

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/4384.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/4384.001.0001)

Making A Middle Landscape

By: Peter G. Rowe

Citation:

Making A Middle Landscape

By: Peter G. Rowe

DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/4384.001.0001

ISBN (electronic): 9780262367943

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 1992

OA Funding Provided By:

OA Funding from National Endowment for the Humanities/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities Open Book Program.



The MIT Press



P r e f a c e

When it was first published back in 1991, Making a Middle Landscape was perhaps generally understood as something of an apology for the American suburb, as well as an attempt to come to grips with this form of American development in a more serious manner. Indeed, this was true on both counts and arose, as much as anything, from firsthand experience living in the United States from the late 1960s in Houston, Texas and then briefly in Arlington, Massachusetts.

In hindsight, a number of observations, stanzas, and chapters in the book seem to continue to hold and have relevance today. For example, the observation regarding suburbs often being reflections of the city to which they are adjacent and belong, illustrated at the beginning of the book by Framingham, Massachusetts and Sharpstown in Houston, remains valid. The efficacy and metaphorical power of the “pastoral” setting and the “machine in the garden,” to use Leo Marx’s famous phrase, also applies. It also does so not only in residential circumstances that usually come to mind, but also with regard to corporate estates and infrastructural developments. The contemplative resonance of the dialectic between modern constructed installations and pastoral or otherwise landscaped settings still holds true and renders suburban life somehow palatable. This result can also be contrasted with ideas of the “city in a garden” in a place like Singapore in Southeast Asia, for example, or the “city and the countryside” in far older Italian depictions, as in Sienna for instance. Many of the trends noted and elaborated on with regard to “houses and homes,” “corporate estates,” “retail realms,” and “highways and byways” have also stood the test of time and further examination. Perhaps what is missing in such a lineup is similar commentary about the role of transit, especially the ubiquitous “transport-oriented development” (TOD) and “development-oriented transit” (DOT) that have dominated much

discussion about peripheral areas in cities. The differences between DOT and TOD are crucial; in megacities of East Asia, like Hong Kong and Seoul, transit authorities and companies take active roles in capitalizing on and shaping development, in contrast to the less involved TOD practiced in the United States.

Finally, the poetics of place sketched out in the closing chapters of Making a Middle Landscape has subsequently received greater attention in the guise of “landscape urbanism” or other similar contemporary formulations. Indeed, one of the underlying arguments in the book was that the presence of elements of “natural environments” were a logical outgrowth and necessary feature of making middle landscapes. There the rough equivalence that could be struck between built and vegetated components, the core of the earlier dialectic, are cases in point. Also, Making a Middle Landscape rather radically proposed manners in which these juxtapositions and resolutions could be made and not by denying or disguising the presence of infrastructure, automobiles, and their design attributes but through amplification of the self-same attributes. To date, this has not been fully broached.

*Peter G. Rowe,
Beijing, China
November, 2018*

© 1991 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.

Open access edition funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities Open Book Program.

The text of this book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

This book was set in Times Roman by DEKR Corporation and printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rowe, Peter G.

Making a middle landscape / Peter G. Rowe

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-262-18138-X

1. Suburbs—United States. 2. City planning—United States. 3. Public spaces—United States—Planning.

4. Land use, Urban—United States. I. Title.

HT352.U6R68 1991

307.74'0973—dc20

90-6674

CIP