

introduction

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V T . W A A B

The term urban morphology was derived from and modeled on the term geomorphology. Geomorphology is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary as *“the geological study of the configuration and evolution of land form”* a term used to describe geological variations as a result of *“changes in weather and climate, in the position of the continents, sea level and so much more. These factors, in turn, influence the pace of evolutionary change of the organisms in the same system.”* [Michael Boulter, Extension – Evolution and the End of Man.](#)

Many series of environmental changes and ancient events gave rise to today’s geomorphologic landscape. It seems that it would make sense to extend the same logic to study urban development and evolution, considering that urban form is, simultaneously, natural and a product. It is a product because urban form is the result of human activities, and it is natural since humans and their activities are an integral part of the environment.

Urban morphology is the evolutionary process where urban centers experience growth or decline over time due to series of changes and events or changes leading to events. This thesis is about an event and a response to the event that has a big impact on an urban environment. The event is the closure of a military base that occupies a large swath of land and the property became available for development. The solutions proposed in this thesis form the response to the event.

*“... our cities were more like unfinished building sites where each generation was free to try its hand. The changes that each ensuing period imposes are often the result of what economists call market forces, a reminder that our cities are shaped not only by planners but also by the often idiosyncratic decisions of large numbers of separate citizens... Socially fragmented, recklessly entrepreneurial, relying almost on the automobile, and often lacking a defined center. They are without many of the conventional trappings of urbanity that have characterized cities in the past.”*

[Witold Rybczynski City Life – Urban expectations in a new world](#)

*“... We have voted for the city of a business district ringed by suburbs and malls and parking lots. Now, as in the past, the challenge is to find community therein.”*

[Jonathan Yardley Reviewing the book City Life by Witold Rybczynski - The Washington Post Book world](#)



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U R B A N M O R P H O L O G Y

This thesis addresses 2 problems; the first is the issue of development and sprawl, the other is the process by which design solutions are developed and proposed. The issue of sprawl is solved by focusing on and emphasizing the urban public realm, and the process proposed is urbanmorphological.

Growth and development are the consequence of a number of forces and/or events which are in play whether the development is called "Planned" or "Unplanned". There are good and bad models to draw from both versions. The challenge of urban design and planning is to introduce forms and patterns that facilitate, expand and enhance future opportunities.

In the present, when development for thousands of inhabitants are planned in periods of a few days and executed in spans of a few months, the necessity for "planned growth" is evident especially when the modern modes of transit are factored in. This is one of the primary reasons why this thesis came to be. This thesis explores ways of producing a process by which a designer recognizes forces and events and attempts to plug given constraints into a series of scenarios, each simulating a model of spontaneous growth. These models are derived from experiences, research, intuition, or specific requirements.



The planning study and analysis undertaken in urban design is, more than anything else, a process of trial and error. Successful trials become models in form and in function.

Given what Witold Rybczynski and Jonathan Yardley describe as the state of American urbanism, this thesis recognizes the current social, economic, political and cultural conditions and proposes urban and architectural interventions which explore ways that can be instrumental parts of the solution. The west end of the City of Alexandria Virginia could be used as the poster child of the aforementioned urban problem. Cameron Station, the closed military base, occupies a significant portion of the west end, approximately 185 acres. This thesis proposes the creation of a nucleus for the west end of the City that counter-balances and complements Old Town on the east end of the City. This will be accomplished by turning what could be considered a void within a developed district (closed military base) into an organizing, stabilizing and connective entity for its surrounding and the region as a whole.



Finally, this project assumes that fundamental to the life of the city is the existence of "Public Realm". It creates a realistic scenario of an urban development, a context in which a demonstration of how, even with the most mundane functions and the least tolerant building type, architecture can be found. The scenario shows how Planning, Urban design and Architecture can and ought to contribute to the making of public realm, and how would such intervention enhance city life.