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Making A Middle Landscape

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The third part of this book addresses the making of a “middle landscape.” First a rural-urban synthesis is proposed between the age-old pastoral perspective and the modern technical temperament, an attitude that ubiquitously manifests itself in a technological way of producing things, managing affairs, and interpreting the world. The resulting philosophical equation of modern pastoralism is useful to the extent that each term can constructively qualify the other. For instance, the potential pandemonium of a technological onslaught on the environment can be restrained by moving toward arcadian simplicity, whereas a rustic resistance to progress can be counteracted by creative technical reasoning. Along the way, mythic images emerge within built landscapes that help mask inconsistencies and inadequacies in the conduct of daily, metropolitan life. Modern pastoralism is a symbolic construct that closely mirrors deeply seated pluralist-majoritarian tensions in contemporary American society, as well as ingrained attitudes toward development.

The general task of locating the idea of modern pastoralism in the contemporary metropolitan landscape is portrayed largely as a matter of realigning and expanding existing types of suburban development. Principally a richer, common residential landscape must be invented, along with a more adequate commercial environment, and greater attention must be paid to a more comprehensively designed public infrastructure. Programmatically these tasks have little to do with buildings and land uses per se but are concerned with the formal structure and functional adequacy of the spatial realms in between.

The issue of an appropriate aesthetic form, or “language,” of expression for the idea of modern pastoralism is broached. Here the verdict is largely in favor of the contemporary authenticity of modernism over historicism’s claim to continuity. Finally, poetic operations that might be employed in the realignment and expansion of suburban rhetoric are identified and illustrated. They include juxtaposition, scaling, ordering, and typological invention.

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