became accepted as the principal planning tool (Hall 1988). The result was the strict separation of work, home, marketplace and social life. This move to create areas dedicated to specific purposes, and to remove uses that conflict produced single-use central business districts, uniform housing tracts, and dispersed shopping centres and recreational facilities.

To facilitate movement between these discrete uses, streets also became specialized in their functions. In the past roads were multifunctional – for pedestrians, vehicles, places of children's play and community socialization. For the modernists, frequent intersections created obstacles to the speedy flow of traffic. Streets became conduits for cars and not people. The manifestation of this concept was in Clarence Perry's neighbourhood unit and his 1927 plan for Radburn – the 'first town for the motor age' (Moe and Wilkie 1997). It shaped the development of future subdivisions in its creation of standards for building placement and density, and a hierarchy of roads with the intent of shielding people from the automobile. Just as land use lost its multi-

faceted nature, so too did streets, with transportation policy at all levels reflecting the new ethos.

Transportation policy during the 1950s and '60s focused primarily on increasing vehicle capacity on roads. Analytical tools considered highways and cars only, while ignoring community design and public transit considerations. Instead of deciding where development should go, engineers just looked at projected traffic trends and designed infrastructure in an attempt to accommodate them. In contrast with this 'silo' approach, Calthorpe and Fulton (2001) understand the term "design" as a process that synthesizes many disciplines. They contend that

> we plan and engineer rather than design. Engineering tends to optimize elements without regard for the larger system, whereas planning tends to be ambiguous, leaving the critical details of place making to chance. If we merely plan and engineer, we forfeit the possibility of developing a 'whole systems' approach of a 'design' that recognizes the trade-offs between isolated efficiencies and integrated parts (p.43).

Land use and transportation policy are but two areas that bear the imprint of modernist thought. Once in place, these ideas were sustained by professional arrogance. In the practice of city-building, there was no place for the average citizen. For Le Corbusier, "[t]he harmonious city must be planned by experts who understand the science of urbanism. They work out the plans in total freedom from partisan pressures and special interests; once their plans are formulated, they must be implemented without opposition" (quoted in Hall 1988, p. 210). Here we see the image of the heroic planner who is professionally trained, all knowing and above all 'objective.'

Bauhaus designer Walter Gropius felt the masses to be too "intellectually underdeveloped" to consult with in his plans for housing projects, whereas Le Corbusier indicated that citizens might be "re-educated" to interact with his urban

vision (Ley 1989, p. 51). Ultimately, though, Le Corbusier was of the opinion that city planning was altogether "too important to be left to the citizens" (qtd. in Moe and Wilkie 1997, p. 43). More recently, during the time of Robert Moses, the disdain felt for opposition to 'The Plan' was apparent in this famous quote on the difficulty of city-building: "more houses in the way…more people in the way – that's all…when you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat axe" (qtd. in Ley 1989, p. 51). In the end, policies were devised and implemented with little reference to the communities that were directly affected.

Mass Production

To deal with the myriad problems of urban environments, city-builders began to view the city as a machine. In this view, the city was an object "to be planned as an engineer plans an industrial process, breaking it down into its essential functions (housing, work, recreation, and traffic), taylorizing and standardizing them, and reassembling them (in the Master Plan) as a totality" (Sandercock, p. 23). At the most basic level of the home, Le Corbusier advocated housing mass produced for mass living, and looked to a future point in time when we arrive at the "'house-machine', which must be both practical and emotionally satisfying and designed for a succession of tenants." (Hall 1988, p. 209). But it would take more than theorists to push this agenda through; political institutions would play a role.

Facilitating the mass production of sprawl in the United States was the Federal Housing Authority (FHA). Using the power to ensure mortgages with low rates of interest, the agency fuelled suburbanization by bringing homes into the reach of most

middle class, and even many working class, citizens. At the same time that suburbanization was being promoted, many inner city communities occupied by people of colour were being 'redlined' (Moe and Wilkie 1997). These policies in tandem had the effect of directing massive amounts of investment to the suburbs to the detriment of inner cities. Moreover the policies created a profitable environment for builders to mass produce communities that were not necessarily livable (ibid.).

A 1938 FHA bulletin titled "Planning Profitable Neighborhoods" described the need for homogeneous, standardized neighbourhoods in order to create a stable market for mortgage insurance. Traditional neighbourhoods as a consequence were labeled as 'bad' and the stage was set for the rise of the development industry (Moe and Wilkie 1997). In the past, homebuilders were small family firms who built communities in incremental steps. Large companies came into being and began to realize new scales of economy. Most notably, the Levitts did for the suburban home what Ford did for the automobile (Moe and Wilkie 1997). In effect "the site became the factory" as hundreds of thousands of similar homes of similar design were mass produced (ibid., p. 55). Levittown on Long Island is the largest single housing development in history at 17,000 homes for 82,000 people (Hall 1988). The increasing scale of production created a sprawl of houses and shopping malls. Ironically, this was not mainly the result of market forces, but the rigid policies and specifications of federal agencies like the FHA, local zoning ordinances and building codes (Moe and Wilkie 1997).

Mass production was extended to road construction as well. Following the Great Depression and World War II car sales declined in North America, until 1950

when car ownership again took off with a concomitant desire for better roads. The US federal government developed the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act to link metropolitan centres, while providing funding for 90 per cent of the construction costs. The twin problems of congestion and parking resulted in downtown interests lobbying for freeways to enter the city. Facilitated by the freeway network and suburbanization, large-scale development became the norm (Moe and Wilkie 1997).

Central to mass production was a drive for profit. Key was the arrival of development companies that were "large-scale, economy and efficiency-conscious, capable of building houses like refrigerators or cars" (Hall 1988, p. 294). Employing assembly line techniques of "flow production, division of labour, standardized designs and parts, new materials and tools" brought profits that were unrealized in the past (ibid., p. 295). City-building was no longer the domain of civic and business coalitions who had some greater civic goal in mind. Increasingly control became concentrated in planning offices, engineering departments and municipal bureaucracies – individuals answering to political leaders – who in turn shared an ideological outlook and often economic interests with private sector developers (Moe and Wilkie 1997). Architect and planner Frederick L. Ackerman laments that we codified "the right of the individual to use the community as a machine for procuring individual profits and benefits without regard to what happens to the community" (qtd. in ibid., p. 41).

Standardization

Within modernism, machines ultimately became viewed as a liberating force. Alongside mass production, standardization, it was thought, could address such

wicked problems as housing in large cities. Society was to be more egalitarian via standardized products produced for all (Ley 1989). There was a strong belief that we could build something better. The ideology of industrial production became ingrained in the culture and ordinary citizens were swept along by this belief (Solomon 2003).

City-builders sought to apply universal solutions that were functional and utilitarian. Le Corbusier set the blueprint for the modernist architect in the city with his proclamation: "I propose one single building for all nations and climates" (qtd. in Ley 1989, p. 47). With this statement he boldly led a reaction against historical architecture and local place-based vernacular traditions. Architect and cultural critic Alfred Loos likewise scorned the 'decadent' ornamentation prevalent at the turn of the 20th century and proclaimed "[t]he meaning" of the building "is the *use*" (qtd. in ibid.). Such thinking presaged the 'form follows function' philosophy of modernism; local context was replaced with a simple geometry, devoid of historical, regional or cultural references.

City-builders lost respect for the locales where they practiced. Rather than seeking to attune themselves to the places they were working on, they sought instead to impose the products of their egotistic imaginations on a blank canvas. Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and le Corbusier most profoundly typified this viewpoint (Moe and Wilkie 1997). In their rush to create something new, modernist planners and architects built "spaces not places'"(Ley 1989, p. 47). Communities became the vacuous, formless non-places of the modernist city (Solomon 2003). The modernists largely succeeded in their endeavor to erase history and replace it with a standardized form, but the effects could not have been more disastrous.

Inherent in the modernist project was a belief in the 'tabula rasa.' As a result, enormous areas were cleared with completely new environments inserted. Again, Le Corbusier led the drive with his unrealized 1925 proposal to demolish historic Paris north of the River Seine (except selected monuments that would be moved), and to replace it with eighteen 700-foot towers (Moe and Wilkie 1997). His La Ville Radieuse concept of 1933, with its zoned land use and geometric design, became the new standard for central city areas and was a modernist template of sorts. "We must build on a clear site…. [T]o save itself, every great city must rebuild its centre" he argued (qtd. in Hall 1988, p. 310). In the end, the effect of these modernist intentions, when put into practice, was to "remove the evidence of the city as a gradual accretion of buildings and spaces, as an organically developing entity with historical reference points, a sense of narrative in the very accumulation of buildings and layouts evident at the street and neighborhood level" (Haughton and Hunter 1994, p. 105).

Sweeping away history and starting anew was viewed as key to the salvation of our cities (Irving 1993). "[T]the city of to-day is a dying thing because it is not geometrical"; we must "replace our haphazard arrangements…by a uniform layout. The result of a true geometrical layout is repetition…standard…uniformity" (Le Corbusier qtd. in Moe and Wilkie 1997, p. 43).   In such an environment a house was "a machine for living in," a street "a factory for producing traffic" (qtd. Ley 1989, p. 48). Such standardized communities also tended to become homogenized and segregated by age, income and race.

Upon visiting Levittown some years after construction, Hall related that "the residential streets are slightly too long and slightly too wide and slightly too straight, so

– despite the variations – the overall result is monotonous and vapid" (1988, p. 296). Lewis Mumford lamented the fact that the "pedestrian scale of the [traditional] suburb disappeared, and with it, most of its individuality and charm. The suburbs ceased to be a neighbourhood unit: it became a low density mass" (qtd. in Moe and Wilkie 1997, p. 49). Also disturbing are the comments of urban historian Kenneth T. Jackson: "by the 1960s the casual suburban visitor would have a hard time deciphering wherever she was in the environs of Boston or Dallas" (qtd. in ibid., p. 54).

For Calthorpe and Fulton (2001, p. 34), these are the "everywhere communities" where all places appear the same: pre-packaged and scattered. In the process of modernist urbanism, we have largely lost the physical context of neighbourhood built around walkability, with clear boundaries, an identifiable centre, and civic institutions and services. With the distinctiveness of place obliterated, people have little interest in claiming space or believing that community matters. Direct and spontaneous interactions are replaced with indirect and selective ones, and the sense of community is diminished.

The aims of modernism were arguably noble in their pursuit of individual liberty and human welfare. What emerged however, were increased individualism, a more commodified human existence, and the loss of a sense of being a part of something larger than ourselves (Irving 1993). Marketing of individualism and freedom ironically had people trapped in a suburban lifestyle and dependent upon the automobile (Moe and Wilkie 1997). A growing critique of modernism arose with Jane Jacobs in the 1960s, with her withering polemic, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

(1961). Her critique of urban planning is considered to mark the transition from modernism to post-modernism in planning theory (Ley 1989)

Modernist thought continues to inform professional practice, however, because we continue to teach it (Sandercock1998). Moreover, modernism continues to inform our approach to city-building because special interests and bureaucratic bias exert a strong influence, perpetuating the status quo. Developers, builders, and engineers wish to replicate profitable developments, while local governments look to increase tax incomes, and neighbourhoods desire exclusivity. With the three modernist principles in mind – specialization, mass production and standardization – we now turn to their manifestation in the case study of Surrey City Centre, with specific reference to the Surrey Central Station and its periphery.

Case Study: Surrey City Centre

Surrey City Centre is located very near the geographic centre of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (see Figure 1).
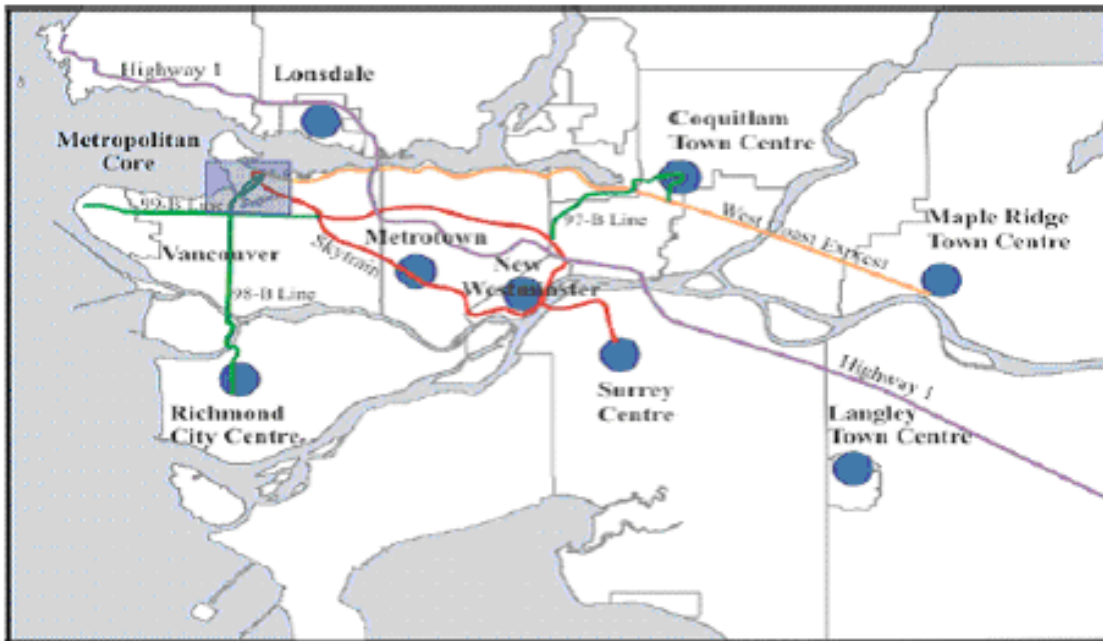
Figure 1: Greater Vancouver Regional District. Source: *GVRD*

Originally known as Whalley, the development of Surrey City Centre was began in 1925 with the construction of the region's first gas station by Harry Whalley. Following the opening of the Pattullo Bridge in November 1937 and the construction of the King George Highway in October of 1940, Whalley became an important transportation corridor. Housing development occurred that was later joined by strip commercial development along the highway. The late 1950s saw the Dell Shopping Center open as Surrey's first such centre, later joined in the '60s by Surrey Place, the first enclosed shopping mall. Both signaled the growing predominance of that district as Surrey's predominant shopping area. The construction of the Port Mann Bridge and the development of the Guildford Shopping Center in the 1960s began to challenge Whalley's position as the dominant commercial core (see Figure 2).
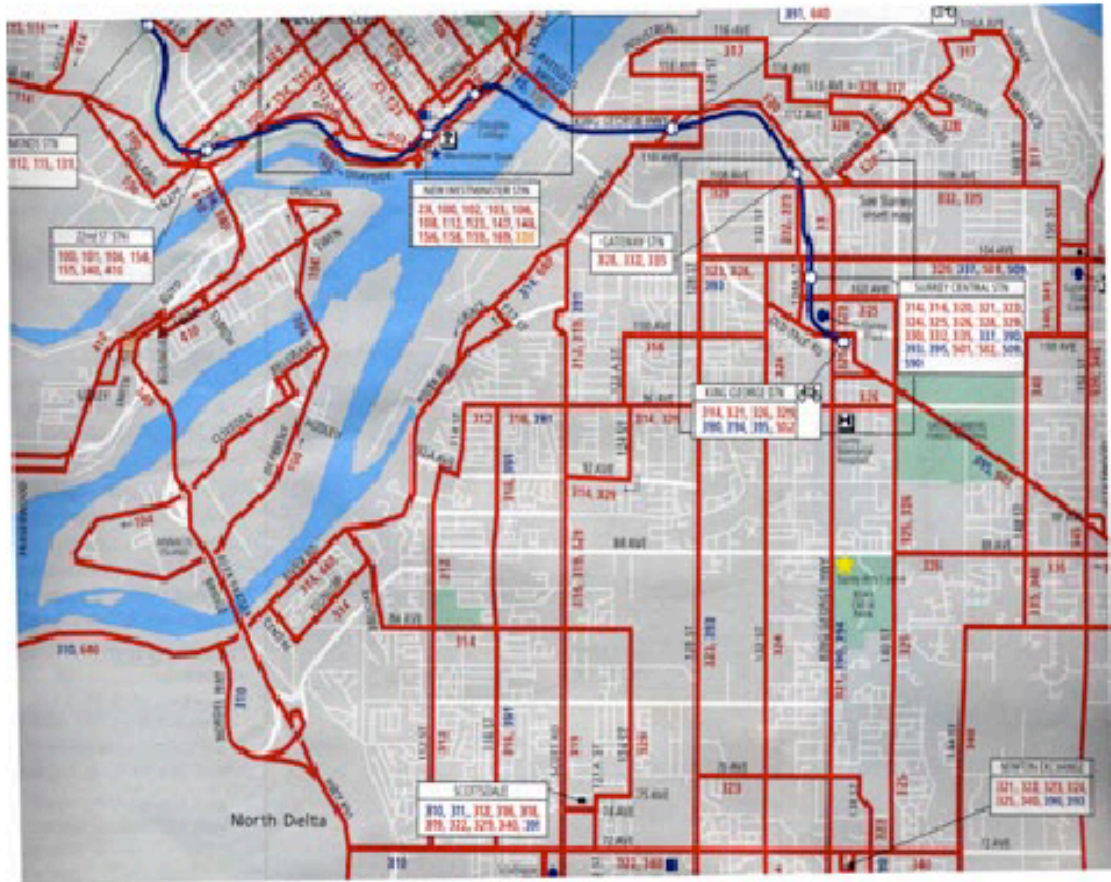
Figure 2: Principal road and transit network in North Surrey. Source: *TransLink.*

Today, Surrey City Centre is one of eight Regional Town Centres identified within the Livable Region Strategic Plan of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD 1996). However, it exhibits problems like any other typical suburban centre: lack of public space, incoherent and chaotic building forms, lack of green space, too much commercial-oriented development, and auto-dependence. The previously outlined principles of modernism are manifest within and help create these problems. The remainder of the paper will elucidate the decisions that precipitated this decline.

Specialization

The results of discipline and sector separation are readily evident within the study area. Employing the analogy of "movement" is useful in discerning how each agency works to achieve efficiency within its respective mandate, doing little to support others, and often working in an ad hoc manner against any holistic sense of place. Planners in the City of Surrey focus attention on land use, and in effect control the *movement of land uses* within the jurisdiction, as one would redistribute coloured pieces of paper on a map. A look at the generalized land use maps shows a predominance of commercial use in the vicinity (see Figure 3). These colours also relate to diurnal patterns of individuals populating the space. Broadly speaking, the commercial areas (in pink) contain people during business hours, approximately 9 to 5, and the surrounding residential areas (in yellow) roughly 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. A vibrant place is one that is populated and used by people throughout the day.
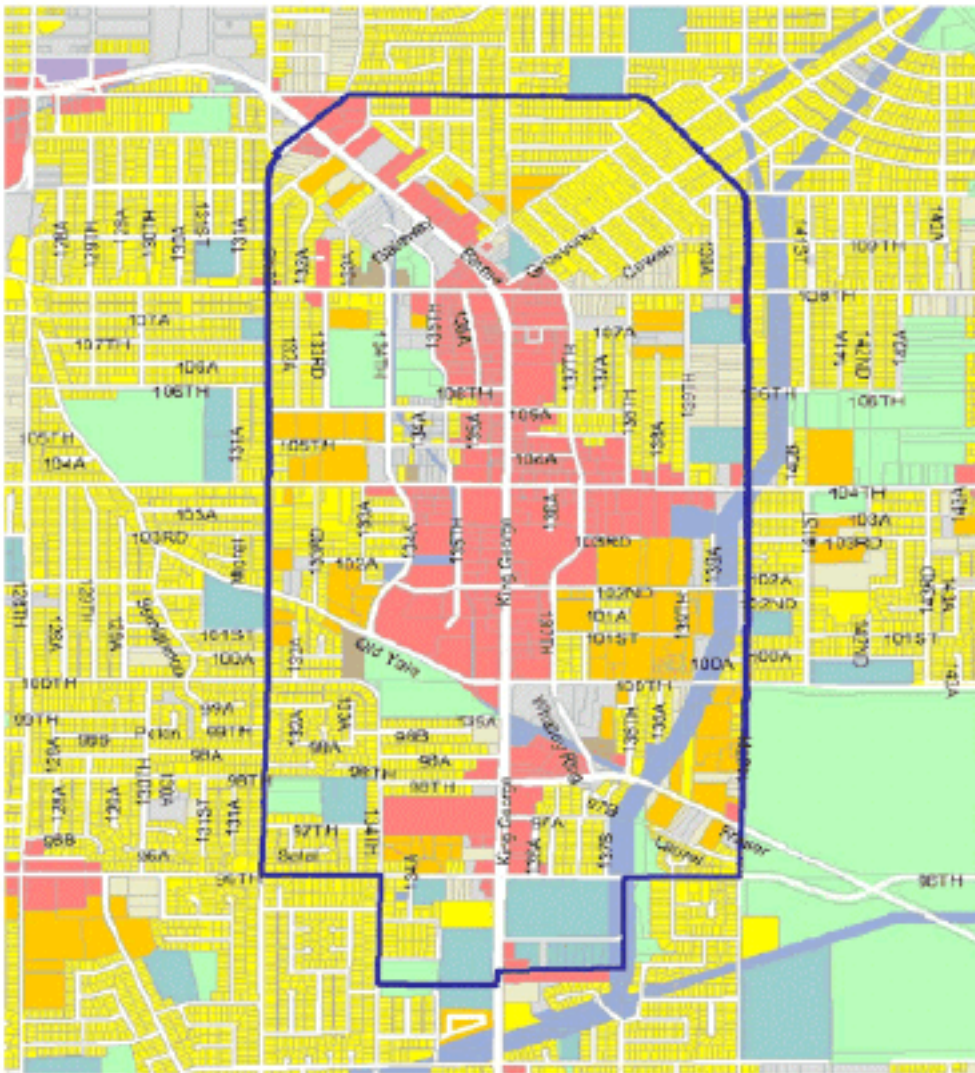
Figure 3. Source: *2001 Generalized Land Use Map, GVRD.*

There are a variety of uses within Surrey City Centre; however, it is not a fine-grained mix. Simply put, it necessary to recognize that more than just uses, the colours on a map are indicative of actual people conducting their day-to-day lives. Surrey City Centre is well-populated during the morning and evening rush hours with commuters, is less well-used by mid-day transit users, and is often deserted in the evenings. A more holistic approach to land use planning would seek an integration of

the different facets of our daily existence (home, work, school, recreation, and social spaces) within close proximity of one another.

Engineers concentrate their efforts on facilitating the *movement of cars*. Over time, Surrey City Centre has witnessed a dramatic increase in road capacity, and there remains a perception that more expansion is required. King George Highway is a typical 6-lane divided arterial bounded by strip commercial development. Its width, traffic, noise and pollution, in addition to the preponderance of parking infrastructure, create an environment that repels all but the most hardened urban pedestrian (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Source: *City of Surrey*

A key component of the recent Whalley Enhancement Strategy is proposed road capital improvements that include upgrades of City Parkway, widening of 103A Avenue and completion of the East and West Whalley Ring Roads (City of Surrey 2003a) Completion of these projects would see capacity increased in an area already overtaken by the car. Exemplifying this is the overcapacity of 134A Street, a little-used 4-lane road with median (see Figure 5). Completion of the ring roads would see a total of fourteen north/south traffic lanes open to through traffic. Surprisingly, the projected

roadworks are heralded as key to "displacing some negative use of the undeveloped land, meeting transportation need and improving appearance of the area" (ibid., p. 21).

Figure 5: Overcapacity of road infrastructure. Source: *Shawn Natrasony.*

A further example of this preoccupation with cars is the planned public square linking Surrey Central SkyTrain Station and King George Highway as part of the Surrey City Centre Urban Design Concept. The intent is to place a square between King George Highway and 134A Street, bounded by two new streets to achieve "increased vehicular access to the activities in and around the square – a more intimate civic scale from the *motorist point of view*" (City of Surrey 1993a, p. 42). Evidently there is little thought of public space solely as a pedestrian experience – it must be "experienced" from a moving car. Additional space given over to the car, and the pedestrian is further hampered.

In addition to an overemphasis on cars, there is an apparent over-regulation of pedestrians. This is most evident if one attempts to walk from the North Surrey Recreation Centre to the Central City complex (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: The Central City Complex. Source: *Surrey Chamber of Commerce*.

Figure 7: Over-regulation of the pedestrian environment. Source: *Shawn Natrasony.*

Pedestrians are confronted by a series of four pedestrian baffles, two bus-only roads with bus-activated crossing signals, a large parking lot and a street (see Figure 7). Though the regulation is meant to protect the pedestrian, it is reflects poor design. Moreover, it is also evidence of a lack of integration of new projects into the area.

Figure 8: Results of CPTED on public space. Source: *Shawn Natrasony.*

The arrival of SkyTrain in 1992 necessitated the construction of a bus loop in the vicinity. The mandate of TransLink (BC Transit at that time) is the efficient *movement of people* within the public transit system. The bus loop was located, logically, within close proximity to the station. Unfortunately, its location lay directly across the entrance to the recreation centre and led to pedestrian conflicts with the entrance and egress of buses as people made their way to the parking lot. The solution was to control the flow of pedestrians to prevent this conflict, and the result, is a pedestrian experience further diminished in the face of automobile transportation.

SkyTrain's arrival brought a host of new problems: loitering, crime and drug dealing. To address this, another institution, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), was brought in and follows a policy of *removing pedestrians*. This is facilitated via Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) clean-up

initiatives, increased police presence, and greater by-law enforcement activities (City of Surrey 2003a). This policy is most forcefully expressed in the cordoning-off of the few green spaces evident in the area (see Figure 8).

What results is an environment that is experienced as one where you are not welcome – or more to the point – pushed away. Instead of creating a place for people, the transitory nature of the area is strengthened. CPTED kills any possibility for a place for people. While some pedestrians are unwelcome, others are encouraged to visit. The dated shopping centre is being renewed and consumers are most welcome as developers seek the *movement of money* inside their commercial projects.

Simply, there is no holistic sense in the planning of Surrey City Centre. Each agency is stuck within the myopic vision of its personal or corporate agenda, working towards its individual aims, with place-making left out of the city-building process. Planners move land uses, engineers move cars, TransLink moves people, the RCMP removes people, and developers move money. Working toward isolated efficiencies, professionals fail to recognize the trade-offs that harm our urban spaces and impact those we design for. We are creating zones rather than places, and designing a fragmented landscape that ignores the connection between uses. Ultimately, place-making is left to chance and the hope that somehow it will develop organically.

Mass production

In a pattern similar to the U.S., sprawl in Canada was mass produced – fueled by home mortgages underwritten by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), highway construction and the emergence of large private development

companies (Denhez 1994). In Surrey, single-family housing development occurred on a massive scale beginning in the 1960s. Around the same time Surrey Place Mall opened as the first large destination shopping centre in this region, marketing mass-produced commodities to a growing population. Already dominated by commercial strip development, this new urban form further drained the vitality of the environment (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Strip commercial development along King George Highway. Source: *Shawn Natrasony*.

Storefronts that historically defined the block face were pulled from their position and placed within an artificial streetscape behind a blank wall. The large parking lots that surround the centre created a large physical void in the urban fabric. With the streetscape "turned outside in" the streets lacked any interest for the pedestrian. Further, with people drawn off the street and into the enclosed environment, the animation of pedestrian traffic on the street was lost. The street

became not a place to experience, but to drive through. With parking lots forming the bulk of open space, there was little space as a pleasant environment to stroll in or sit.

The drive for profit and the opportunity to build on past successes encouraged mass production of shopping centres further afield. As with Surrey Place, the successful formula of nationally recognized chain stores within an enclosed mall, surrounded by expansive parking facilities, was reproduced in pace with advancing single-family home development. In this instance, city-building became little more than allowing developers to fulfill their ambitions. Developers seek to maximize available square metres of rentable space, demand an overabundance of parking for patrons, and prefer the drawing potential of national chains over local enterprises. Further, this situation is exacerbated by the desire of local officials to maximize tax revenue. As newer developments gained prominence and Surrey Place aged, the area fell into decline. Markets on their own do not create vibrant urban places in suburban locations; a focus on revenue often occurs to the detriment of creating neighbourhoods.

Mass production of landscapes necessitates a cleared site. In previous eras change arrived incrementally, and growth was not overwhelming to the community. Contemporary change arrives via big developments in the same vein as Le Corbusier's modernist vision. "While [the existing local] businesses must be supported and respected they, almost entirely, represent an interim, older form of development…The challenge to *the plan* is to provide a circumstance in which these enterprises can live out *their natural lives* in a context undergoing major transformation" (City of Surrey 1993a, p. 15, italics added). While the existing

morphology leaves much to be desired, is the proposed replacement of a more livable quality? One must question the wisdom of wholesale clearance and consolidation of land parcels in preparation for large towers sitting in space.

Standardization

In the application of universal city-building solutions that are functional and utilitarian in nature, the urban environment became a diminished place. For the casual observer, the City of Surrey offers few clues to distinguish it from the suburban mass that typifies most North American cities. The generalized land use map (Figure 3) of Surrey City Centre denotes the standardized urban forms occurring across time. Surrounding Surrey City Centre is a monotonous and advancing sprawl of tract housing devoid of pedestrian scale that dates back to the 1960s. Along King George Highway is the spine of characterless low-rise commercial developments built mostly in the 1950s with some recent buildings inserted. As well, there are large sites recently cleared and targeted for redevelopment. Municipal codes, similar to those in other jurisdictions, that regulate building setbacks, massing, and parking requirements have resulted in an environment that could easily be 'anywhere.'

Change in the area increasingly occurs in standardized forms. SkyTrain was an intrusive arrival in 1992, and like a huge erector set, was 'thrown over' the existing fabric of the area (see Figure 10). In the absurdly optimistic language of the Surrey City Centre Design Guidelines: "[t]he intensification of the Centre can provide, for the first time a place of Civitas, a shared, high quality public place for all of Surrey's citizens. This means that one area of Surrey, which is not currently dissimilar from

several other automobile based strip commercial zones, will be intensified to another state. It is not a question of whether this will happen, SkyTrain assures that it will" (City of Surrey 1993a, p. 14). What occurred was not Civitas, but the trading of one standardized urban form for another.

Figure 10: Intrusion of SkyTrain into the urban environment. Source: *Shawn Natrasony.*

SkyTrain and the proposed developments did not foster the revitalization of the area anticipated by the City of Surrey. In keeping with the rest of the system, the Surrey Central Station appears to be constructed from a kit of parts. Designed to be functional, it looks like any other sterile station: unfriendly, cold, impersonal, and characterless. Worse, the station floats above the street without any real connection to its surroundings (see Figure 9).

Another recent form is the standardized high rise tower. The proliferation of these forms is representative of the continued impact of modernism in our cities. In Surrey City Centre there is little integration of each new tower into the existing fabric. All are set in space and do little to define it – acting in direct opposition to the age-old forms of defined blocks of buildings facing onto streets, with continuity, ground floor public uses and entrances (see Figures 11 and 12). These towers in open space bring the densities of an urban environment but offer none of the urban character. Turning city-building over to developers who operate at the scale of hundreds of acres does not allow for successful urban places to develop over time.
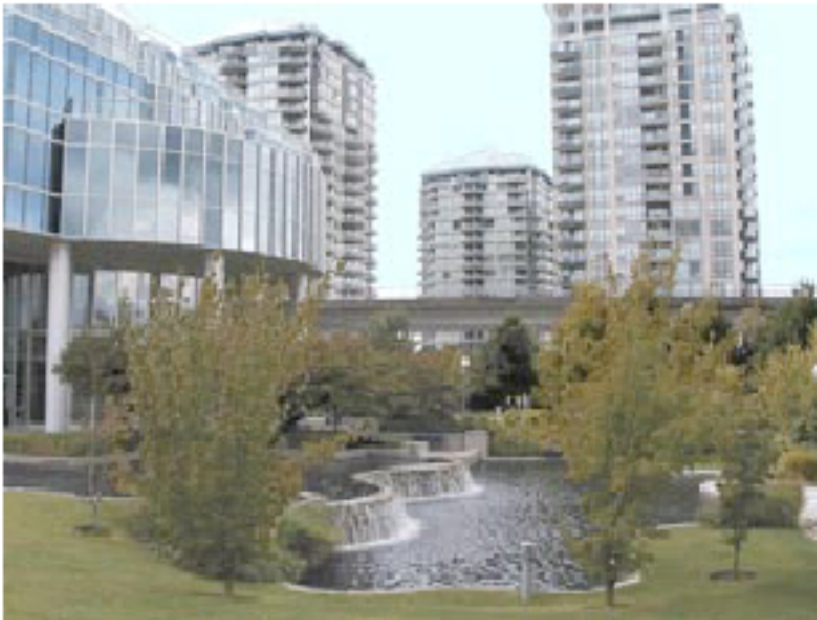
Figure 11: High-rise towers. Source: *GVRD*

Figure 12: More high-rise towers and a pseudo-public space. Source: *GVRD*

Acting in contrast to standardization, but also harmful, is the individualism of the ego-driven professional. The architect of the Central City development (see Figure 6), a new high-rise complex in Surrey City Centre, is overly concerned with the boldness of the design, its visual impact and the prestige associated with its sweeping lines.

Again we see an inward-looking project that ignores both the station and the surrounding area. As discussed, there is little integration with the existing recreation centre. The 'civic plaza' lacks a sense of enclosure common to popular public spaces. Instead it offers a view of a sterile parking lot. Visitors do come to see the striking tower which has won many accolades. But, like all the other projects, it does not add up to something greater than itself.

While Surrey strives to create a name for itself, the city ignores what is already present, looking to outside sources to define its image. Moreover, despite some nods in the direction of post-modern planning, modernist ideals are still evident in the Surrey City Centre Urban Design Concept where it is held that "[a]rchitectural design is best left to the energy and talent of individual building architects" (City of Surrey 1993, p. 29). Central City offers no history, local or regional context or cultural reference to the community. Notably, there has been a concentrated effort to remove the area's collective past with the erasure of names: Surrey Place becomes Central City; Whalley becomes Surrey City Centre. How does place-making occur if there is no *place*?

The future of Surrey City Centre does offer some hope. Its shortcomings notwithstanding, the Central City project may be the impetus for long-term improvement in the area. The Central City tower is today home to a satellite campus of Simon Fraser University. This will bring a much-needed infusion of daytime and evening use not focused solely upon commerce. Moreover, at least one major firm is locating a call-centre here and this will strengthen local employment opportunities. The City has also won a grant from Transport Canada to reconsider its plan for the area

and to seek ways of "enhancing the physical environment to increase walking, cycling and transit use around the Surrey Central Station" (2003b, p. 1).

Today, with a post-secondary institution and nearby shopping, recreation facilities and a library, the opportunity exists to capitalize on these strengths. What the area truly needs is a critical mass of people who reside in the area, and there is a growing recognition of this. In an effort to attract private sector investment, the development cost charges for Surrey City Centre were cut in half for residential projects greater than 45 units per acre (equal to four stories or more), while lower density developments receive a 25 per cent discount (City of Surrey 2003c). This effort to improve the balance of land uses is laudable. However, even more importantly, each new development proposal needs to be evaluated for its capacity to 'heal' the fragmented urban fabric in the area and increase its wholeness.

Conclusions

This paper has considered the principles of modernist ideology that have reflected themselves in the creation of our built environment. In addressing the worst excesses of 19th century industrial expansion, city-builders adopted principles that can be seen as attributes of a Fordist paradigm applied to city-building. Notions of specialization, mass production and standardization are largely responsible for the sprawling pattern characteristic of North American suburbs, and are clearly evident in Surrey City Centre. Working towards isolated efficiencies within discipline and sector specialization, our holistic sense of the built environment has been lost. Planners move land uses, engineers move cars, transit planners move people, the law

enforcement officials remove people, and developers move money. We practice wholesale clearance of building sites in preparation for mass production of new developments. We continue to apply standardized city-building solutions that are functional and utilitarian. In short, there is little recognition of the negative trade-offs involved in applying these approaches, their short-term efficiency notwithstanding. Instead of healing, each new development further drains the vitality of the urban environment. In contrast with such one-off planning, engineering, and architecture, we must reaffirm our commitment to place-making as a collective act of design.

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