

Par Space

by Professor Robert .E. Somol

The American southwest, greatest beneficiary of Jefferson's half-mile square settlement pattern, has recently become the most visible region to abandon the grid. From Las Vegas to Orange County to Arizona, there is a three-state wide Bermuda triangle of lost orthogonality, an improbably fertile territory for the emergence of *par space*. Here, recreation forms the basis for infrastructure: golf courses are invariably the first figures to appear on the landscape, verdant gaskets awaiting the arrival of the next round of tract home development. Appearing more as a cultivation than a *tabula rasa*, the golf course seemingly transforms everything around *it* into a desert. Through an alchemy of green, what were once denigrated as typical and reproducible subdivisions can now be experienced as exceptional and exotic frontiers.

Not simply an amenity, the golf course is the greatest investment opportunity and planning technique available today, effortlessly able to reconcile personal security and group play, community identity and topographical variation.. Residential golf communities (invariably gated) are simply an extension of the radial and other anti-grid types of Orange County and its progeny: from Disneyland to the University of California at Irvine campus, from the Spectrum office park to the Fashion Island mall. Conditioning the exterior as a new form of interior, these new domestic golf courses mobilize the landscape not as a natural resource for health and adventure, but as an acquired sign of value and security.

Juxtaposing case studies in Orange County and the Las Vegas Valley with squatter settlements and developer housing in Tijuana, Mexico, allows an expanded definition of “sustainability” with regard to urban organization and lifestyle. Can sustainability survive the green? What are the lessons to project from seemingly extreme social and economic housing contexts?

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