

Cities, Communities and Homes: Is the Urban Future Livable?

- **Paper / Proposal Title:**

Cities, Communities and Homes as Blind Fields: A Lefebvrian Analysis

- **Format:**

Written paper

- **Author(s) Name:**

Tanzil Shafique and Paco Mejias Villatoro

- **University or Company Affiliation:**

Fay Jones School of Architecture + Design. University of Arkansas, U.S.A.

- **Abstract (300 words):**

This paper explores the self-evident difficulty architects and urban planners have in seeing “Cities”, “Communities” and “Homes” as part of a single continuum. In retrospect one can see sense intuitively that these three are part of the same interconnected reality and hence, a decision in one of the fields affects immediately the other two. Despite this evidence of entanglement, architectural pedagogy still direly lacks a proper understanding of the city and social concerns—and more so in some cultural contexts such as the North American Academia. As a consequence, there is a blindness between these fields as evident in the naive proposals of the American New Urbanism (CNU) which ignores the complex diversity of the city—dogmatically pursuing the scale of a pocket neighborhood or purportedly organizes good communities while dismissing the role of good architecture of the home.

In his book *The Urban Revolution* in 1970s, Henri Lefebvre coined the term 'blind fields' to describe a phenomenon which this paper shall utilize analytically. He said that the Rural, the Industrial and the Urban, were fields traditionally thought separately, despite the

evidence of their connections. Lefebvre argued that this was due to the impossibility of recognizing the fields in between that tend to disappear in our vision the moment we center our attention in one of the fields, like the blind spot in the retina. The benefit of the specificity of attention comes with the loss of vision of these inbetweenness. Lefebvre mentioned Ideology and Knowledge as two of these blinding agents.

This paper argues that the conceptual isolation of these three terms is coming from the same Lefebvreian effect, and with the intervention of the same agents. The ideological lens with which we analyze the city conditions the conclusions and the design decision. We ignore complexities to choose observations that fit the model. The way in which CNU project the communal scale is conditioned by a populist ideology paired with laissez-faire neo-liberalism, which prioritizes the consumer's taste undermining our responsibility to explore how architecture can inhabit the contemporary life. A similar case in point is the recent scandalous remarks from Patrick Schumacher about the liberalization of the housing market and disregarding the community aspect of cities, thus blinding our ethical responsibility of societal welfare. The paper will conclude with a speculative antidote to this blindness by recasting Sennett's idea of Open Cities and Borders as zones of active inbetweenness.