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*The Metastasizing Megaproject: Urban design and 'monstrous moral hybrids' in the American city [Book Chapter]*

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## **The Metastasizing Megaproject: Urban design and ‘monstrous moral hybrids’ in the American city**

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## **The Metastasizing Megaproject: Urban design and ‘monstrous moral hybrids’ in the American city**

### *The Megaproject Phenomenon*

In cities around the world, megaprojects are getting constructed in ever greater numbers. Many, like the famed Guggenheim Bilbao (Spain) or the Beijing Water Cube (China), have succeeded in attracting global notice to their host cities through expressive architecture and sophisticated programs. Others, like the Three Gorges Dam (Wuhan, China) or the English Channel Tunnel have less dynamic designs, but required never-before-seen feats of engineering and finance in order to be built. The proliferation of such projects around the globe reflects both the rapid expansion of economies in the former developing world and the equally voracious hunger of developing cities and nations to be seen as major actors on what is now perceived as a single world stage.

Global megaprojects are spectacular, but they do not come cheap. The Guggenheim Bilbao cost just under \$100 million, but its associated infrastructure costs were much more: around 17 billion Euros (Baniotopoulou 2001, Plaza 2006). Relatively impoverished South Africa spent over 14 billion Rand (\$2 billion) for its ten new and refurbished World Cup stadia (Indo-Asian News Service 2010). Some even argue that Greece’s \$18 billion-plus bill to host the 2004 Olympics, including four major transportation developments and over 2,000 housing units in the Olympic Village, led to the country’s severe fiscal crisis (Moore 2008; Barron 2004; Saporta 2003; Newman 2002). In similar fashion, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, is in the midst of constructing a multi-billion-Euro “city of culture” that threatens to bankrupt the province, necessitating emergency funding from Spain and the European Union (Bello, pers. comm.).

With these costs, the global megaproject requires a strong state; one not only able to afford, but able and willing to undertake the substantial demolition, relocation, and reconstruction required for megaprojects to get built. The latter conditions have inhibited the US, where the megaproject phenomenon has manifested itself very differently during the past two decades than elsewhere in the world. There has been little federal-level enthusiasm for constructing significant infrastructure projects, attracting global sporting events like the Olympics, or for constructing monumental cultural facilities along the lines of Bilbao’s Guggenheim.

However, the lack of federal-level interest in prestige and visibility for the US on a global level does not mean that American cities are not constructing megaprojects. On the contrary, the last two decades have seen their proliferation, particularly in the arena of large single-building structures such as convention centers, stadia, and, increasingly, casinos. A 1998 survey (Judd 2003) found 178 of 463 cities over 50,000 population constructing new convention centers, and 181 of 463 constructing new sports stadiums. Many of the US’s proliferating single-building megaprojects have been constructed in or near city centers, even as the previous generation of single-purpose megaprojects from the 1960s and 1970s shied away from them (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). But the last four decades have also ironically seen the near-total cessation of large infrastructure construction projects like highways, underground transit networks, and new airports (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). The US thus presents a paradoxical case of simultaneous single-building megaproject proliferation, and a corresponding mega-infrastructure-project paralysis.

Altshuler and Luberoff (2003) seek to explain the seeming paradox of megaproject paralysis and proliferation. They concluded that the diminution of infrastructural megaprojects, beginning in the 1970s, was due to a new attitude of “do no harm” derived from concerns of neighborhood and

environmental activists about the negative impacts of new megaprojects. In the absence of a strong federal mandate, “bottom-up” constituencies needed to support a megaproject in order for it to happen. Extremely costly new highways, airports, and transit systems that were almost guaranteed to engender community resistance and did not stand to benefit any particular private constituency did not make the grade. In this political context, local governmental and private actors were insufficiently interested, insufficiently capitalized, hindered by a raft of regulations and, one might argue, unduly influenced by anti-infrastructure constituencies representing a minority of the larger population. The resulting infrastructural paralysis can be seen in the US’s underdeveloped passenger railroad system, in the increasing age and capacity restrictions of its airports, and in underinvestment like that which led to the catastrophic 2007 collapse of the Interstate 35 bridge in Minneapolis.

By the same token, the proliferation of single-building megaprojects can be attributed to the same combination of “bottom-up federalism”, active local constituencies, and regulatory barriers that stifled new infrastructural megaproject construction. Convention centers and stadia have far more vocal constituencies supporting them. They are also less likely to engender fierce opposition: Altshuler and Luberoff (2003) observed that single-building megaprojects occupy comparatively much less space and adversely impact far fewer people than infrastructure megaprojects. And while federal funding is unavailable for such structures, state and local funding has been used for an increasing percentage of megaprojects (Siegfried and Zimbalist 2000; Sanders 2005). Proponents of these facilities have successfully argued that new megaprojects are necessary to keep their host cities competitive, to keep locally-beloved sports teams from departing for different (often warmer) climes, or to generate tax revenue and jobs. This created a public-private political economy, termed the “urban regime” by Fainstein and Fainstein (1983) and the “growth machine” by Logan and Molotch (1987), where the municipality focuses more on creating wealth and less on providing services.

#### *Tourist cities and tourist infrastructure*

The proliferation of single-building megaprojects in the US is also part of a larger cultural-economic shift away from an industrial economy toward one based on leisure. This shift, at least in American cities of the Northeast and Midwest, can be seen as making a virtue out of necessity, since deindustrialization has been steep and steady since the 1950s. Camden, New Jersey, for example, lost 75 percent of its industrial jobs between 1950 and 1982 (Gillette 2005). Facing a shrinking industrial economy, cities from Baltimore to San Francisco transformed, or tried to transform, their obsolete waterfronts and factories into shopping centers, “festival marketplaces”, and tourist meccas (Judd and Fainstein 1999).

Single-building megaprojects are a critical component of the tourist city phenomenon. Cities devastated by deindustrialization and drained by rampant suburbanization have used megaprojects to entice suburbanites and out of town visitors to otherwise unglamorous locations (Judd 2003). For many suburbanites, attending sporting events may be the only reason for them to come into downtown, and the same is likely true for many conventioners. Cities lacking benevolent climates, spectacular scenery, or significant historic buildings see megaprojects as the only way to bring thousands of outside eyes to their distressed downtowns.

The growth of the tourist economy and of tourist infrastructure also reflects a societal turn toward leisure, fantasy, and entertainment (Hannigan 1998). Visitors long for, and city policymakers try to create, a “tourist bubble” (Judd and Fainstein 1999) where tourists can find something different than their everyday experience. Increasingly, cities in the United States have come to see escapism as an arena in which they can compete successfully against suburbs and with other cities across the globe

(Judd and Fainstein 1999). The 'total environment' of the stadium, convention center, or entertainment district makes these megaprojects desirable for visitors focused on escapism.

Casinos are perhaps the epitome of escapism and are an emerging area of megaproject construction in cities. Cities and states are increasingly fiscally handicapped, especially since the 2007 economic downturn, and see casinos as the most effective way of capturing additional revenue without imposing unpopular new taxes. Casinos are also fiscally superior to stadiums and convention centers, since they are privately capitalized and return hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue annually. Thus far, they have been unequivocally good fiscal news for their host municipalities. Since 2000, New Orleans, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh as well as smaller cities in Illinois, Indiana, and Mississippi have all constructed casinos within the city limits (Hunter 2010), and in September 2010 Philadelphia will join them with a casino along its waterfront. More casinos are not only likely, but guaranteed as other states, including Massachusetts, continue the trend.

Economic, social, and political arguments against megaprojects have thus far proved to be fruitless. Arguments that sports stadia do not provide appreciable economic impacts (Baade 1996), that convention centers are money-losing concerns that require perpetual subsidy/subsidies and never pay back their investors (Coates and Humphreys 1998, Sanders 1998, 1999, 2001, 2006), or that casinos are parasitic enterprises preying on the poor and regressively taxing the uneducated fall flat against the chorus of downtown boosters, politicians eager to gain electoral favor, business leaders eager to win construction contracts, corporations eager to make windfall profits, and chambers of commerce eager to show up competing cities. As Altshuler and Luberoff (2003) astutely noted, single-building megaprojects succeed, among other reasons, because they please many and displace few. With their true costs distributed widely and the glamour of shining new structures outshining their often invisible damage, it is little wonder that the march of downtown megaprojects in the United States is as unstoppable as the march of global megaprojects elsewhere.

### *The megaproject in downtown*

Due to their sheer size, one would imagine that the location of megaprojects in downtown would constitute a major urban design debate. Yet the urban design discussion on the topic has been almost completely silent. Megaproject critics themselves spend little time arguing for the preservation of the larger urban environment, choosing instead to focus on individual landmarks (Davies 2008) or ignoring the built environment entirely in favor of economic or social arguments against the megaproject (Lin 2010). When urban design seems to have been considered at all, it has merely focused on the stylistic relationship of the structure, particularly its historic 'ornament', to older structures (Hale 2005).

However, the placement of megaprojects downtown presents a substantial urban design challenge deserving of debate. These structures are much greater in scale, and much more demanding of space, than any other downtown building. They disrupt or destroy the urban pattern, including the network of streets, buildings, neighborhoods (Ryan 2008), or even, as we will see, the larger spatial organization of downtown. Granted, looking at the American downtown, one can see why urban design and megaprojects are seldom considered together: most American downtowns possess little urban design of note, at least not if judged against their European forebears. Most American cities were in fact 'designed' by speculators (Reps 1961), and the unfortunate result is usually a monotonous grid ignoring topography and providing little space for parks or public buildings. The postwar automobile age did additional damage to the American downtown. Today, laced with parking lots and wrapped with bands of freeways, the downtowns of most American cities provide more space and comfort for cars than for

people. In particular, widespread building demolition for parking lots and garages has left many American downtowns largely without consistent street walls or urban fabric.

At the same time, any argument that the destructive twentieth century left American downtowns with no urban design value would be an exaggeration. Downtowns often retain pleasant districts of older buildings. The historic American urban fabric may not be monumental, but when it is intact and lively it possesses an organic urban order whose praises were loudly sung by Jacobs (1961). Even fifty years later, concentrations of older downtown buildings are often the preferred sites for locally-owned entertainment establishments generating an authentic, if unsophisticated, street life (Campo and Ryan 2008).

Downtown's surviving urban fabric, fragmented and incomplete as it may be, has also been a locus of interest for retail revitalization, entertainment and arts districts, and residential conversions, as well as megaprojects like casinos and convention centers. While these new uses may contribute to downtown's visitor traffic, new uses, particularly megaprojects, also threaten to disrupt, displace, or transform the arguably more 'authentic' uses occupying older buildings (Campo and Ryan 2008, Zukin 2010). Within this fragmented but often still diverse and small-scale urban setting, where do downtown megaprojects go? In some cases, ample ex-industrial space, vacant waterfronts, or even underused parkland is available (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003). But if convenient large parcels of vacant land are not available then megaprojects must be shoehorned into the urban fabric. This requires, as we will see, a combination of block assembly, small-parcel aggregation, street demapping, and demolition of older buildings. Achieving these aims also requires public condemnation and/or obligatory land purchases analogous to that which occurred during the era of urban renewal and highway construction and the displacement of people and businesses who may resist relocation.

Furthermore, the physical damage that megaprojects cause in downtown does not end upon the completion of the initial facility. While stadiums rarely require expansion, convention centers expand regularly, casinos almost ceaselessly. In Detroit the convention center has expanded on about a 30-year cycle since the late 1950s, but since 2000 all three casinos in Detroit have expanded, some more than once, in a process that one may call *megaproject metastasis* for its relationship to unregulated, cancerous growth. The expansion argument from local governments and private boosters is always the same: to compete effectively against other facilities, to attract more spenders from farther afield, and to attract them for longer periods of time (Guest 2005a, 2005b, Cross 2005, Yancey 2007). To paraphrase Sanders (2005), both convention centers and casinos are engaged in a ceaseless "arms race" against competing facilities in other cities. Expansion is needed by the growth machine to maintain the original public investment, keep needed revenue dollars flowing to state coffers, and to provide jobs and other benefits for the city.

But expansions can be as difficult and destructive as the construction of the original facility. Boosters may argue that megaproject expansions stimulate economic activity - Philadelphia's convention center has been called not only the city's "chief economic engine" but the cause of "a boom in Philadelphia's hotels and restaurants" (Gelbart 2004) - but the more difficult reality is that downtown megaprojects are a double-edged sword. For the megaproject to arrive in downtown in the first place, it must inevitably destroy some of that downtown. And to expand and thereby survive, the megaproject must destroy even more.

Philadelphia and Detroit illustrate two different sides of the destruction caused by megaproject expansion or metastasis. In the case of Philadelphia, a single megaproject (the Pennsylvania Convention

Center) was first sited, then expanded within the tight urban fabric of Center City. Both the original and expanded convention center destroyed historic buildings, removed city streets, and generated a significant and jarring scale contrast between a gargantuan single-use facility and a small-scale, active fabric. In the case of Detroit, four stadium and casino megaprojects sited downtown in the 1990s have obliterated urban fabric, cleared some of the few older buildings remaining downtown, and reshaped much of the city center into an aggregation of superblocks surrounded by parking lots.

### *Philadelphia*

Philadelphia is an old city, founded in 1680 and built on a grid of narrow streets (40 to 60 feet wide) and even narrower alleys. Much of the prewar urban fabric of downtown, or Center City, is composed of two- to four-story rowhouses and commercial buildings that are only 15 to 20 feet wide. Where the old buildings remain, Center City has an almost medieval scale. It is a delightful place for urban living, at least for those who do not own cars and do not need private outdoor space. Approximately 60 percent of Center City is still comprised of historic fabric, particularly to the south of Market Street where one can walk for several blocks without encountering parking lots or even large swathes of postwar development (Figure 1). This area is what many would consider almost the perfect urban environment, with many features beloved of Jane Jacobs like old buildings both high-rise and low-rise, short blocks, diverse land uses, small shops, and a mix of populations from college students to homeless to the extremely wealthy.

The area north of Market Street is less fortunate. Beginning in the 1830s this is where industries clustered together with lower-income housing and Center City's two railroad stations. Megaprojects of their day, the railroad stations occupied several blocks each and blighted their surrounds as well, making this part of downtown a prime redevelopment area after World War II. Additional damage occurred in the 1920s when the Benjamin Franklin Parkway was constructed, and again in the 1950s and 1960s when urban renewal leveled several blocks east and west of City Hall. As if to add insult to injury a sunken expressway was completed, after decades of debate, along the northern edge of Center City in the 1980s. By 1990, only fragmented areas of fabric remained north of Market Street, much of it in Chinatown or along Broad Street. With few intact blocks of urban fabric and low land values, the north of Market area was a convenient site for a megaproject.

[Figure 1 about here]

The Pennsylvania Convention Center was constructed on four city blocks behind the derelict Reading Railroad Terminal between 1988 and 1993. After initial "howls of protest" from the 162 businesses that were to be displaced, protests died down when the city provided ample relocation assistance to most (Hart and Bailey 1985). Almost as soon as the Center had been completed, however, calls came for its expansion (Belden 2005). Boosters provided the usual estimates of construction jobs, convention attendee spending, and future tax revenues as justification for the project. The cost (\$464 million estimated in 2002, over \$700 million estimated by 2007) was initially an obstacle, but the Pennsylvania legislature came to the rescue by voting in 2004 to provide \$400 million in expected revenue from slot-machine funds (Belden 2005) over and above revenue provided by a new hotel tax (Gelbart 2008).

The designated site of the Center expansion, to double its size and make the largest convention space in the Northeast, was four city blocks between 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Broad Street (see Figure 1). In 2002 these blocks were about 50 percent occupied by fifteen buildings, including several eight- and nine-story industrial loft structures. While none of these buildings were initially recognized as 'historic', a

subsequent 2004 agreement between the Convention Center Authority and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission to preserve two of the structures was broken by the state agency in charge of construction when it declared that it was not party to this agreement (Saffron 2008). After a court battle, all buildings except a 22-story skyscraper were demolished. Occupants of the condemned structures, including several arts organizations and three dozen artists' studios, as well as a number of industrial firms, were provided relocation assistance, but many found the relocation provisions untenable (Campo 2007). Construction began in earnest in late 2007 and the expansion opening was scheduled as of the time of writing (2010) for March 2011.

On the street, the visual impact of the Philadelphia Convention Center on its surroundings is dramatic. It is a mammoth structure that fits into the urban fabric of Philadelphia with great difficulty. The original Center, demapped one street and transformed another into a depressing cavern tunnel under the elevated convention floor for the length of two blocks. By 2011 13<sup>th</sup> Street will also have been transformed from an ordinary if unprepossessing city street to another two block-long tunnel under the center. With the Center's expansion to Broad Street, landmark buildings including architect Frank Furness's spectacular Fine Arts Academy and Museum (1871) now lie directly across the street from the Convention Center. While these structures would seem to stand a good chance of resisting any future megaproject metastasis, a modest neighborhood of 19C row houses and industrial buildings one block north of the Convention Center almost certainly faces destruction in any expansion scenario.

The Convention Center is credited by boosters as being the "chief economic engine" of Center City Philadelphia. But it is highly doubtful that active streets such as those in Chinatown directly adjacent to the Center depend on this expanding megaproject to survive. Like urban renewal 50 years ago, this metastasizing megaproject has destroyed independent businesses, mixed uses, old buildings, and diverse populations - urban elements which Jane Jacobs celebrated but which have had little value to the growth machine behind Philadelphia's expanding megaproject.

### *Detroit*

[Figure 2 about here]

Compared to Philadelphia, Detroit is a spacious city. The city's downtown street system is an odd and accidental combination of a grandiose Baroque radial plan dating from 1807 clashing with a casual and imperfectly surveyed speculative grid (Reps 1961). The Baroque street plan provides a variety of small parks and boulevards unusual in a Midwestern city, but the rest of the downtown plan is of little design interest. Detroit was developed with detached single-family wooden homes, and none remain downtown. Philadelphia is an old city with patches of newer buildings, but Detroit is exactly the opposite, a new city with only a few patches of old buildings downtown. It is a creature of the twentieth century in all of the positive and negative connotations of the term.

Detroit has suffered severely from postwar decline and shrinkage driven by the city's economic collapse. The downtown area is now (2010) about one-third parking lots and barely one-fourth of downtown remains as coherent blocks of older urban fabric (see Figure 2). Many downtown skyscrapers have been vacant for decades and are threatened by destruction. The only concentrations of prewar buildings are found along Woodward Avenue and in the office district. Elsewhere, the urban fabric has seemingly evaporated and only scattered older buildings persist, often surrounded by parking.



The siting of megaprojects in downtown Detroit began early. By the 1960s the city's waterfront had been substantially rebuilt, making it the first city in the United States to accomplish this goal, and one of the first to possess a 300,000 square foot convention center directly adjacent to downtown (Philadelphia's 440,000 square foot center came more than 30 years later.) The destruction required for Detroit's Civic Center was immense and over the next 40 years megaprojects proliferated along the waterfront. In 1977 the Renaissance Center, an office, hotel and retail complex developed by Ford, opened on its eastern end, and the Convention Center expanded by another 400,000 square feet between 1985 and 1989 (BEI Associates 2010). In a numbingly familiar repetition of convention center growth machine politics, state and local discussions commenced in earnest in 2007 about expanding the facility yet again.

Megaprojects also proliferated elsewhere downtown. Comerica Park, a new baseball stadium, and Ford Field, a domed football stadium, opened in 1999 and 2002. Located near Woodward Avenue on land formerly occupied by small-scale office and manufacturing buildings, these megaprojects were a sign of how deteriorated Detroit's downtown fabric had become. Their obliteration of 14 blocks and parts of four others required the demolition of only 10 buildings.

More was to come. The megaproject incursion that distinguished Detroit from all others was the decision by Michigan voters in 1996 to permit three casinos to locate downtown. Both the city's mayor and city council supported the decision on the basis of the revenue that the casinos would deliver. In order for the casinos to open as quickly as possible, they were to choose 'temporary' sites in either existing or new buildings before ultimately rebuilding in a line along the waterfront east of the Renaissance Center.

Two of Detroit's new casinos chose temporary sites in downtown; the third opened in a converted former bakery building just to the north. The MGM Casino purchased a former Internal Revenue Service building with 85,000 square feet of gambling space and parking for 3,800 cars, opening in July 1999 (Ankeny 1998, *London Free Press* 1999)(see Figure 3). The locally controlled Greektown Casino selected a location on the east side of downtown in buildings that had been purchased in anticipation of casino legalization (see Figure 4).<sup>\*</sup> Detroit's two downtown casinos thus selected opposing urban strategies: one built a self-contained complex, the other built one tied to the urban fabric. The latter decision was admittedly self-interested, but it did drive a casino design that was related to surrounding streets and structures.

By 2002 the city's plan to concentrate the permanent casinos along the waterfront had fallen through due to problems with site assembly (Carvlin 2001), and the casinos signed a new agreement permitting them to remain on their formerly temporary sites. Each casino undertook massive renovation and expansion plans following this agreement. MGM was the only company to actually build a new structure, choosing a permanent location just one block north of its temporary location in an almost completely empty area that was once residential. Complete by late 2007, the mammoth new building included 100,000 square feet of gambling space, a 16-story, 400-room hotel, 5,625 parking spaces, and various conference, retail, and restaurant facilities (Yancey 2007). When it moved to its new complex the MGM Grand created Detroit's first abandoned casino, a complex that remains vacant today (2010). Like Comerica Park and Ford Field, the MGM Casino was less destructive than it was a sad sign of the

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<sup>\*</sup> The owners were later forced to sell their share in the casino due to charges of financial improprieties (*Grand Rapids Press* 2000).

decay of a downtown so deteriorated that ten city blocks could be demapped without anyone even noticing.

Not to be outdone, the Greektown casino purchased a city-owned parking garage one block northeast of its existing site, demolished it, and constructed a 13-story, 3,500-space parking garage together with a 30-story, 400-room hotel (see Figure 5). However, when the expansion opened in February 2009, the casino, suffering from the economic downturn, had filed for bankruptcy protection under Chapter 11 (Fidler 2010). Outside of downtown the Motor City expanded similarly, including an 18-story hotel, an expansion to 100,000 square feet of gambling space, and an expansion to 4,440 parking spaces (Cross 2005).

[Figure 3 about here.]

[Figure 4 about here.]

[Figure 5 about here.]

Detroit's urban casinos are the paradigmatic metastasizing megaprojects. Where convention centers are publicly-owned entities that expand every 20 or so years to compete with other convention centers in other cities, Detroit's casino expansion has been driven not only by the idiosyncratic 'temporary site' provisions, but by the relentless need to provide gaming, parking, and hotel space consistent with those of casinos elsewhere, including directly across the river in Windsor, Ontario. This need will only increase as casinos proliferate nationwide. Detroit's casino metastasis is both visually shocking and urbanistically destructive. These are inherently antiurban structures, elephantine in scale, sealed from the street and demanding convenient and substantial vehicular access and storage, and their siting in downtown is nothing less than disastrous.

One can only imagine what further metastatic destruction of the Detroit streetscape will occur when the Greektown casino next expands, given its location amongst some of downtown's last remaining small-scale urban fabric. The MGM casino, isolated as it is on the far west of downtown, is less likely to directly damage the remaining Detroit fabric when it expands, but its site is also paradoxically far more hemmed in by highways and other megaprojects, including the DTE Energy "peace park" superblock created from the combination of six former city blocks in 2008.

#### *"Monstrous moral hybrids" and the future of downtown*

Downtown megaprojects are in their ascendance. Convention centers continue their expansions, not only in Detroit and Philadelphia but around the country; casinos are being considered by more and more cities; and most major American cities have just finished constructing the most recent generation of sports stadia. A foreign observer would see little sign of the partnership between public and private elites reconsidering the validity or desirability of downtown megaprojects. Altshuler and Luberoff confirm that "the era of urban megaprojects is not over... there is no indication that [local megaproject advocates] are about to" stop funding or supporting these projects (2003, 284).

Both Philadelphia and Detroit, despite numerous assets elsewhere, represent worst-case megaproject urban design scenarios. Philadelphia's convention center was directly inserted into a dense fabric with historic character, abundant businesses, residents, and active street life, and has consumed more of that fabric as it expands. On the other hand, Detroit represents a once-intact, now badly deteriorated downtown being further, even gratuitously, erased by a raft of metastasizing megaprojects.

Jane Jacobs offers us a philosophical perspective with which to critically assess the downtown megaproject phenomenon. Long after she described precepts of the ideal urban environment in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jacobs ventured into the terrain of what she called “the moral foundations of commerce and politics”. In her 1992 book *Systems of Survival*, Jacobs argued starkly that commerce and “guardianship” were separate and equal “moral syndromes”; that each served necessary social, political, and economic needs; and that they could be combined only with great care and at great peril. Jacobs was particularly concerned with the damage caused by negative combinations of these two functions, which she called “monstrous moral hybrids” (1992: 80). I believe that the three different megaprojects examined in this chapter are each different monstrous hybrids, each bearing similarities to a fourth monstrous hybrid of urban renewal.

In the light of Jacobs’ perspective, convention centers are perhaps the most easily interpreted and least easily condemned. These are simple manifestations of government ostentation, economically unproductive like a palace or courthouse but equally monumental in scale and cost. Convention centers are less honest in their alleged economic purposes of generating visitor traffic and improving the city’s image. The spurious arguments made that these centers stimulate local economies and “support” the downtown are thin masks over their true purpose of serving as showpiece projects for local government. The fact that governments find ways to circumvent obstacles to spending on such projects (Altshuler and Luberoff 2003) underscores their critical importance in maintaining the guardian functions of *ostentation* and *largesse* (Jacobs 1992). The ostentatious, largesse-driven aspects of convention centers may also be seen as a particularly American manifestation (oriented to “trade” and “commerce”) of the same guardian instinct, more nakedly expressed, driving costly if sometimes beautiful megaprojects around the world like Bilbao’s Guggenheim or Paris’s *grands projects* of the 1980s and 90s. But perhaps the most regretful aspect of these largesse-driven megaprojects is that the need for highly visible signs of ostentation has driven cities like Philadelphia to site extremely large buildings amidst an urban fabric that is ill able to support or withstand them. Philadelphia’s Convention Center reminds us that guardian ostentation can be destructive even in the most pluralistic, democratic contexts and that it must be continually called out, guarded against, and restrained.

Stadiums are not more physically destructive or more visually obtrusive than convention centers (although they are equally gargantuan), but they constitute a different monstrous mix of guardian and commercial functions, one benefiting both the former and the latter. Stadiums represent the most highly visible guardian subsidy of commercial enterprise in the American city. The flagrant and completely uneconomic subsidy of highly profitable professional sports teams reflects the fact that these teams serve important guardian functions of *fortitude*, *loyalty*, *prowess*, *leisure*, and again *ostentation* and *largesse* (Jacobs 1992). In a society that allegedly values small government, sports teams carry out functions like parades, mass gatherings, and oaths of fealty to the state, that are often governmental functions elsewhere.

Casinos are both the most physically destructive and visually obtrusive monstrous hybrids in American downtowns today and their proliferation and metastasis is cause for the most serious concern. Where convention centers and stadiums represent guardian functions run amok or placed in the hands of commercial enterprise, casinos are an even more extreme mix of guardian and commercial roles. Casinos do not serve guardian functions like ostentation, but by partially privatizing a fundamental government function (taxation), they thereby enhance *all* guardian functions. Casinos, run by competitive private enterprises desperate for revenue, in essence convert local and state government

into profit-seeking enterprises, since greater casino revenues generate greater government revenues<sup>†</sup>. Casinos violate the most fundamental of Jacobs' guardian syndrome, *shun trading* (1992), placing government in perverse dependency upon a single form of private enterprise, and thus incentivizing an even more perverse governmental protection of that commercial enterprise.

The rampant metastasis of Detroit's casinos thus becomes easier to understand. As entities with a peculiar and unnatural relationship with government, casinos are of course exempt from the normal regulatory controls which would restrict or otherwise govern their location, growth, and actions, such as street demapping or parking provision within the city. Just as it is ridiculous to imagine Detroit ever being able to survive without casinos today, only a short 10 years after their creation, it is ridiculous to imagine the city restricting the parking controls, lot assemblages, street demappings, violations of historic preservation guidelines, and demolition of building stock that all three of Detroit's casinos have engaged in. No aspect of the city's urban fabric may stand in the way of Detroit's casinos, for the city has made a Faustian bargain with commerce that must be upheld by permitting the reshaping of the built environment to whatever extent the casino needs. Casinos are not the first private enterprises to have possessed this power in Detroit; during much of the postwar era the city had the same perverse dependency upon automobile manufacturers, to the extent that Detroit was willing to displace over 3,400 residents and demolish 1,200 buildings for GM's Poletown plant in 1981-82 (Thomas 1997).

In an ideal world, American cities might actually physically embody Jacobs' buzzing, modest, diverse neighborhoods, housing only a few monumental buildings fulfilling guardian functions in locations that did not interfere with or destroy the former. Unfortunately, the current American city is very different from this ideal. Not only are many cities' diverse urban neighborhoods threatened by economic decline and suburban migration, but government seems to have lost control of its ability to control the numbers, sites, and shape of downtown megaprojects, either because its desire for pomp and circumstance has slipped its bounds or because it has become overly dependent upon the profits generated by "trading" and is thereby unwilling to regulate them. Megaprojects proliferate because they fulfill important government functions, but city governments, including those of Philadelphia and Detroit, are clearly demonstrating poor judgment in restraining their hunger for ostentation, largess, and profit. These cities' lack of political capacity is being reinforced by a lack of civic capacity that might enforce appropriate restraint of guardian irresponsibility. The metastasizing megaproject is thus a warning sign that governments, at the local and perhaps the state and federal levels as well are failing to fulfill important responsibilities and are merging with commerce in new and monstrous ways.

All hope should not be lost for concerned citizens and activists in American downtowns facing metastasizing megaprojects. Even if megaproject metastasis cannot be questioned without substantial reform of the growth machines dominating American cities and of federal policy guiding those cities, megaprojects might at least be located more intelligently and less destructively. Two simple rules might mitigate much damage: first, megaprojects should never replace remaining urban fabric; and second, megaprojects should be sited to permit metastasis without damage. Two cities, Baltimore and Milwaukee, offer hope for the future in this regard. Baltimore has constructed two stadia within the last 20 years on sites adjacent to, yet sufficiently removed from, existing residential neighborhoods and tourist areas so as to not destroy or dominate them. Milwaukee has sited an Indian casino on industrial land adjacent to highways and the downtown, yet located far from residential neighborhoods or urban fabric that might be at risk from metastasis. These cities have made these intelligent decisions without

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<sup>†</sup> Four percent of the state of Connecticut's total revenue is generated by only two casinos (*New York Times* 2010), and an amazing 11 percent of Detroit's revenue is generated by its three casinos (Citizens Research Council 2010).

urban design guidance from either state or federal policy, a sign either of the importance of local initiative, or perhaps just a lucky break in an otherwise dispiriting story of metastasizing megaprojects. Ultimately, the apparent necessity of downtown megaprojects to serve monstrous hybrids of guardianship and commerce must be tempered by a respect and deeper appreciation of the other functions of downtowns and of cities themselves.

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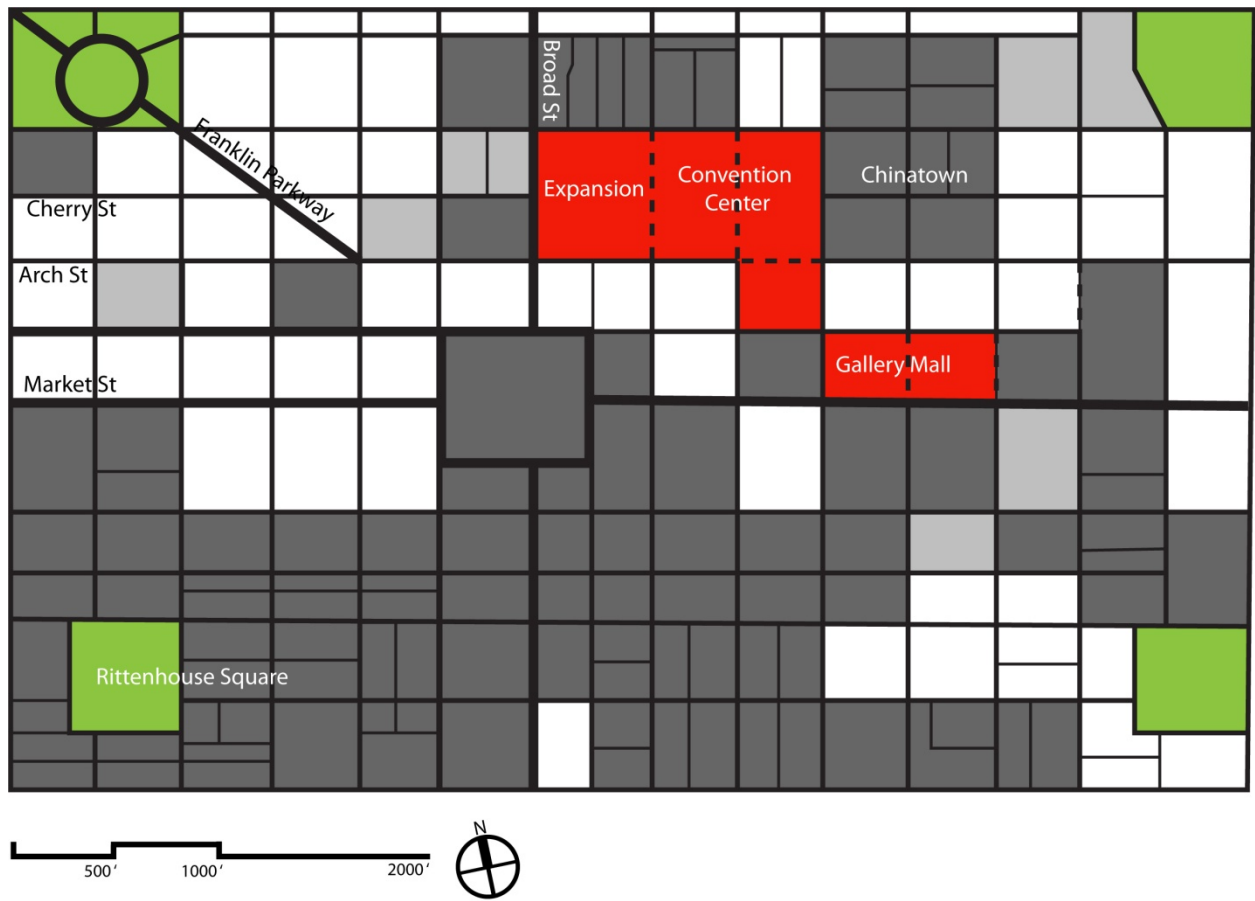


Figure 1. Urban design conditions in Philadelphia, 2010. Historic (pre-1950) urban fabric is shown in dark grey, streets in black, park space in green, parking space in light grey, megaprojects in red, and postwar urban fabric in white.

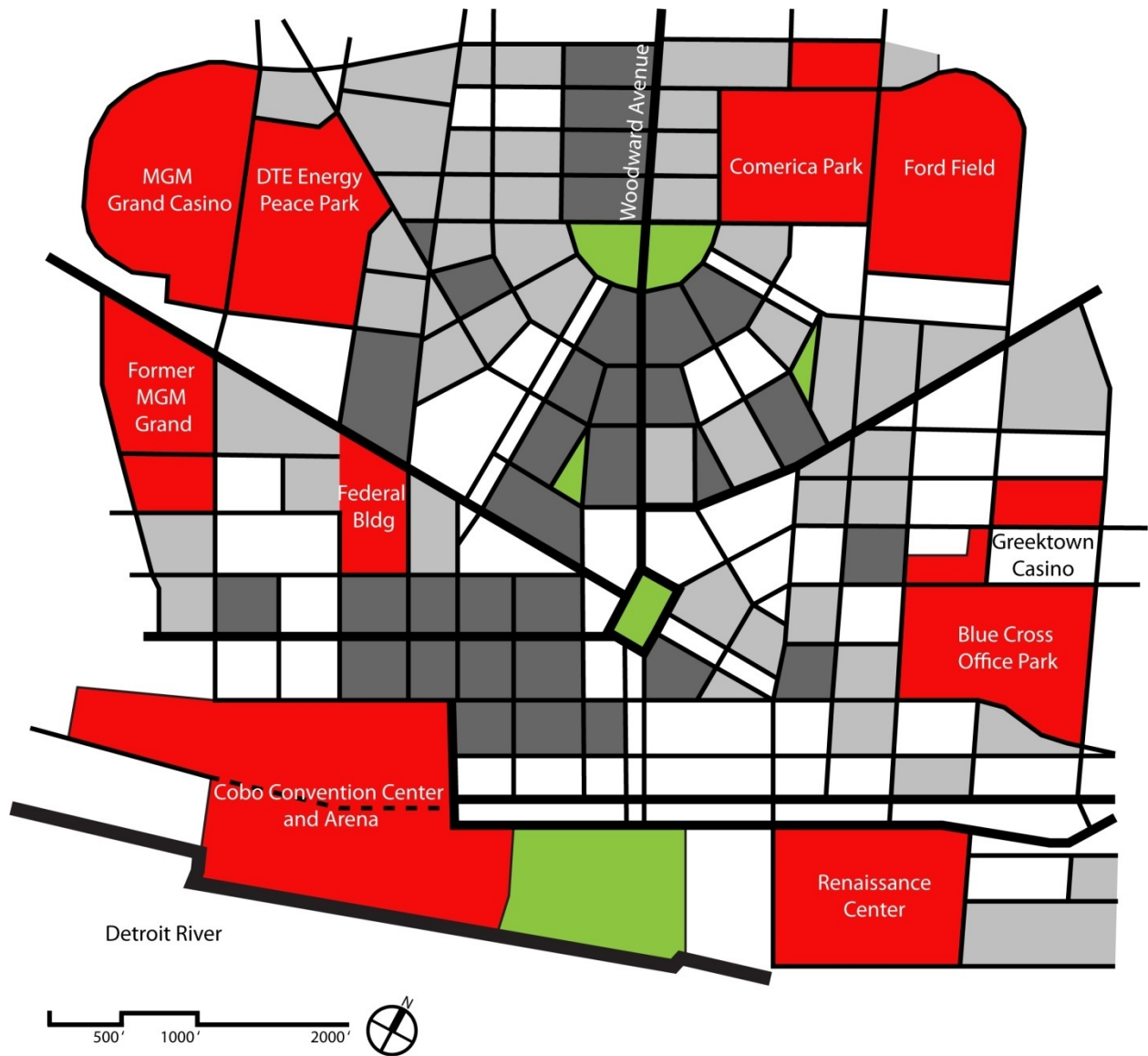


Figure 2. Urban design conditions in Detroit, 2010. Historic (pre-1950) urban fabric in dark grey, streets in black, park space in green, parking space in light grey, megaprojects in red, and postwar urban fabric in white.

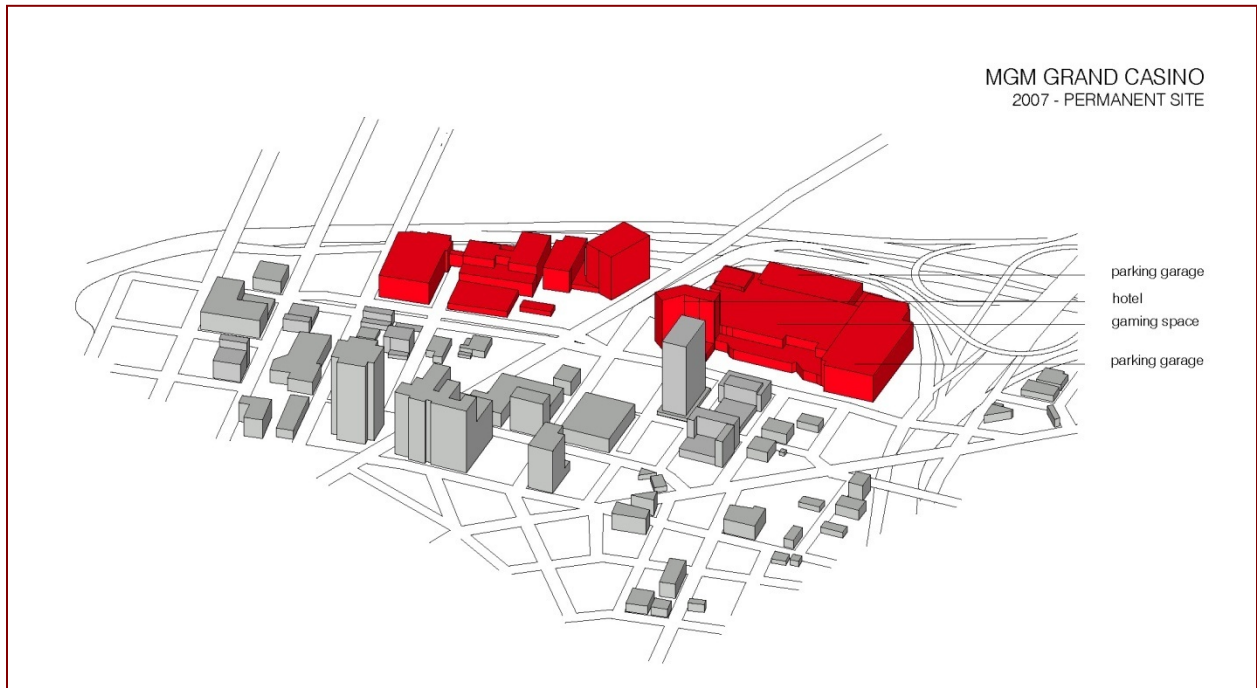


Figure 3. The relocation of the MGM casino from its temporary site (open 1999) to its permanent site in 2007 created Detroit's first abandoned casino.



Figure 4. The first incarnation of the Greektown casino (open 2000) included gambling space adjacent to the city's most active commercial block and a parking garage two blocks away.



Figure 5. By 2009 the Greektown casino had metastasized twice, most recently to an adjacent city block in order to provide a hotel tower and 3,500-car parking garage.