



# Better by Design?

Architecture, Urban Planning,  
and the Good City

Paul Knox

Better by Design?

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Architecture, Urban Planning, and the Good City

Paul L. Knox

**VIRGINIA TECH.**  
PUBLISHING

Blacksburg, Virginia



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First published 2020 by Virginia Tech Publishing  
Virginia Tech Publishing  
University Libraries at Virginia Tech  
560 Drillfield Drive  
Blacksburg, VA 24061



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This book was peer-reviewed (2 single-blind reviews) prior to publication by Virginia Tech Publishing.

#### Publication Cataloging Information

Knox, Paul L., author

Better by Design? Architecture, Urban Planning, and the Good City / Paul L. Knox

Pages cm

ISBN: 978-1-949373-33-2 (epub)

ISBN: 978-1-949373-31-8 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-949373-32-5 (pdf)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/better-by-design>

1. Architecture. 2. Architecture and society

NA9000.K74 2020

720

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Front Cover image: Aardvark/Alamy Stock Photo

Back cover: Royal Institute of British Architects archive

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## Preface

This book is the culmination of a career of writing on urbanization, the design professions, and the social production of the built environment. In broader terms it is the outcome of a combination of academic interest, teaching experience, and personal experience. Having long pursued an interest in urbanization and the built environment from a social science perspective, I found myself in the privileged position of dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech for almost a decade. During that time my involvement with design professionals and access to planners, builders, developers, community groups, and professional accrediting bodies gave me additional insight and somewhat different perspectives on the production and meaning of the built environment. Office visits, site visits, and informal conversations gave depth and texture to issues that had hitherto been, for me, mainly empirical or theoretical in tenor. They also taught me that a summative view is neither possible nor desirable and that a purity of critique is illusory. Teaching courses in architecture and planning meanwhile provided strong evidence of the passion and commitment of design students and the power, in pedagogical terms, of the studio. But these experiences also revealed the insularity of solipsistic academic disciplines and, in stark contrast, the dependence of practitioners on external relations and the shifting interdependencies inherent to urban political economies.

This book seeks to bring these perspectives together within an overall framework that is informed by social theory. It offers a reinterpretation of the history of the design professions, tracing their intellectual roots, identifying foundational ideas, key innovations, and path-dependent historical processes, and presents a critical appraisal of the effectiveness of the design professions in the perpetual urge to create and sustain “good cities.” I have made no attempt to offer my own definition of a good city. The point here is that context is everything. Although there are recurring dimensions of societal conceptions of the good city, priorities change in response to the exigencies and opportunities of successive phases of urban development and their interpretation by different groups. The achievements of professional fields involved in the production of the built environment must be understood in relation to these changing priorities and interpretations.

I have been helped enormously by my colleagues, friends, and students. Their thoughts, comments, and skills have been invaluable. I would especially like to recognize the contributions of Professor Robert Freestone, my new colleague Professor Aaron Betsky, and anonymous reviewers of the draft manuscript. I would also like to acknowledge the encouragement and advice of Peter Potter and the generous support of Virginia Tech in the preparation and publication of this book. Unless indicated otherwise, the photographs in the book are my own. In several cases I am indebted to the contributors of images to the Wikimedia Commons. Longleaf Services provided wonderfully effective editing. Any remaining errors are of course my own responsibility.

Blacksburg, Virginia  
June 2020

Part I  
Introduction

## Good Cities, Bad Cities

The design professions—architecture, urban planning, landscape architecture, and urban design—share a great deal in terms of intellectual antecedents, professional ideals, and praxis. They rightly claim a crucial link between the built environment and human flourishing, and share a commitment to creating better cities, whether at the scale of buildings, neighborhoods, or city-regions. They have overlapping philosophical and theoretical discourses as well as intersecting creative practices. Their telos encompasses the material realization of socially accepted conceptions of the good and what it means to live well: shaping environments in ways that contribute to social well-being and livability and proposing new possibilities for living.

Like all other professions, the design professions rely on their knowledgeability and expertise for their fundamental professional and intellectual authority. For architecture and its derivative offspring—urban planning, landscape architecture, and urban design—this expertise is in designing and implementing blueprints for built environments that are effective, beneficial, resilient, and agreeable. Their legitimacy rests, in other words, on their ability to create the physical fabric and spatial organization necessary for “good cities,” broadly conceived.

The staple interpretation of the history of the design professions pivots around the influence of inspirational figures and the successive responses of the avant-garde to changes in historical circumstances. This kind of narrative—emphasizing the way that the idealizations of visionaries have found their way into practice and been condensed out into the built environment—has been followed in relation to all of the design professions.<sup>1</sup> Such narratives often fail to fully recognize the way that the key themes and concepts have been unearthed, borrowed, retranslated, adapted, hybridized, and applied to new contexts from one historical period to another. But what is often entirely discounted are the additional complexities resulting from interdependencies with actors and agents from other fields. “The design of cities,” Barnett points out, “has been determined by engineers, surveyors, lawyers, and investors, each making individual, rational decisions for rational reasons.”<sup>2</sup> Well, perhaps not always for rational reasons, but certainly with a variety of motivations, and not all of them concerned so much with creating better cities.

The production of the built environment must therefore be seen as a function of time- and place-specific social relations that involve not only design professionals but also a web of other actors and institutions, including landowners, investors, financiers, developers, builders, business and community leaders, government agencies, homeowner associations, and consumers as well as design professionals. These sets of relations represent “systems of building provision.”<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, it is clear that these systems of building provision—not just the design professions themselves—need to be understood in terms of their linkages with the complexities of economic, social, cultural, environmental, and political change. Here, then, we have to confront the broader role of the design professions as elements in the social and property relations of capitalism. The design fields have co-evolved not only with the property development and construction industries, and with building and transportation technologies and state regulatory frameworks; but also in response to many other forces, including structural economic change, the restless dynamics of investment and disinvestment in cities, and changing patterns of land ownership, property law, tax policy, local politics, and consumer preferences. In the process, the roles and ideals of the design professions themselves have changed, along with changing schools of thought in engineering, the arts, and the social sciences. This calls for a transdisciplinary approach that draws on economics, political science, law, history, geography, public administration, sociology and other disciplines in unearthing the relations among different institutions, interests, and professions.

This book is a beginning. It places the innovations of the avant-garde in architecture and design in context of capitalism’s regular and recurrent crises: the major events that have provided “path-shaping” moments for the emergence of new discourses in design, policy, and planning. The book also traces how the design professions have engaged with preexisting interpretations (policy discourses, utopian ideals) that have become translated into taken-for-granted ideas and practices. It traces the mobilization and circulation of design and policy ideas and identifies key event-sequences and path dependencies as ideas and precedents have consolidated into praxis. It pays special attention to the influence of thought leaders and tastemakers from other fields—philosophy, law, literature, economics, political science, sociology—along with that of innovators from within the design fields themselves. It takes into account the predispositions and ideologies of design professionals and the way that these are shaped by narratives within educational curricula, by the metrics of professional success, by the priorities of the professional press, and by formal constraints imposed by the state. It recognizes the design fields’ contributions to inspiring and creating good cities, but it also acknowledges who benefitted (and who

did not), notes where things went badly wrong, and critiques the limitations of certain strands of design and design thinking.

The narrative is framed within the broader political economies of Britain and the United States. This is, in part, a product of my own span of knowledge and experience, and in part a device to keep to a reasonable length and focus for a single book. Some “outside” influences are impossible to overlook—Haussmann, the Bauhaus, and Corbusier, for example—but the overwhelming focus here is Anglo-American. This is not simply a matter of convenience, however. On both sides of the Atlantic efforts to create and sustain the good city have been interdependent, bound by a common language, a broadly shared economic history, a shared professional literature, and academic cultures and professional networks that have facilitated the easy exchange of both ideas and people. The differences between the political economy of Britain and that of the United States, sometimes quite sharp, simply serve to make things interesting.

Framed in this way, the key actors in the narrative are—inevitably—predominantly white and male. This is, of course, a reflection of the societies in which they have operated but, latterly, also to some extent a reflection of misogyny within the design fields themselves. The narrative also reflects the distinct class biases inherent to the history of the design fields. The chief patrons of the design fields have been wealthy and powerful individuals and corporations; their employers have often been establishment institutions; and the talents and energies of design professionals in private practice have inevitably been framed overwhelmingly around the interests and priorities of better educated and more affluent clients. Despite the sincerity of individual practitioners and educators in their commitment to social, economic, and environmental justice and to livable, stimulating, and pleasurable cities for all, it was only during the golden age of modernist design and planning in Europe that the working classes were explicitly intended as principal beneficiaries of the fields as a whole (a commitment that was washed out as modernism made its way across the Atlantic). Otherwise, when poor, working-class and non-white communities have benefitted from the design fields’ contributions to the good city, it has generally been a consequence of societal responses to crises and threats to the health, safety, and well-being of the established order and the dominant classes: mitigating the dangers of fire, disease, and the mob, and managing the negative externalities of urbanization.

### **The Good City**

At the broadest level, the ideal of the good city has to be understood in the context of the fundamental roles of cities. In crude terms, cities are simply “giant machines for making money”<sup>4</sup>—some of which is, necessarily, reinvested in the built environment in search of further profit. In rather more specific terms, cities can be thought of as fulfilling three

interrelated roles in capitalist economies, and the design fields are implicated in each of them.

First is the mobilizing function of cities. Cities provide efficient and effective environments for organizing labor, capital, and raw materials, and for distributing finished products. They are places where the classic economic advantages of centrality, agglomeration, and what economist Alfred Marshall called “industrial atmosphere”<sup>5</sup> are conducive to capitalist enterprise.

Second is the decision-making capacity of urban settings. Because cities bring together the decision-making apparatus of public and private institutions and organizations, they come to be concentrations of political and economic power. Big cities, especially, are nodal command centers in the “space of flows”<sup>6</sup> that constitute industrial and post-industrial space-economies.

Third are the generative functions of cities. The concentration of people in urban settings makes for much greater interaction and competition. As Peter Hall demonstrated in *Cities in Civilization*, cities become “creative fields,” fostering innovation, generating knowledge, and disseminating information.<sup>7</sup>

As these functions play out, the logic of capital can furnish great buildings, attractive squares and plazas, pleasing townscapes, and thriving communities. But all too often it can result in sterile settings, unhealthy environments, segregated and dysfunctional communities, and disenfranchised and displaced populations. Society looks to the design professions to maximize—or at least contribute to—the positive outcomes of urbanization and minimize or avoid the negative.

### **Urban Imaginaries**

A key attribute of the design professions is their capacity for anticipation, innovation, and inspiration: mobilizing conceptions of alternative (and better) ways of city building and fostering a disposition for progressive social change. Utopian thinking, in other words: “the capacity to imagine a future that departs significantly from what we know to be a general condition in the present.”<sup>8</sup> Such thinking, of course, comes with the accumulated intellectual and ideological baggage of previous centuries.

The ancient Greeks regarded the city as a place in which virtue and democracy could flourish. Socrates and Plato both saw Athens as the arena where “citizens” were created and nurtured. Aristotle expounded on the city as the “natural” and “good” basis for the development of society, a place where public and private life were in interplay for the first time, and a place that supported an unprecedented development of art, intellect, and politics. The idea of “The good city for the good life, an immensely powerful Athenian invention, diffused through time and space and left a legacy of pro-urbanism difficult to dislodge.”<sup>9</sup>

*The ancient Greeks  
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In medieval times, towns and cities were places of refuge and freedom from feudalism and servitude. With the emergence of capitalism, cities became the locus of the generation and accumulation of wealth because of their capacity for organizing production, distribution, trade, and consumption. Peter Hall, in his magisterial survey of urbanization, provided a wealth of evidence of urban environments as crucibles of cultural and technological evolution, providing the “innovative milieu” for all the attributes we recognize as features of a civilized society.<sup>10</sup> Hall points, for example, to the art, music, theatre, and related cultures in classical Athens, Renaissance Florence, Elizabethan London, nineteenth-century Vienna, and early twentieth-century Paris and Berlin, along with innovation combining technology with art and music in Los Angeles and Memphis. Manchester, Glasgow, Berlin, Detroit, Silicon Valley, and Tokyo provided the innovative milieu for industrial and post-industrial innovation. Innovations in the “soft” infrastructure of urban life emerged in still other cities: public works in ancient Rome, local government and utilities in nineteenth-century London, public works in Baron Haussmann’s Paris, and social welfare systems in post-war Stockholm.

Yet many commentators on the urban condition have pointed out that despite the roles of cities as enclaves of social conviviality, innovation, and economic progress, they are also engines of inequality, crucibles of conflict, and generators of social and environmental problems. Lewis Mumford, author of another magisterial survey of urbanization,<sup>11</sup> concluded that the technologies invented in cities tend to contain the seeds of their undoing, the “golden ages” of individual metropolises inevitably being followed by decline and its attendant problems: all contributing to a cultural tendency toward anti-urbanism.

### **Anti-urbanism**

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution the ideal of the good city has been framed within an overall cultural climate that has carried strong currents of anti-urbanism, with cities often portrayed as a necessary evil if not downright bad places. In America, Thomas Jefferson had set the tone long before with his mythologization of a nation of yeoman farmers and his fear that cities would undermine the established order: “The mobs of great cities add so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body.”<sup>12</sup> Anti-urbanism was a recurring element in the political platform of the Democratic Party through much of the nineteenth century, while art and literature were dominated by a reactionary Romanticism that was most pronounced in the so-called American Renaissance, rooted in the works of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Thoreau had written of Boston that “the pigs in the street are the most respectable

part of the population.”<sup>13</sup> His most famous book, *Walden* (1854), popularized the idea of Nature as a spiritual wellspring for city dwellers.

Mid-nineteenth century American painters like Thomas Cole established themselves by painting glorious wilderness landscapes and seascapes, and novelists like Stephen Crane and, later, Theodore Dreiser portrayed the industrializing American city as a gargantuan maw that simply swallowed the unfortunates who were drawn to it for work. By the late nineteenth century, the educated classes had come to think of their relationship with Nature and the Great Outdoors as something distinctively “American.” In a paper published in 1893 the historian Frederick Jackson Turner launched the influential vanity that the “frontier experience” was the single most significant factor in determining the “American character,”<sup>14</sup> and it became broadly understood that “access to undefiled, bountiful and sublime Nature is what accounts for the virtue and special good fortune of Americans.”<sup>15</sup>

Europeans had different national vanities, but the elaboration of the virtue of the rural and the vice of the urban was also an abiding theme of European culture. It was reflected in Britain, for example, in the writing of William Cobbett, Thomas Hardy, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens and the art of John Constable and J. M. W. Turner. Like Americans, Europeans also shared an aspect of nineteenth-century anti-urban ideology constructed around a fear of the loss not just of the established social and political order but also of patriarchal control over women.<sup>16</sup> It was expressed, among other ways, in strong gender coding built into the domestic architecture of Victorian and Edwardian suburbs.

Anti-urbanism was somewhat less dominant in the twentieth century, giving way to a lopsided ambivalence toward the city—a grudging functional attraction accompanied by an intellectual dislike—that was masterfully analyzed by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*.<sup>17</sup> But undiluted anti-urbanism was still very important, as documented by M. G. and L. White in *The Intellectual Versus the City*, by Robert Beauregard in *Voices of Decline*, and by Steven Conn in *Americans Against the City*.<sup>18</sup>

There have, of course, been plenty of aspects of the lived experience of urbanization to underpin and sustain Western anti-urban culture. In the nineteenth century, overcrowding, lack of sanitation, defective drainage, and inadequate water supplies led to disease epidemics and the associated social costs of squalor (intemperance, immorality, and criminality). Mid-twentieth century concerns focused on the persistence of poverty along with inner-city decay, the alienation of big-city life, and the banality of the suburbs; while more recently it has been income polarization, racial tension, homelessness, and indiscriminate violence. Most recently of all, the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 once again emphasized the vulnerability of cities to the spread of disease.

*A lopsided  
ambivalence toward  
the city*

### Toward the Good City

The broader topic of the book begs an obvious question. Just what constitutes a “good” city? But it should be recognized at the outset that there can be no single, enduring definition or normative statement of what constitutes the good city. The answer is contingent on urban conditions and sociocultural priorities at different points in time. And as these conditions and priorities change, so does the relevance of particular attributes of the built environment to conceptions of what is good or desirable. There are other important aspects of conditionality, including those of class and scale. Good for whom? For business, for community, or sustainability? Should design be driven primarily by social criteria?<sup>19</sup> For the poor, the middle classes, or the wealthy? For the clients and paymasters of design professionals? Are there losers as well as winners? Then there is the question of scale. Discussions by social philosophers and social scientists tend to be framed at the scale of the city as a whole. For architects, discussion is framed, mostly, at the scale of individual buildings; for planners, landscape architects, and urban designers they are typically framed at the scale of city districts but occasionally at the scale of entire cities or city regions.

Against the backdrop of these conditionalities, imaginaries of utopian societies and ideal cities provide a starting point, since there are recurring dimensions of the idealized good city that have carried forward to influence the ideology and praxis of the design professions. It has long been accepted—within intellectual circles, at least—that access to the beautiful and inspiring must be among the elements indispensable to any conception of the good city. Among other recurring themes are health, safety, order, and social harmony; and these ideals in turn have often been linked to the importance of justice, of democratic political structures, and a collective—or at least progressive—approach to urban affairs. Utility, functionalism, and proportion in the organization of space also feature prominently among the desiderata of utopian societies and ideal cities, though as Meyerson notes there tends to have been a striking contrast in that social utopias:

... if they have dealt at all with elements of physical environment, have done so but superficially: the forms and interrelations of housing, workshops, facilities for education and recreation, and the distribution of open land, have followed, as afterthoughts. ... Conversely, the utopias of visual design have ignored class structure, the economic base, and the process of government in the desirable future they present.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the concepts and themes that have been carried through the long history of thought on ideal cities and utopian societies have been developed, adopted, and refined by visionary practitioners and deployed by their followers. As we shall see, however, it is a complex story, framed and reframed in the context of evolving political economies. As Peter Hall observed:

*Just what  
constitutes a  
good city?*

When at last the visions were discovered and resuscitated, their implementation came often in very different places, in very different circumstances, and often through very different mechanisms, from those their inventors had originally envisaged. Transplanted as they were in time and space and socio-political environment, it is small wonder that the results were often bizarre, sometimes catastrophic.<sup>21</sup>

The book is organized in three parts. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical frameworks that help in understanding the complex interdependencies among the design professions and their economic, political, social, and cultural contexts. Part 2 of the book focuses on the “Intentional City”—the foundational ideas and innovations that have emerged in striving toward the ideal of the good city. The six chapters in this part of the book are arranged in broad chronological sequence, beginning with key historical antecedents and following through to the challenges and responses to successive phases of urbanization. Part 3—“The Continuing Struggle”—is focused on a critical review of recent and contemporary efforts to create and sustain the good city.

# 2

## Design Practitioners and Their Fields

The efforts of the design professions to contribute to the realization of the good city have always been conditioned by politics, economics, social change, and an evolving political economy that includes the legacies of utopian thinking, the influence of the prevailing intellectual climate, the commodification of culture, and the shifting currents of taste and fashion. Understanding all this in broader context involves tracing arts and policy discourses and the generation and circulation of design ideas. It means taking account of patterns of event-sequences, path dependencies, and behavioral lock-in as ideas are translated into praxis. In seeking to understand the efforts of the design professions we need also to acknowledge the human interactions that give shape to policies, plans, and buildings.<sup>1</sup> We need to appreciate the influence of tastemakers, thought leaders, and knowledge brokers, understand the predispositions and ideologies of design professionals themselves, and the way that these are shaped.

### **Structure and Agency: Systems of Building Provision**

One framework capable of accommodating this complexity is the structuration (or structure-agency) approach developed by sociologist Anthony Giddens, in which knowledgeable actors operate within a specific social context, mediated by a variety of institutional arrangements.<sup>2</sup> This is described succinctly by Dear and Wolch:

The structure-agency relationship is mediated by a series of institutional arrangements that both enable and constrain action. Hence three 'levels of analysis' can be identified: structures, institutions, and agents. *Structures* include the long-term, deep-seated social practices that govern daily life, such as law and the family. *Institutions* represent the phenomenal forms of structures, including, for example, the state apparatus. And *agents* are those influential human actors who determine the precise, observable outcomes of any social interaction.<sup>3</sup>

Structuration theory recognizes that we are all actors (whether designers, planners, members of interest groups, bureaucrats, elected officials, or consumers), and all part of a dualism in which economic, social, communicative, political, and legal structures frame and enable our behavior; while our behavior itself reconstitutes and sometimes changes these structures. Furthermore, structuration theory recognizes that we are all members of various networks of social actors:

organizations, interest groups, neighbors, social classes, and so on, as well as professional networks.

Planning theorist Patsy Healey has argued for such an approach to the urban development process.<sup>4</sup> But while some attention has been given to urban planning and policy in this way, architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design have received little attention. Meanwhile, from Weberian sociology we are reminded that some actors and institutions can be more significant than others. For the design professions, the most important actors include landowners, developers, financiers, and central and local government officials. Along with realtors, commercial bankers, construction companies, utility companies, engineering and technical subcontractors, chambers of commerce, lawyers, title insurance and trust companies, federal, state, and local agencies, and transportation and utility companies, these actors constitute systems of building provision: local economic-political complexes whose efforts frame the challenges and opportunities for design professionals.

### **Habitus and Field**

As writers like Garry Stevens and Paul Jones have pointed out, the concept of a “field” developed by French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu is useful here.<sup>5</sup> The concept of “field” in Bourdieu’s work has two distinct but related meanings: first, that of a site of symbolic and economic struggle and, second, that of a “field of force” that can shape and condition the values, ideology, and practices of the actors and institutions operating within it. Stevens suggests that “we might consider the field of architecture to consist of architects, critics, architectural academics, builders, all the forms of clients, the part of the state concerned with construction, financial institutions, plus architectural discourse and building regulations, among other things.”<sup>6</sup>

Critics and historians within the field can exert an important influence on the definition of the field itself. In architecture, for example, they influence the types of buildings that can “properly” be considered as architecture, the buildings that are considered good enough even to merit criticism, and the types of people who can legitimately claim to be architects. Nicklaus Pevsner’s haughty distinction between architecture and “mere building” meanwhile reflects a more general perspective that for a long time kept the focus on stylistic issues and deterred architectural historians from studying industrial buildings and middle- and working-class housing.<sup>7</sup>

Within each field, personal distinction can be achieved through the acquisition of various forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Economic capital, the most generally recognized means of “keeping score,” is any form of wealth that is easily turned into money. Social capital derives from the social connections of family, locality and field, often inherited through class membership. Cultural capital is the sum of

credentials, skill, and knowledge acquired through education and upbringing. It can take three forms: institutionalized cultural capital, or formally accredited learning; objectified cultural capital, such as art, books, and the stylistic aspects of architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, product design, and so on; and embodied or “symbolic” cultural capital, the non-accredited and sometimes tacit knowledge, tastes and dispositions absorbed through participation in a particular field. Embodied cultural capital derives from the command of superior taste. In Western societies, superior taste has long been the distinguishing attribute of bourgeois class fractions, whose members are socialized to appreciate fine art and music, to like certain foods, to understand complicated art forms, and to master certain context-specific manners, vocabularies, and demeanors.

Cultural capital is not simply equivalent to cultural literacy but is, rather, a “feel for the game,” a product of knowledgeability of the symbolic meaning of particular cultural artifacts and sociocultural practices. The fact that cultural capital is vulnerable to shifts in the denotative and connotative meaning of everything from buildings to ideas only makes it more potent as a measure of distinction. But not everyone necessarily accepts the definitions of taste and distinction set out by the tastemakers with the cultural capital to exercise power within and between fields. One of Bourdieu’s key contributions has been to identify the avant-garde—defined by its opposition to the generally accepted canon of “good” taste and “high” culture—as a primary source of symbolic capital. The story of the Modern movement (chapter 7) is precisely the story of how the architectural avant-garde completely displaced Beaux-Arts cultural capital in favor of its own conventions.

Different fields and class fractions are characterized by different combinations of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Typically, upper-class social groups command high levels of each kind of capital; working-class groups have relatively little of any kind; the nouveau riche have plenty of economic capital but less social and cultural capital; and so on. Design professionals will certainly have a good deal of cultural (especially symbolic) capital, whatever their economic and social capital.

The point here is that these combinations of different kinds of capital contribute to collective perceptual and evaluative schemata—cognitive structures and dispositions—that derive from people’s everyday lived experience, including work environments. These schemata operate at a subconscious level, through commonplace daily practices, dress codes, use of language, and behavior. The result is an internalized set of group norms that Bourdieu has conceptualized as “habitus.” Habitus is the result of socialization into the dominant values of a field, a process whereby the consecrated tastes, languages, and practices of the field become learned and internalized by individuals, who in turn reproduce these values and maintain the boundaries of the field.

*Cultural capital  
and a “feel for the  
game”*



### The Aestheticized Habitus

As Sharon Zukin has noted,<sup>8</sup> the increasingly complex and diverse world of art and design means that there is a growing number of cultural intermediaries—commentators, reviewers, editorialists, brokers, consultants, bloggers, copy writers, movie directors, talk show hosts—whose efforts are relevant to the habitus of design fields and to maintaining practitioners’ “feel for the game.” The process of maintaining habitus is continuous. The signs and symbols of economic, social, and cultural capital have to constantly be reinforced, shuffled, inverted, or displaced. New languages of taste and identity may have to be mastered. Innovative designs and ideas have to be inducted as desirable or enchanting (or not); the once-fashionable may be condemned as dated or tasteless; kitsch may be consecrated as cool; and minimalism (for example) may be cultivated as a desirable trait.

Habitus and field, then, are mutually interdependent, since a habitus always exists in relation to a given field. In the field of architecture the most cherished dispositions of habitus center around aesthetics. The field’s overwhelming emphasis on symbolic capital, originality, giftedness and—let’s face it—novelty, amounts to a “force field” that encourages practitioners to prioritize surface appearance and visual effect. One result is an affinity for sculptural approaches to design, with buildings being designed from the outside in. Competition within the field consequently fosters a tendency toward striking appearances. For Frampton this amounts to an over-aestheticization, “so that the entire field becomes flooded with an endless proliferation of images ... increasingly designed for their photogenic effect.”<sup>9</sup>

The aestheticized habitus of the field extends to dress and discourse. Wearing black clothing became stereotypical for male architects<sup>10</sup> while bow ties (which may have had a practical function in the days of Indian ink and drawing boards) are now preferred as stunt accessories, along with arty scarves, capes, canes, collarless shirts, and Corbusier/Warhol-style glasses. Artemide lamps and Barcelona chairs (designed by Mies van der Rohe) are the equivalent signifiers in architects’ living rooms. Language and discourse are also part of habitus. Cocooned in highly aestheticized and/or technical fields, discourse and language become specialized.

The fields of landscape architecture, urban design, and urban planning share much of the aesthetic disposition of architecture: a reflection of their common roots. For the same reason they are vulnerable to the appeal of originality and the idea of a field shaped by individual giftedness. Planning has the most distinctive set of dispositions in relation to the other design fields. The authority of the field comes less from symbolic capital and connoisseurship and more from its practitioners’ social capital in the context of bureaucracies underpinned by laws and regulations.



Within these fields are the design professions: codified categories of practitioners organized by professional organizations with restrictive (and restricted) practices and standards and codes of conduct, and with registered membership based on institutionalized cultural capital. The professionalization of architecture dates from the late eighteenth century (in Britain) and early nineteenth century (in the United States). Landscape architecture and planning were professionalized at the turn of the twentieth century. Urban design remains a field rather than a formalized profession. Each of the professions has developed a distinctive normative ideology into which entrants (self-selected and already disposed toward the telos of the profession) are socialized through formal education, professional meetings, academic and trade journals, and general day-to-day contact with fellow practitioners. These normative ideologies, as sociologists such as Evetts and Freidson point out, help professional organizations to maintain their authoritative status and to claim an interest in the public good.<sup>11</sup>

The professional ideology cultivated within urban planning, for example, is the product of several strands of thought that have become closely intertwined as the profession developed. These include the moral environmentalism of early sanitary reformers and philanthropists; the concern with aesthetics that stems from links with architecture; the functional organization of space associated with the influx of geography graduates to the profession; the systems thinking and cybernetics of the 1970s, and the computer modeling of the 1980s; and so on.<sup>12</sup> Running through all these strands is a paternalism that at times surfaces to reveal planners as “evangelistic bureaucrats.” According to Davies, evangelical claims regarding the good city have been fostered in order to protect practitioners from criticisms that result from the conflicts that inevitably arise from the pursuit of their work; and it is related to a self-image of imaginative farsightedness, selflessness, fairness, and humanitarianism.<sup>13</sup> As we shall see, such an evangelical attitude can lead to “bureaucratic aggression” on a grand scale.

*A self-image  
of imaginative  
farsightedness*

## **The Design Fields in Economic and Social Context**

In their professional symbiosis, architecture, urban design and urban planning constitute exacting ideologies of form, both social and physical, which underwrite the prevailing ideology of power.<sup>14</sup>

In general terms, the design fields can be seen as carrying the zeitgeist of the prevailing political economy while serving, like other components of the system, as one of the means through which the necessary conditions for the continuation of the system are reproduced. Design professionals’ roles as arbiters, creators, and manipulators of aesthetics are part of the process whereby changing relationships within society at large become expressed in the “superstructure” of ideas,

institutions, and objects. This allows us to see major shifts in design styles as dialectical responses to the evolving dynamics of urban-industrial society: part of a series of broad intellectual and artistic innovative reactions to economic, social, and cultural changes.

Design professionals translate social and cultural values into material form: they are amplifiers and rectifiers of intellectual, social, and cultural trends, at once both products and carriers of the flux of ideas and power relationships in society. It is generally accepted that “Since design’s beginning, when it was conceived as an art of giving form to products for mass production, it has been firmly embedded in consumer culture.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, “There appears to be a deeply-entrenched conservatism among design historians, an unwillingness to confront the relationship between design and politics, design and social injustice.”<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Stowell, editor of *Architectural Forum* in the 1930s, acknowledged that “architects ... remain ultimately the highly paid employees of realtors and builders or are themselves small businessmen with a stake in the common exploitation.”<sup>17</sup> So, “In order to make sense of design, we must recognise that its disguising, concealing and transforming powers have been essential to the progress of modern industrial societies.”<sup>18</sup>

Since the 1950s, the underlying premise of design practice of all kinds—architecture, urban design and planning, interior design, product design, furniture design, fashion, photography, graphic design—has been that success ultimately depends on designers’ sensitivity to the currents of trends and tastes within culture and on their ability to lend traction to capital accumulation by articulating these values and tastes in the promotion of ideas and events, services and products, buildings and cities. Today, design has an unambiguous role in facilitating the circulation and accumulation of capital. As key arbiters of style, design professionals are in a powerful position to stimulate consumption merely by generating and/or endorsing changes in the nuances of building styles.

An important aspect of design, therefore, is to deliver novelty: style for style’s sake, the zeit for sore eyes. Meanwhile, by virtue of the prestige and mystique socially accorded to creativity, design professionals add exchange value to the built environment through their decisions about design. Design, then, is a key instrument in the commodification and formatting of culture; it is fundamentally about styling, coding, and effective communication with an audience of consumers. As William Saunders, editor of the *Harvard Design Magazine* puts it: “along with every other cultural production (including music, photography, book publishing, the fine arts, and even education), the design of the built environment has been increasingly engulfed in and made subservient to the goals of the capitalist economy, more specifically the luring of consumers for the purpose of gaining their money.”<sup>19</sup>

*Design professionals  
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and cultural trends*

Another key role of design within the broader political economy is that of legitimation. Nineteenth-century businesses, for example, drew legitimacy from classical art, which had become closely associated with aristocratic and religious institutions. Department stores masqueraded as museums, banks were fitted out as ducal palaces, and factories were built to imitate castles. A major theme in the critical literature on architectural history is the way that architecture has repeatedly veiled and obscured the realities of economic and social relations.<sup>20</sup> The physical arrangement and appearance of the built environment can help to suggest stability amid change (or vice versa), to create order amid uncertainty, and to make the social order appear natural and permanent. Thus there is a “silent complicity”<sup>21</sup> that exists between architects and the agendas of the politically and economically powerful.

This is achieved in part through what political scientist Harold Lasswell called the “signature of power.”<sup>22</sup> It is manifest in two ways: through majestic displays of power in the scenography of architecture and urban design, and through a “strategy of admiration,” aimed at diverting the audience with spectacular and dramatic architecture and urban settings. It will be understood, however, that it may not always be desirable to flaunt power. Legitimation may, therefore, require modest or low-profile design. Conversely, it is by no means only “high” design that legitimizes the prevailing order. The everyday settings of home, workplace, and neighborhood also help to naturalize class and gender relations. Thus another important function of design is in social reproduction, creating settings and images that structure and channel the values and worldviews of different class fractions and that contribute to “moral geographies” that express particular value systems in material form.

Design can also function to commodify critical or antithetical movements, thereby acting as an “internal survival mechanism” of capitalism and allowing the dominant social order to protect itself from opposing ideological forces. Through design, the energy of oppositional movements can be diverted into commercialism, so that the movements themselves, having forfeited their raw power, pass quietly away. As we shall see in chapter 6, the radical oppositional impulses of nineteenth-century communitarian social reform movements were translated into professionalized urban design and planning that was charged with the management of urban settings as efficient places for business as well as healthy places for productive workers. And, to take another example—to be elaborated in chapter 7—the aesthetic of the seminal modernism of the Bauhaus, originally tied closely to socialist ideals, was quickly co-opted by corporate capital when its leading practitioners crossed the Atlantic.

### Change, Innovation and Diffusion

Theory and practice in every field have been shaped by broad sociopolitical innovations that have emerged from moments of deep crisis and transition. When some combination of economic, technological, social, political, or cultural change leads large (or key) sections of society to question traditionally accepted ideals and practices—a condition that the ancient Greeks called *aporia*—profound changes to the overall political economy can result. Thus, for example, the European political crises of 1848 brought the beginnings of deep social and political reform; the upheavals and disjunctions that followed the First World War fostered the introduction of welfare states; the Great Depression produced Keynesianism; the 1973 OPEC-induced inflationary crisis unleashed corporate globalization and neoliberalism; and so on. We may soon begin to see the long-term implications of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and its associated economic recession.

Capitalism's regular and recurrent crises meanwhile provide "path-shaping" moments<sup>23</sup> characterized by the emergence of new discourses and new aesthetic responses. As Milton Friedman observed, "Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around."<sup>24</sup> This is why it is important to trace the mobilization and circulation of design and policy ideas.

A key concept here is that of path dependency. Path-dependent historical processes are those where contingent events result in institutional changes and event sequences with deterministic properties. The core idea of path dependence is that, once established, structures, institutions, and operational systems can become increasingly difficult to change over time. Seemingly small contingent choices early on, in other words, can set in motion event chains that have deterministic properties with broad, long-term impacts.<sup>25</sup> Accounting for path dependence means tracing certain outcomes back to previous events that were in themselves not necessarily logical or inevitable consequences of their particular circumstances.

Another, related concept is that of critical junctures. These are moments of major change, triggered primarily by exogenous forces, resulting in new institutional arrangements and new developmental pathways. Woven into path-dependence and critical junctures are traveling ideas and policy mobilities— "socially produced and circulated forms of knowledge addressing how to design and govern cities that develop in, are conditioned by, travel through, connect, and shape various spatial scales, networks, policy communities, and institutional contexts."<sup>26</sup> Innovations are diffused through a combination of conferences, study tours, site visits, publications, and internet sites. They are carried

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and recurrent  
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moments*

and propagated by individual practitioners as well as elected officials, bureaucrats, pressure groups, and professional organizations, all framing and packaging knowledge about best policy practices, successful cities, and cutting-edge ideas.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, although there is a certain amount of reciprocal indifference among the design professions and related fields (architects, historically, hardly able to contain their sense of superiority to the others), the complex patterns of interaction, collusion, and negotiation that are involved in the diffusion of urban plans, ideas, and policies can result in a co-evolutionary “lock-in,” establishing a durable conventional wisdom and its associated practices and processes. But historical events stubbornly refuse to follow a neat chronological sequence and, as Peter Hall observes in his history of urban planning, this is particularly true of the history of ideas:

... the products of human intelligence derive from others, branch out, fuse, lie dormant, or are awakened in exceedingly complex ways, which seldom permit of any neat linear description. Worse, they do not readily submit to any schematic ordering either. So the analyst who seeks to write an account around a series of main themes will find that they crisscross in a thoroughly disorderly and confusing way.<sup>28</sup>

Part II

The Intentional City

# 3

## Foundational Ideas and Legacy Frameworks

Foundational ideas about the good city were developed systematically during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, drawing on Greek and Roman precedents. But early thinking about the good city was framed almost exclusively around the concerns and aspirations of educated elites. As a result, matters of taste were firmly established as the primary theme, along with considerations of virtue, order and civility, happiness, and prosperity. Celebration and appreciation of the beautiful was a prominent dimension of the good life for the elite. Their overwhelming emphasis on embodied cultural capital created the beginnings of a “force field” that was to become colonized and nurtured by the design professions.

The pre-industrial era also saw the cultivation of the idea of the architect as a polymath and public intellectual. Their patrons were the wealthy and the powerful who appreciated the capacity of the built environment to legitimize power and symbolize wealth and status. It was the wealthy educated elites who established not only the early canon of taste in architecture but also the legal and physical frameworks that were to set in motion key path dependencies that have influenced subsequent attempts to create and sustain the good city. Only to the extent that architecture might create moral landscapes was there any consideration of the relevance of design for the lower orders.

### **The Enlightenment Paradigm**

Greco-Roman philosophy identified goodness as a condition in which virtue and happiness were one and the same: the idea of *summum bonum*, an all-encompassing goal of human life. It was an ideal that could best be articulated and sustained in cities, where the forum and the agora provided setting and context for the necessary public rhetoric. The rise of democracy in Greek cities during the first half of the First Millennium BCE was reflected in architecture and urban design, and in particular the rise of the agora as a central gathering place where problems of general interest could be debated and resolved.<sup>1</sup> The centrality of urban life was contemplated as long ago as the fourth century BCE by Plato in *The Laws* and fully developed in *The Republic*, where he called for an ideal city based on virtue and justice. Plato said little about the physical

environment of the city, though he noted that private property is a hindrance to social mobility. The issue of property and property rights, as we shall see, has been fundamental to the realization of the good city.

The intellectual revolutions that unfolded between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries—the Renaissance and the European Enlightenment—completely and irreversibly transformed thinking about the good life. Although discourse was riddled with disputes and contradictions, and although earlier types of thinking did not disappear altogether, the concept of *summum bonum* was forever eclipsed by very different understandings of the “good.” Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries writers from Machiavelli, Hobbes, Kant, Adam Smith, and Bentham (among others) established an “Enlightenment paradigm”:

... a system of beliefs about human beings as largely selfish creatures, sociable insofar as they feel sympathy for one another and realise that their welfare is intertwined, but essentially governed by the pursuit of their own desires. In this system, the only rational goal of society is the maximum satisfaction of wants, and the only way of achieving this is a commercial society based on a market economy, private property and limited government.<sup>2</sup>

In this view, “good” is achieved by pursuing whatever happens to be desired: power, health, beauty, wealth, happiness, identity, freedom.

### **The European Enlightenment and Architectural Thought**

Specialized architects emerged in the early vanguard of the European Enlightenment and in the process laid claim to the capacity of the built environment to facilitate and reflect some of these desires. The word “architect” came into use in fifteenth-century Italy as sculptors and painters like Brunelleschi, Michelozzo, Bramante, Raphael, and Michelangelo turned their hand to designing important buildings and overseeing their construction. The patronage of new city-states and a wealthy merchant class meanwhile encouraged the expression of a new sense of monumentality and the pursuit of a suitable new style. Architects, from the start, aligned themselves as closely as possible with wealth and power:

The first architects were not only freed from the stigma of manual work, they gained prestige from the complexity, the civic importance, and the ancient aesthetic lineage claimed for the new style of building. Assisted by humanist theoreticians like Leon Battista Alberti, able to respond to central concerns of the state, and supported by the keen interest of amateur patrons, architects became the first artists to move closer to the ruling class, into an intermediate social status inaccessible to mere craftsmen.<sup>3</sup>

Architectural thinking was strongly influenced by the tenets that had been laid out by Roman military engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio



(commonly referred to simply as Vitruvius) in his multivolume work entitled *De architectura*. Vitruvius is famous for a fixation on the proportions of the human body and for asserting that a building should be considered for its strength (*firmitas*), convenience (*utilitas*), and beauty (*venustas*). For Vitruvius, beauty stemmed from the harmony of all the parts of a structure, “fitted together with such proportion and connection, that nothing could be added, diminished, or altered but for the worse.”

Architecture’s roles within the Enlightenment paradigm were based in large part on Alberti’s assertions in his *De re aedificatoria* (1485), the first printed book on architecture. Alberti was at great pains to distance the architect from the building artisan: for him the architect was a scholar as well as an artist. The Renaissance ideal of the designer as universal man, not simply proficient in drawing, surveying, geometry, arithmetic, and optics but also versed in literature, history, and philosophy—and even medicine and astronomy—was a vanity that has echoes in today’s stereotype of the architect as a public intellectual. Alberti also set in motion the assertion that the skills of the architect extend beyond individual structures to the entire city—“the city is like a great house, and the house in its turn a small city”—an abiding and recurring conceit that has not been dissolved by the professionalization of planning, landscape architecture, and urban design. Some of architecture’s foundational claims on the affective as well as the material dimensions of the good city can also be traced to Alberti. “We are exceedingly obliged to the Architect,” he wrote, “to whom, in time of Leisure, we are indebted for Tranquility, Pleasure and Health, in time of Business for Assistance and Profit; and in both, for Security and Dignity.”<sup>4</sup>

Both Alberti and his contemporary Filareti (the pseudonym of Antonio Averlino) espoused a utopian desire for order and the rational organization of space. Filareti followed Vitruvius in emphasizing the proportions of the human body but asserted that beauty (*bellezza*) must involve lavish decoration and expensive materials. Alberti, in contrast, emphasized the idea of *lineamenta*, the proportional and geometrical basis of buildings. This geometrical approach was most consistent with Renaissance thinking, and it is evident in the trio of panels painted in Urbino in the 1480s depicting an Ideal City (fig. 3.1). It is also evident in the pattern of streets, public spaces and monuments in the Late Renaissance town of Sabbioneta, designed and built near Mantua by the wealthy Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga (fig. 3.2).

The built form of Renaissance architects drew heavily on ancient Rome, deploying classical orders and architectural elements such as columns, pilasters, pediments, entablatures, arches, and domes in pursuit of harmonious form and mathematical proportion. Brunelleschi was the first to use the classical orders in a consistent manner. Some of Alberti’s church designs, meanwhile, were based on the façades of



3.1. **The Ideal Renaissance City.** One of three panels commissioned in Urbino in the 1480s, capturing the ideal of an ordered setting for the life of the Renaissance aristocracy.



3.2. **Sabbioneta, Italy.** Designed and built by Vespasiano Gonzaga in the second half of the 1500s as a city of art and culture, Sabbioneta was a realization of the urban, architectural, and artistic ideals of the Renaissance.

Roman temples. Like many others, Alberti had undertaken a pilgrimage to Rome to study the ancient buildings and ruins.

The canon and generative principles of classical architecture were also diffused through books. Andrea Palladio's *I quattro libri dell'architettura* (Four Books of Architecture, published in 1570) was especially influential, since it reflected his specialization in high-end domestic architecture. The economic transformation from feudalism to merchant capitalism had brought with it a great demand among the wealthy for imposing villas. Palladio (fig. 3.3) based his own designs on Roman country villas, executed with the scale, symmetry, and clarity expected by Renaissance sensibility. His Villa Capra (La Rotonda; fig. 3.4) became one of the most referenced buildings of the Renaissance period, a founding example of what would become yet another important theme in the field of architecture: the "Consecrated Genius/Great Buildings" perspective.

Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, meanwhile set the precedent for the novel as a vehicle for imagining an ideal society. Not explicitly about urban life, More's scenario addressed what would become an important issue: the relative merits of town versus country. More suggested that by alternating city and country living, people could acquire knowledge, working skills, and understanding from both settings

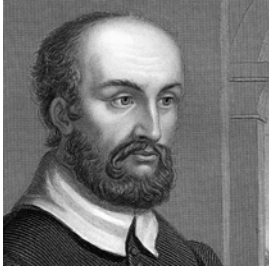
### **Rationalism and the Liberal Subject**

In broader context, the European Enlightenment brought an intertwining of political, ideological, cultural, and social philosophies and concerns that would eventually be distilled into the underpinnings of emerging design fields. An increasing belief in progress, rationalism, and egalitarianism was accompanied by explorations of the nature of property and a recognition of the differentiation of public and private realms, the moral importance of aesthetics, and the potent symbolism of the built environment.

Re-readings of classical and ecclesiastical texts led to an intellectual climate of critique that developed into rationalism and the delineation of a public sphere for civil society: quite separate from the institutions of religion and the absolutist state. Aesthetics became a central focus of the intellectual preoccupation with rational critique. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* argued that a sense of beauty is a distinct and autonomous aspect of the human mind, comparable to moral and scientific understanding. Kantian aesthetics are based on the assumption of an innate sense of beauty common to everyone, rejecting the idea of any individual or subjective interpretation.

Gradually, the methodology of rational critique undermined the pre-Enlightenment acceptance of blind fate as the reality of everyday life, replacing it with a concept of progress based on human action:

Instead of nature and fate as abstract and implacable forces, progress was now seen as the result of endeavor, of incessant struggle against internal and conservative



**3.3. Andrea Palladio.** A former stonecutter, Palladio designed numerous villas and several palaces. His treatise *I quattro libri dell'architettura* (The Four Books of Architecture) became one of the most influential architectural pattern books ever published and made him an influential figure in educated circles. The first architect to systematize the plan of a house, he consistently used the ancient Greco-Roman temple front as a portico. After his death in 1580, British architects began to follow his design principles—often quite loosely—for all types of buildings, from modest terraces to grand country houses, town halls, and assembly rooms. In the eighteenth century a revival of interest in his work saw Palladian style spread to North America.



**3.4. Villa Capra (La Rotonda), Vicenza, Italy.** The Villa Capra, built in 1550–51 near Vicenza, was a hilltop summer salon for a wealthy client to read, admire and discuss art, and entertain lavishly. Palladio's villas were designed as integrated complexes with a sophisticated use of geometry and proportion, and temple-like elevations. He attached great importance to the grounds around each house, since they extended the axial symmetry and proportion of the building. The Villa Capra had a completely symmetrical plan with porticoes on each elevation and a central circular hall surmounted by a dome. Over time, it became consecrated as one of the Great Buildings of neoclassical architecture.



forces. The image was not that of despairing Sisyphus; thanks to the enlightening influence of science and industry, mankind was indeed winning the battle.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Enlightenment thinking had distilled the idea of the liberal subject: individuals of thrift, energy, perseverance and, critically, capable of reflexive evaluation of their own actions. Adam Smith invoked the metaphor of the “invisible hand” of the market to theorize the way in which the individual interests of liberal subjects could be converted into the interests of society by way of the tendency for free markets to reach equilibrium. The outcomes of free market exchange in land, labor, capital, and consumption goods, he argued, operate through a system of mutual interdependence to promote the general good of society at large. Adam Smith’s invisible hand has long provided the fundamental justification for a laissez-faire political economy as the basis for the good city.

Equally significant to the intellectual ferment of Late Enlightenment Britain—and of particular significance to urbanization and the ideal of the good city—was John Locke’s reasoning on two issues. First was the importance of differentiating public and private realms in addressing questions of “good for whom?” Second was his notion that “joining” one’s labor to anything conferred a right of property.<sup>6</sup> Locke argued that one could appropriate a given parcel of land through the application of one’s personal labor, thus necessarily turning that parcel into private territory, distinct and detached from all other interests, including the public or collective interest:

In contrast, Jeremy Bentham (fig. 3.5) did not regard property as an absolute or natural right acquired through individual labor. Property, he argued, was a social construct that could only be justified by expediency. He recognized that property was a precondition for the generation of wealth and noted that inequality was a price that had to be paid.<sup>7</sup> He also recognized that a legal guarantee of possession is not sufficient: it must be possible to exchange rights in a market (therefore giving land agents, surveyors, attorneys, and other market middlemen a critical role in systems of building provision).

Bentham’s extensive writings also explored rational principles that would later provide a basis for legal, social, and moral reforms. In the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* he observed that rights, including property rights, must give rise to reciprocal obligations. He is perhaps best known for his elaboration of utilitarianism: the belief that the greatest good is achieved with the maximum possible happiness of the maximum number of people. This would later be translated into the twentieth-century urban policy and planning doctrine that actions are just if they are for the benefit of a majority.

David Ricardo provided another key piece of economic theory with his concept of economic rent and its far-reaching implications for urban development. Urban locations with good infrastructure and



**3.5. Jeremy Bentham** (1748-1832). An influential philosopher whose ethical theory of utilitarianism (holding that actions are morally right if they tend to promote happiness or pleasure) was to become an important legacy in thinking about the good city.





3.6a. London after the Great Fire of 1666. Extract from a map by Wenceslaus Hollar, showing the extent of the devastation. The fire raged for days and destroyed more than thirteen thousand houses and most of the City's civic and ecclesiastical buildings.



3.6b. London rebuilt, 1677. This extract from Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1677 shows how quickly the City was rebuilt, mainly around the old street pattern: a classic example of path dependency.

public services have a special advantage over other sites, and competition to occupy them is reflected in land value and the price tenants are prepared to pay for the privilege of renting a building, shop, or office. This begs the question: To whom does economic rent rightfully belong: the landowner? Or the providers and maintainers of infrastructure and services? The idea of redistributing economic rent—through taxes, for example—would eventually come to be seen as providing an opportunity for shaping the good city.

### **Legacy Frameworks, Legal and Physical**

Meanwhile, the legacy of premodern processes of urbanization generated physical frameworks with their own implications for subsequent generations of design professionals. The resurgence of towns in Europe after the eleventh century brought with it the need for regulations and design codes to address problems that could only be tackled communally. The problems of high-density living must have been well understood. But it took crises rather than knowledge or foresight to bring regulation, especially since it would affect individual rights and property values.

The three great sources of recurring crises in premodern cities were fire, disease, and the mob, and all of them played a part in shaping the regulatory environment that would be inherited by the design fields. It was fire that prompted early building codes. London's first mayor had banned thatched roofs after a major fire in 1212, and other cities followed suit after similar incidents. Nevertheless, timber framing prevailed until the development of new building technologies in the nineteenth century. It duly took a major fire to bring forth a landmark building code. The Fire of London in 1666 raged for days. It destroyed more than thirteen thousand houses and most of the city's civic and ecclesiastical buildings, displacing almost 90 percent of the population. When London recovered, it did so with a system of building codes that shaped its cityscapes for centuries.

Within ten years of the fire, the City of London had bounced back (fig. 3.6). With more than eight thousand new houses and numerous public buildings, London returned to business as usual. At first glance it might seem like an opportunity missed: a rare chance to plan the city and lay it out in the Grand Manner, commensurate with urban design in the great Continental cities of the time. Christopher Wren put forward such a plan, as did John Evelyn and Robert Hooke. All three plans featured broad, straight avenues with vistas of landmarks in public squares. Nothing came of them. The idea of comprehensive city planning was associated with the exercise of absolute and autocratic power and the "popery" of France—anathema to English cultural sensibilities as well as to the City of London's unbridled commercialism. In the absence of planning and urban design on what effectively was tabula

*In the absence  
of planning and  
urban design, path  
dependency took  
over*



rasa, path dependency took over, with property lines and the prefire street pattern forming the template for redevelopment.

As London's building controls were updated, they diffused to provincial towns—usually after an outbreak of fire, as in Warwick (1694), Bristol (1778), and Liverpool (1825 and 1842), for example. Most significant in terms of precedent was the London Building Act of 1774 that consolidated all previous legislation with the aim of standardizing the quality and construction of buildings and making them as fire-proof as possible. Drafted by the architects George Dance and Robert Taylor, the act restricted any superfluous exterior timber ornamentation except for door frames and shop fronts. The sizes of rooms and their layouts were standardized, and four types or “rates” of buildings were specified in terms of size and structural quality. The importance of the act for architecture and urban design was that it effectively set the template for speculative building by allowing little variation. The result was the development of the elegant uniformity of the Georgian terrace, plain brick frontages, and strict symmetry of fenestration: a fashion that was soon diffused beyond London, not only to provincial cities but also across the Atlantic to North America.

### **Leaseholds, Covenants and Design**

Several other legal frameworks came into play to exert a significant influence on the built environment. The leasehold system was especially important. This system goes back at least as far as twelfth-century Milan and began to be used in England in the sixteenth century. Instead of selling their freehold interest to developers or building on their land themselves, landowners lease it to others, who erect buildings and keep them in repair according to terms specified in the leases. When the leases expire, the land and the buildings on it revert to the ground landlord. Leasehold terms in the seventeenth century were typically between forty and sixty years; by 1800, ninety-nine years (the “London building lease”) was common.

For landlords the advantages were clear. Granting leases was likely to be the only way in which they could increase both the revenue and the capital value of their landholding. ... Because at the end of the lease the land and buildings on it reverted to the landlord, there was the possibility of a substantial long-term gain if development was carried out properly.<sup>8</sup>

There were several methods that landlords might use to influence the character of building on their land. By laying out streets and providing amenities such as water supply, parks, or assembly halls, landlords could hope to ensure the quality of future development and, therefore, the long-term value of the land. But the main means of controlling development lay in covenants inserted in the building leases. Among the most common were clauses concerning the minimum sum

*The result was the development of the elegant uniformity of the Georgian terrace*



to be spent on building. In addition, building façades might be the subject of clauses requiring that they would be properly aligned with adjoining houses and of similar height. Building materials might be specified, or architectural drawings attached to the lease. Other clauses might stipulate the thickness of outer walls, the use of materials in the interior, or the dimensions of joists, wall plates, and rafters.<sup>9</sup>

### **Takings**

As urban development began to accelerate, so conflicts and contradictions involving property rights and the public interest intensified. These issues were the focus of much of Locke's writing, and in practice they eventually led to laws on "takings": the legal basis for the exercise of eminent domain, or compulsory purchase of private property by the state. At root, takings law requires that the exercise of eminent domain is subject to the requirement, dating from the Magna Carta, that the taking be compensated. In the United States the first recorded use of eminent domain was for building roads across "improved ground" in Massachusetts in 1639. The writings of Locke and his contemporaries served as a standard reference for enlightened English colonialists, and they in turn influenced the Fifth Amendment of the US Constitution, which provided, among other things, that no person shall "be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation": an extremely powerful principle in relation to the ideal of the good city.

### **Cadastral Frameworks and their Afterlife**

Just as early phases of urbanization generated legal frameworks that have continued to shape the built environment, they also generated ground plans and associated patterns of property ownership (the "urban cadaster") whose afterlife set in motion path dependencies that have framed subsequent processes of urbanization. As it develops, the cadaster forms a "morphological frame" around natural features (streams, bluffs, and so forth) and legacy features (city walls, royal parks, field boundaries, and so forth). Such features can become "fixation lines" that temporarily halt urban expansion, "fixing" the geometry of later development.

The morphological frames of British cities with premodern foundations embody a complex legacy, ranging from the siting of Roman walls and gates to the medieval system of burgage plots and the great estates of the church, the monarchy, and its landed aristocracy. Cadastral frameworks in North America were very different. For European colonists in North America, the absence of spatial markers like streets and field boundaries was taken as empirical proof that native people had no claim to land. Colonists assumed a Lockean approach to property, taking it as given that acts of improvement through enclosing, fencing, house construction, and agricultural activity established private ownership. Spanish settlement followed the instructions given by King Philip II in the Laws of the Indies (1573), in which settlements

were designed in grids, with a central plaza around which public buildings and wealthy residents would locate.<sup>10</sup>

As John Reps has shown,<sup>11</sup> English influence on town layout resulted in two distinct geographic “traditions.” Towns in the New England tradition featured an open green of common land fringed by a church, a town hall, and other important buildings. They grew organically, with principal streets following old paths and Indian trails, and new streets and alleys added haphazardly as the need arose—as in Boston, for example. The New England tradition diffused westward along the shores of the lower Great Lakes and into the northern part of the old Northwest Territory. The Pennsylvania tradition was based on a simple grid layout. William Penn had introduced the idea in his plan for Philadelphia (1682). Savannah, established in 1733, was designed by General James Oglethorpe with a grid plan that provided for small neighborhoods grouped around parks or market squares, and the Pennsylvania tradition spread across the Appalachians “in a great fan that eventually covered much of the interior. ... when westward-moving Americans got down to the serious business of creating towns, there was no room for greens and churches in the middle of town.”<sup>12</sup>

There were some notable exceptions to these traditions. In New England, New Haven, Connecticut, was laid out by surveyor John Brockett in 1638 as a large square subdivided into nine equal squares, with the centermost square reserved for the town common. The urban core of Atlanta had grown organically around topography and Indian trails lacing the area; while Annapolis, laid out in 1694, not long after Philadelphia, was planned along French baroque lines by Francis Nicholson, the governor of Maryland. A few years later—now as governor of Virginia—Nicholson laid out Williamsburg as the new seat of government in Virginia with a ground plan and institutional architecture that drew heavily on European baroque ideals.

Beyond the towns themselves, the original colonies—along with their derivative states of Maine, Vermont, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia—used the British system of metes and bounds, whereby property lines follow local landmarks and topographic features. Subsequent urban expansion was therefore framed in parcels of irregular size and shape. But the widespread use of the Philadelphia city plan paved the way for acceptance of Jefferson’s idea of a gridded land division system for the rural lands of the whole Northwest Territory. The Land Ordinance of 1785 and Northwest Ordinance of 1787 were designed to control the survey, sale, and settling of the new lands. The resulting Public Land Survey System of township-and-range division of territory into one-square-mile sections of land within 36-square-mile townships, rigidly oriented to the cardinal directions of the compass, has framed countless towns and urban subdivisions across the United States.

The grid plan had several important virtues in an expanding entrepreneurial republic. It was flexible, with plenty of room for variety and scope for planning. As ancient Greek and Roman colonists had understood, the grid made it very easy to lay out new settlements in advance of colonization: a great advantage in a young country where an immigrant population was pressing rapidly into new territories. The grid also made it easy to plat smaller rectangular parcels of land on a map, so that speculators could buy and sell parcels sight unseen (“off-plan” in modern parlance). The grid has become a stereotypical element of American urbanism and as such it has also inspired some bold claims: “For these early visitors to a new continent the order of a grid was a reassuring symbol at the edge of a vast and sometimes terrifying wilderness. The grid also connoted order for Americans and was, as well, a sign of virtue and rectitude.”<sup>13</sup>

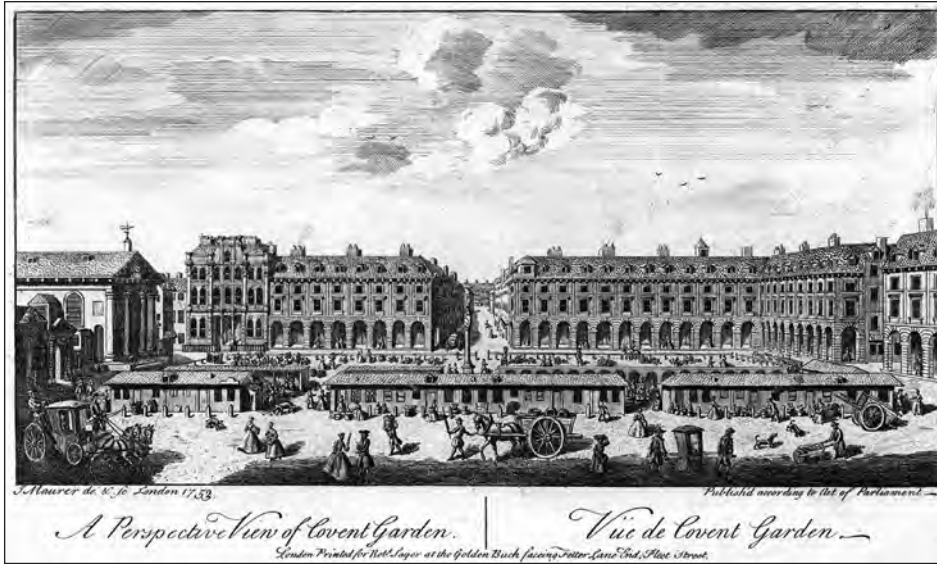
### **Innovation in Architecture and Urban Development**

Meanwhile in Britain a group of key innovators—speculative developers and master builders—were busy transcribing commercial imperatives onto what would become an enduring template of good taste in urban design. With autocratic impulses constrained by parliamentary democracy and the church in something of a reactionary mode, it was aristocratic landholders who were the key innovators in architecture and urban design. The Reformation had resulted in the windfall privatization of London’s medieval fringe belt of hospitals, abbeys, priories, convents, and ecclesiastical palaces, and the beneficiaries were a select group of families of Tudor and Stuart courtiers whose heirs would become “Landlords to London.”<sup>14</sup> A few families—including the Russells, the Grosvenors, and Cadogans—gained control of London’s prime development land: the “Great Estates” of the West End. The generous size of their holdings gave the owners of these estates the opportunity to exercise an exceptional degree of architectural and urban design control.

The fourth Duke of Bedford had led the way in the 1630s with the development of land that was formerly the kitchen garden of Westminster Abbey, the Convent (later “Covent”) Garden. The duke, who had a reputation for financial shrewdness, insisted on a leasehold system that gave him control over the development and the eventual recovery of the property, leaving the effort and risk of building and selling to others. Developed from 1631 to 1639, to a design by Inigo Jones (fig. 3.7), Covent Garden’s combination of terraced townhouses (fig. 3.8) around an open area, with contractual agreements set about with restrictive covenants, became the template for two centuries of architectural taste in London and beyond.

The sensibilities of the duke and the other aristocratic landowners of the Great Estates were derived from Renaissance rationality. The result was a series of layouts with simple rectilinear plans in which

*An enduring  
template of good  
taste in urban  
design*



3.8. Covent Garden, London. Developed on the site of the original garden of the monks of Westminster Abbey as housing "fit for the habitations of Gentlemen and men of ability," the scheme was devised by Inigo Jones, emulating the piazzas he had seen in Italy.



3.7. Inigo Jones (1573–1652). Surveyor-general of the King's Works and architect-planner of Covent Garden, Jones was also known for introducing the Renaissance ideals of Andrea Palladio to Britain in Queen's House (1616–1619) and Banqueting House (1619–1622).



3.12. Red Lion Square, London. A Nicholas Barbon development, completed in the 1680s and incrementally redeveloped in subsequent years as a fashionable square that became home to a succession of artistic talent, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris.



3.11. Nicholas Barbon (1640–1698). One of London's first speculative developers, Barbon was also one of the most prolific.



blocks of buildings surrounded open spaces configured in various primary geometric shapes: crescents, circles and, predominantly, squares. Squares, along with the linear terraces that ran from them, also had an economic rationale. Builders were able to maximize the density of large homes by setting tall houses next to each other in long runs. The Earl of Southampton laid out the building lots for Bloomsbury Square in 1665, the Earl of Leicester followed with Leicester Square in 1671, the Duke of Monmouth began the development of Soho Square in 1678, Edward Jermyn, Earl of St Alban's, broke ground on St James's Square in 1684; Grosvenor Square followed in 1695, and Berkeley Square in 1698. Bedford Square (fig. 3.9) was built between 1775 and 1783 by Francis Russell, the fifth Duke of Bedford, who joined forces with one of the most successful developers of the eighteenth century, James Burton. By 1800 there were more than thirty squares in London's West End (fig. 3.10). The landlords of the Great Estates had collectively established an innovative solution to urban design:

By requiring sound building construction, disciplined exercise of architectural aesthetics, stylistic continuity (particularly in such understated English classical styles as the Georgian), and an order arrangement of building fronts around street and gardens, they achieved a special sense of place in each estate.<sup>15</sup>

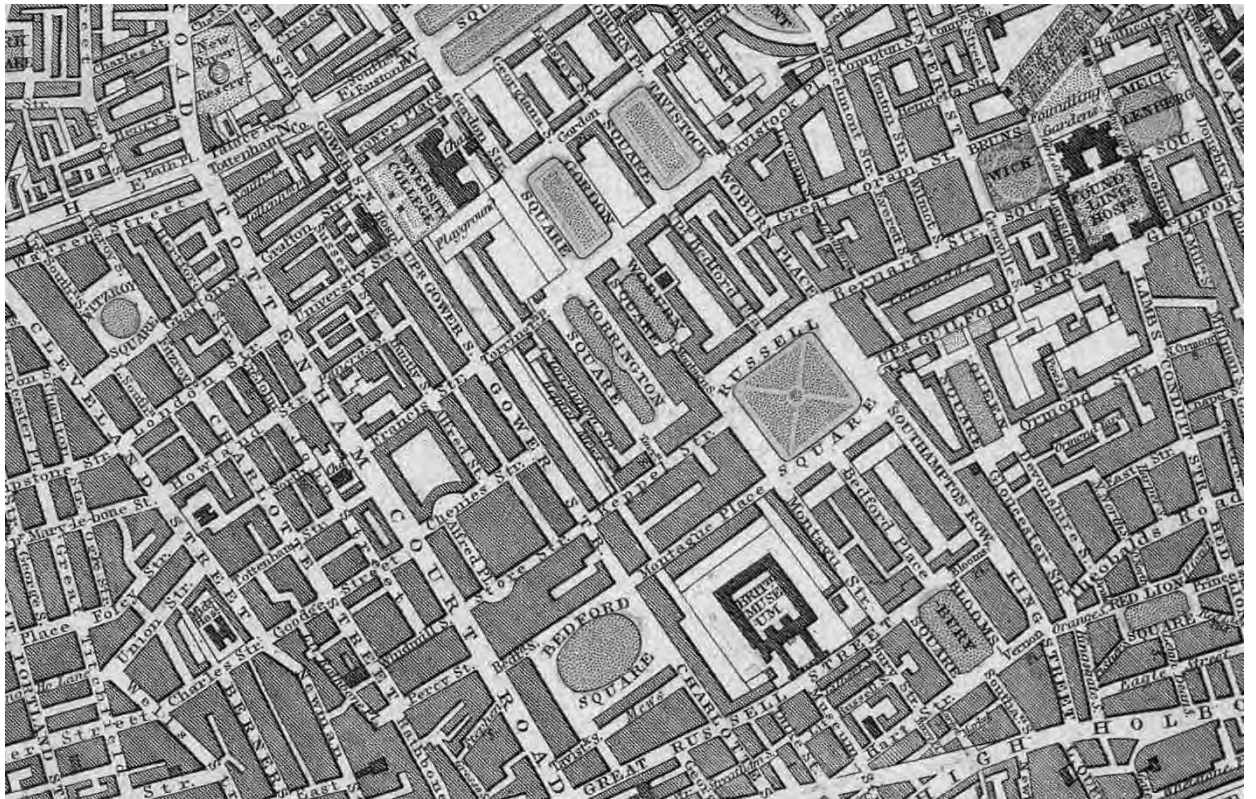
*The landlords of the Great Estates had collectively established an innovative solution to urban design*

The framework of unified terraces and squares fostered a new, proto-Georgian architecture: “the unacknowledged dictator of whole streets of houses in innumerable cities of the English-speaking world.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Developers and Master-Builders**

The financial successes of aristocratic land developers soon prompted other speculators and master builders to invest in urban development. In eighteenth-century Britain, development on greenfield sites could yield profits five or ten times greater than farming. Developers came from many occupations including craftsmen, bricklayers, carpenters, and joiners as well as lawyers. They took on an influential new role, deciding on the type of project to be undertaken on a particular site and thereby inscribing their judgement on to the cityscape. In the few cities with a substantial wealthy class—Bath, Brighton, Bristol, Cheltenham, and Edinburgh—developers had the opportunity to create estates for well-to-do residents and were able to create versions of London's Great Estates, thereby diffusing the proto-Georgian terraces, crescents, and squares as the template of good taste. For the most part, though, housing for the middle class and established working classes was the principal market opportunity, where the emphasis was on speed, standardization, and affordability.

One of England's earliest speculative developers was the notorious Nicholas Barbon (fig. 3.11; full name: Nicholas If-Jesus-Christ-Had-Not-Died-For-Thee-Thou-Hadst-Been-Damned Barbon). He acquired large



3.9. (top) **Bedford Square**. London's most important and complete example of eighteenth-century town planning, built on a site known as "St Giles ruins," where a slum known as the Rookery had stood. It is the best-preserved of all London's squares.

3.10. (bottom) **West London**. An exceptional degree of architectural and urban design control resulted in a distinctive morphology of terraces and squares that set the template for urbane cityscapes.

tracts of land in London after the Great Fire of 1666 and built numerous houses and commercial properties, urbanizing the countryside that had separated the City from Westminster. His book *The Discourse of Trade* (1690) is credited with identifying building construction as a stimulant of economic growth. He is also credited with inventing commercial fire insurance. But he is remembered most as one of London's most rapacious and unscrupulous developers. He "represented a crucial shift in London development from it being the activity of wealthy noblemen speculating on their own land to the operation of self-made entrepreneurs skilled at working the new residential property market. Where he led, others gladly followed."<sup>17</sup> His most important project was Red Lion Square (fig. 3.12), laid out in the 1680s, but there was scarcely an area of the late-seventeenth-century city that did not see some Barbon operation. Barbon believed in "great undertakings," seeing the advantages of mass production and standardization, and his example led to the emergence of innovative master builders like James Burton, Alexander Copland and, later, Thomas Cubitt.

*Barbon believed in "great undertakings," seeing the advantages of mass production and standardization*

### **Enclosure: Accumulation by Dispossession**

Developers and master builders on both sides of the Atlantic needed parcels of undeveloped land of sufficient size to be able to exploit economies of scale. This did not pose much of a problem in North America, where land had simply been appropriated by colonists and subsequently held free in law: a primitive process of "accumulation by dispossession."<sup>18</sup> But in Europe the legacies of feudalism made for a more complicated situation. Much of the land owned by the monarchy, the church, and the gentry still carried restrictions and responsibilities dating from medieval times; and in much of Europe considerable tracts of land around towns and cities remained as open fields or unimproved "wastes." These were "common lands" to which villagers and townspeople traditionally had certain rights of access: open fields being used for cultivation and "wastes" for collecting firewood, harvesting meadow grass, or pasturing animals.

In Britain, changing the ancient rights and responsibilities attached to land required individuals to petition for acts of Parliament. Between 1660 and 1830, Parliament passed roughly 3,500 acts restructuring ancient rights to property.<sup>19</sup> These enabled wealthy families to enclose common lands and to sell, mortgage, lease, exchange, and improve land previously bound by inheritance rules and other legal encumbrances. Enclosure was effectively another instance of accumulation by dispossession.

The General Enclosure Act of 1801 simplified and standardized the legal procedures, resulting in a dramatic capitalization of the countryside. Between 1750 and 1820 enclosure dispossessed former



occupiers from some 30 percent of the agricultural land of England.<sup>20</sup> The concentration of landownership intensified still further as independent smallholdings were bought out and estates reorganized production. This effectively created the rentier class of landowners who would influence the future urbanization of the country. Their capital provided the foundation for the residential construction industry as well as for the essential infrastructure of roads, factories, ports, and canals.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the enclosure of the countryside also created an impoverished population whose plight would become the greatest challenge to the creation of “good cities.” The British Enclosure Acts removed the prior rights of local people to rural land they had used for generations, depriving them of a living and creating an industrial reserve army of cheap labor:

The enclosures created a new organization of classes. The peasant with rights and a status, with a share in the fortunes and government of his village, standing in rags, but standing on his feet, makes way for the labourer with no corporate rights to defend, no corporate power to invoke, no property to cherish, no ambition to pursue, bent beneath the fear of his masters, and the weight of a future without hope. No class in the world has so beaten and crouching a history.<sup>22</sup>

It was this reserve army that found its way into the factories and sweatshops of Birmingham, Manchester, and London and that spilled over, as emigrants, to Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, and beyond.



# 4

## Careers Open to Talent and Taste

During the eighteenth century the practice of architecture began to take shape as educated individuals sought “careers open to talent.”<sup>1</sup> The field by this time had accumulated certain skill sets associated with cultivated taste but was not yet identified with a distinct occupational practice. Academies, dining clubs, and societies of art and literature provided the key settings for the evolution of a clear identity for the field and for the discussion of the requirements of a formal education. The most important institution in this regard was the Académie Royale d’Architecture, founded with eight members in 1671 by Louis XIV in France. In what would become a crucial step in the subsequent development and self-image of the profession, the Académie fostered art and aesthetics as the heart of the field and all but ignored building crafts and the engineering aspects of architecture. By the 1720s the Académie had established an adjunct institution in Rome, and in the 1750s the Académie incorporated the École des Arts, with its atelier system of architectural education that had been founded by Jacques-François Blondel.

Elsewhere, however, the only formal training available was the emerging practice of articulated pupilage in an architect’s office. Additional training in drawing was otherwise gained in the company of painters and sculptors in various improvised art schools. In Britain, the Society of Artists, founded in 1761, was the first institution to attract leading architects. It was superseded a few years later by the Royal Academy of Arts (though only four of the thirty-six founder members were architects). As in the Académie in France, the emphasis in the Royal Academy was on the aesthetics of architecture: forming the taste of the students “to interest them in the laws and principles of composition,” and with only lip-service given to “a critical examination of structures.”<sup>2</sup>

As the field took shape in Britain toward the end of the eighteenth century, its leading practitioners formed an exclusive men’s club, the Architects’ Club, with membership restricted to Royal Academicians, holders of the Royal Academy’s Gold Medal, and members of distinguished foreign institutions. At the same time, the field’s focus on art and aesthetics was underscored by the creation of the Surveyors’ Club in 1792 (drawing on the new class of professional assessors appointed under the Building Act of 1774), signaling the beginnings of formal differentiation within what had been an unstructured field of endeavor. By this time, competition among practitioners had begun to intensify as commissions for public buildings became subject to open

competitions. Literary and philosophical societies with middle-class memberships, such as the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, became a source of informed lay opinion. “As standards of judgment broadened with the activities of building committees and boards of governors or trustees, so the architect was required to play a more closely defined role, ‘selling’ his designs in open rivalry with his colleagues.”<sup>3</sup>

In colonial and post-revolutionary America, “architect” remained an elastic term, covering master builders and experienced artisans as well as planters, merchants, and self-styled “gentlemen” who designed as an avocation indicative of cultivated taste. Only at the end of the eighteenth century did practitioners begin to think of themselves as having a distinct identity.<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe (fig. 4.1) claimed to be the first professional architect to practice in the United States, having immigrated from Britain in 1796 equipped with professional training and considerable experience in both architecture and engineering. He was to be instrumental in the organization of the profession in the early nineteenth century. The first native-born professional architect was Charles Bulfinch, who graduated from Harvard College in 1781 and took an extended gap year to travel in England, France, and Italy before returning to Boston to design several churches, numerous private residences, and the Massachusetts State House. The best-known post-Revolutionary architect in the United States, of course, was another gentleman practitioner, Thomas Jefferson. His three major works—his plantation home of Monticello, the Virginia State Capitol, and the campus of the University of Virginia—“embodied what Jefferson considered to be a fundamental element of the new American society: a freestanding farm, a seat of government, and a center of learning.”<sup>5</sup>

### A Cultural Turn and Its Diffusion

From these roots, the canon of refined taste in architecture was established and spread through commercial publication. John Shute had provided the earliest English-language description of the classical orders of architecture in *The First and Chief Groundes of Architecture*, published in 1563. But the eighteenth century brought a golden age of architectural publications. Most books, aimed at the gentleman scholar, were large in format, expensive, and largely academic.

The most influential books reflected the cultural turn in England that followed the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 (the overthrow of the Catholic king James II). The formal and aesthetic power of the baroque had simply been exhausted by rote repetition, and the spirit of revolution kindled a new interest in the history and iconography of ancient republican Rome. It was a theme that was especially appealing to the patrician tastes of the country’s Whig society, expressed in the writings of the philosopher Lord Shaftesbury and his circle. Like his tutor, John Locke, Shaftesbury not only contributed many key ideas to the European Enlightenment, “but also served to associate the visual arts with politics in a way that had profound implications for



**4.1. Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820).** Latrobe introduced professionalism to the United States and provided training for a number of apprentices who went on to spread Greek Revival architecture across the country.

the neo-Palladian revival in architecture, the anti-baroque theories of landscape design, and attitudes towards the study of classical antiquity.”<sup>6</sup>

It made for a receptive cultural climate for the publication in 1715 of the first English translation of Palladio’s *Four Books of Architecture* edited by Giacomo Leoni, a Venetian architect who had come to London under the sponsorship of Lord Burlington. A second influential publication in 1715 was Colen Campbell’s first portfolio of drawings, *Vitruvius Britannicus*.

Campbell’s main aim was to revive interest in the architecture of Ancient Rome and that of Palladio and his followers, as well as to secure country house commissions for himself and his friends. ... Inigo Jones, the first English Palladian, was prominent but Vanbrugh also figured. Utterly rejected was recent Italian work, with Bernini stigmatised as “affected and licentious” and Borromini held to be “wildly extravagant.”<sup>7</sup>

Campbell published further portfolios in 1719 and 1725 and in 1728 James Gibbs published his *Book of Architecture, Containing Designs of Buildings and Ornaments*. Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s etchings of Roman ruins, published in the 1740s, were influential in educated society, as were William Adam’s *Vitruvius Scotius*, published in 1750, and Isaac Ware’s *A Complete Body of Architecture* (1756). These publications reflected and reinforced patrician taste and influenced the authors of builders’ pattern books. They also influenced many of the country’s leading practitioners. Nicholas Hawksmoor, for example, architect of several London churches and Wren’s collaborator on St Paul’s Cathedral and Greenwich Royal Naval College, was self-educated and had never traveled, but he was fascinated by ancient and classical architecture and developed a compendious knowledge from books and drawings.

The cumulative effect was the percolation of aristocratic taste through the social order and the diffusion of Palladian architecture throughout the country and beyond. James Gibbs’s *Book of Architecture* enjoyed a particular success in the North American colonies. With the help of inexpensive pattern books, the standards of taste and the rules of proportion laid down by the Palladian school had permeated down to the jobbing builder by the end of the century.

### **The Grand Tour**

For those who could afford it, pilgrimage to the original sites featured in these publications was essential. James I’s treaty with Spain in 1604 had eased the passage of Protestant travelers in Italy, sparking a new era of cultural travel. Inigo Jones was one of the first architects to take advantage, and by the 1700s travel around Continental Europe was de rigueur among the educated and aspirational elite.<sup>8</sup> The term “Grand Tour” was first used in 1670 in Richard Lassells’ *Voyage, or a Compleat Journey through Italy*, and it has become shorthand for a dimension of architectural education with far-reaching implications. In the eighteenth century the dominance of Palladianism meant that the Veneto was an essential part of the Grand Tour, along with Palladian antecedents in Greece.

*The cumulative effect  
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throughout the  
country*

But the focus of the Grand Tour was Rome. For architects it offered not only its ancient monuments but also the intellectual ferment of the French Académie and the Accademia di San Luca, another influential art school. The Accademia organized important competitions, such the Concorso Clementino and Concorso Balestra, which brought domestic and foreign designers together. Rome became a meeting place where different styles and traditions of architecture were discussed, assimilated, and combined.

### **Design in Practice**

The incipient influence of design professionals on the landscapes of eighteenth-century Europe and North America was accelerated by an emerging capitalism with its great upheavals of colonization, war, political revolution, migration, emigration, immigration, international trade, and protoindustrialization. The Great Transformation of the nineteenth century that Polanyi was to write about had its roots in the latter part of the eighteenth century as new commodities, materials, and technologies created new markets; as protoindustrial systems created new social formations, and as a new set of public policies facilitated the transformation of land itself into a “fictitious commodity” that unleashed urbanization.

### **Landscapes of Opportunity**

As C. W. Chalkin established, there was plenty of displaced rural labor and more than sufficient capital to fuel the urbanization of the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Savings were accumulating as a result of the expansion of inland and overseas trade, higher productivity in agriculture, and the development of processing industries and some branches of manufacturing. Access to ample capital or credit was the principal reason for land and building speculation, but it also supported commissions for factories, institutional buildings, and grand townhomes. For households with less immediate access to capital, building societies appeared, the first during the 1770s in Birmingham, England. Based on equitable trust, these precursors to American savings and loan institutions allowed more than six people to be members without forming a joint stock company. The trust provided its members with their own houses and dissolved when they were built and all debts paid.

Investors meanwhile had to cope with the effects of a new phenomenon associated with the new capital market: fluctuations in demand resulting from the political and geopolitical climate as well as the boom-and-bust business cycle. In London, for example, the first big property boom came in the 1670s, stimulated by the Restoration and recovery from the Great Fire. This saw the development of Leicester Square, Soho Square, and Golden Square. The next bout of building followed the Peace of Utrecht (1713–1714) and the Hanoverian Succession (1715) and lasted until around 1730; Hanover, Cavendish, and Grosvenor squares appeared during this period. With the close of the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763), London’s building boom prompted

the Fulham architect Henry Holland to acquire building rights for a large parcel of land straddling northern Chelsea and Knightsbridge. Hans Town, as it was originally known, became the model for the many new “towns” that sprang up around central London. Holland built moderately sized houses for sale, together with a mansion for himself, with grounds landscaped by Capability Brown.<sup>10</sup>

Overlain on the sequence of geopolitical events was the increasingly pronounced influence of a business cycle of eighteen to twenty years, characterized by a trough in building (and design commissions) that lasts three or four years, followed by a recovery that reaches boom conditions eight or nine years later. Fluctuating rates of interest and costs of materials had a direct expression in the built environment. “Jerry building” (characterized by inadequate foundations, bad bricks, thin walls and flimsy floors, rafters and joints), notes Chalkin, was pronounced during periods of war “when dear materials, high interest rates and reduced demand would have led to shrinking profit margins in the housing industry. It may also have been characteristic of the earlier stages of a boom in the industry when demand far exceeded supply.”<sup>11</sup>

The landscape of opportunity for designers was also being shaped by the emerging urban space-economy and its new functional specializations. As the rural population ceased to grow, commissions were increasingly hard to come by in traditional market towns. The growing affluence of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois classes, meanwhile, led to the growth of spa towns, generating commissions for hotels and new kinds of facilities and well-to-do residential quarters. Seaside resorts sprang up as sea bathing began to be perceived as a cure for various ailments and so became acceptable for respectable people, generating commissions for the design of hotels, gardens, parks, and villas.

Most eighteenth-century urban growth was in other kinds of towns and cities, with restricted opportunities for designers. Manufacturing towns, seaports, and inland (canal) ports all needed new institutional buildings and some upscale villas, townhomes, and elegant squares and crescents. But the great bulk of their growth took the form of docks, forges, foundries, breweries, tanneries, and factories and the courts and alleys of jerry-built housing for their workers, all of it unregulated to the point of chaos.

### **Materials and Technology in Design**

In the second half of the eighteenth century, architectural practice began to be influenced by changes in building technology and by shifts in people’s tastes regarding materials. Although bricks and tiles had been used for grand country houses from the 1690s it took another half-century before the possibilities for change became widespread. Canal systems made possible the cheap distribution of timber, stone, and roofing slates, and the thinness of slates compared with tiles made possible more slender roof timbers.

*A landscape of opportunity for designers was being shaped by the emerging urban space-economy*

Sawmilling by machine, using horses, began in London in the 1760s, and by the end of the century Samuel Bentham, the inspector general of Naval Works (and brother of Jeremy Bentham) had patented circular saws driven by a steam engine and introduced them to operations in the Royal Navy's main dockyard in Portsmouth.

The most profound change was the gradual replacement of stone and timber construction by brick. Standardized production, compacting clay with rollers, began in the 1740s and by the end of the century bricks were being compressed mechanically. Around many towns, woodland was disappearing and where brick-earth was available it made the use of bricks economic. More than anything, brick was fashionable, the ideal material for the Georgian terraces of London and provincial English towns and—at first—the row houses of the towns along the Eastern Seaboard of North America.

The differences between the New England and Pennsylvania traditions of settlement soon began to be reinforced by differences in preferences for materials and building styles. As Pennsylvanians moved inland, they took with them the English conventions of domestic building. The streets of inland Pennsylvania towns like Carlisle, Reading, and York were lined with red-brick Georgian row houses, much as in their English namesakes. “By the time New Englanders had migrated a few miles inland, however, they had abandoned the use of brick and begun to build in wood. It was not just wood for framing, but exterior wood as well—shingles and clapboards, and a rich variety of wooden embellishments.” By the time of the Revolution, “even rich and fashionable people were opting to build their mansions out of wood, even in coastal towns where brick construction had until only recently been the ruling norm.”<sup>12</sup> Wood was no less expensive nor more abundant in New England than it was in Pennsylvania. It was a matter of the predisposition for New Englanders to experiment, contrasted with the ingrained conservatism of Pennsylvanian domestic life.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile in Britain and in the larger cities of the East Coast, brick structures were increasingly embellished in response to a perceived need for social and architectural distinction. Given the expense of decorative building stone, the solution was stucco: a coating that could be made from a variety of materials including gypsum, sand, clay, chalk, cement, oil, and lime. It had first been brought to England by Italian craftsmen in the late 1500s and used by Inigo Jones. From about 1760 it was deployed by Robert Adam and other leading architects in Britain, and by 1800 it had become the dominant feature of fashionable residences, mostly in loosely Italianate neoclassical style. Buildings were faced and decorated with stucco pediments, cornices, screens, pilasters, architraves, balustrades, porticos, hollow columns, and low-relief medallions. Coade stone, a more durable proprietary product, was also used in Britain to add street-level rustication as well as figurative sculpture, festooned friezes, and other small-scale classical details to houses large and small.

### **Design for Moral Landscapes**

The symbolic power of architecture had long been recognized by its sponsors. It could be argued, in fact, that until the eighteenth century the principal function of architecture was almost exclusively as an expression of power, wealth, or religious authority. The philosophical debates of the European Enlightenment paved the way for a more nuanced kind of symbolism. We have already seen how the Palladian revival sprang from a revolutionary cultural turn that fostered an interest in the history and iconography of ancient republican Rome. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, some architects—Latrobe in the United States and John Soane in England, for example—argued that architecture should be an instrument of social reform, a tool to shape people’s minds and enhance civic society. To foster, in other words, the good city. It was a powerful and seductive idea, and would, as we shall see, become one of the recurrent claims of the professionalized field of architecture.

This approach prompted a tradition of debate that extends beyond the aesthetic qualities of a given building to the “rightness” or “wrongness” of the inspiration (or justification) behind the design, and to its received meanings. Thomas Jefferson was especially conscious of this as he contemplated the planting of a new capital city. Many American colonists had developed a moralistic dedication to utilitarianism in building: high art and architecture were widely associated with the corrupt and decadent Europe that they had spurned. Utilitarianism was nevertheless felt by the new country’s leaders to be an inadequate expression of national purpose. It left the republican symbolism of neoclassical Greco-Roman architecture as the only reasonable choice. Ironically, this meant the Palladian interpretation that so appealed to the patrician elite in Britain.

When the competition for the Capitol Building was held in 1792, the submissions from native-born designers were uninspiring. The award for the design went to William Thornton, a physician trained in Edinburgh and Paris and a gentleman-amateur architect. His scheme was a hybrid: a basic neoclassical design with pilasters and other details drawn from contemporary Georgian architecture in Britain. The design for the President’s House went to an Irish architect, James Hoban, whose design was inspired by plate 51 in Gibbs’s *Book of Architecture* (and that also greatly resembled Leinster House in Dublin). “No one seemed to note the irony that the two most important and symbolic buildings created for a radically new government were highly conservative in design and adhered closely to the traditions of English Georgian architecture.”<sup>14</sup>

The irony was starker still when it came to the plan for the new capital. Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s baroque-inspired axial plan was redolent of the autocratic capitals of European kingdoms, dukedoms, and principalities. It was undoubtedly inspired by two of André Le Nôtre’s designs: the gardens at Versailles and the imposing Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, which L’Enfant had experienced firsthand, having lived in Paris until the

*Some argued that architecture should be an instrument of social reform*



age of twenty-three. L'Enfant's plan (fig. 4.2) featured radiating avenues. Pennsylvania Avenue was to be the same width as the Champs-Élysées, providing "reciprocity of sight" between the Capitol and the President's House, each set on the two highest points of the swampy plain. The lay of the land also guided the location of public squares, each named for a state, with lines of sight among them along communicating avenues. "L'Enfant conceived of these individual but visually linked state districts as a metaphor that demonstrated a new nation's ideals of independence and unity in built form."<sup>15</sup> In the hope of integrating his plan with the more democratic symbolism of the new regime, L'Enfant underpinned his diagonals with a grid (which Jefferson had been advocating). As a symbolic landscape, it was deeply compromised, and the resulting cadaster features lots of small shards of awkward land parcels left over from the collision of the two different geometric systems.

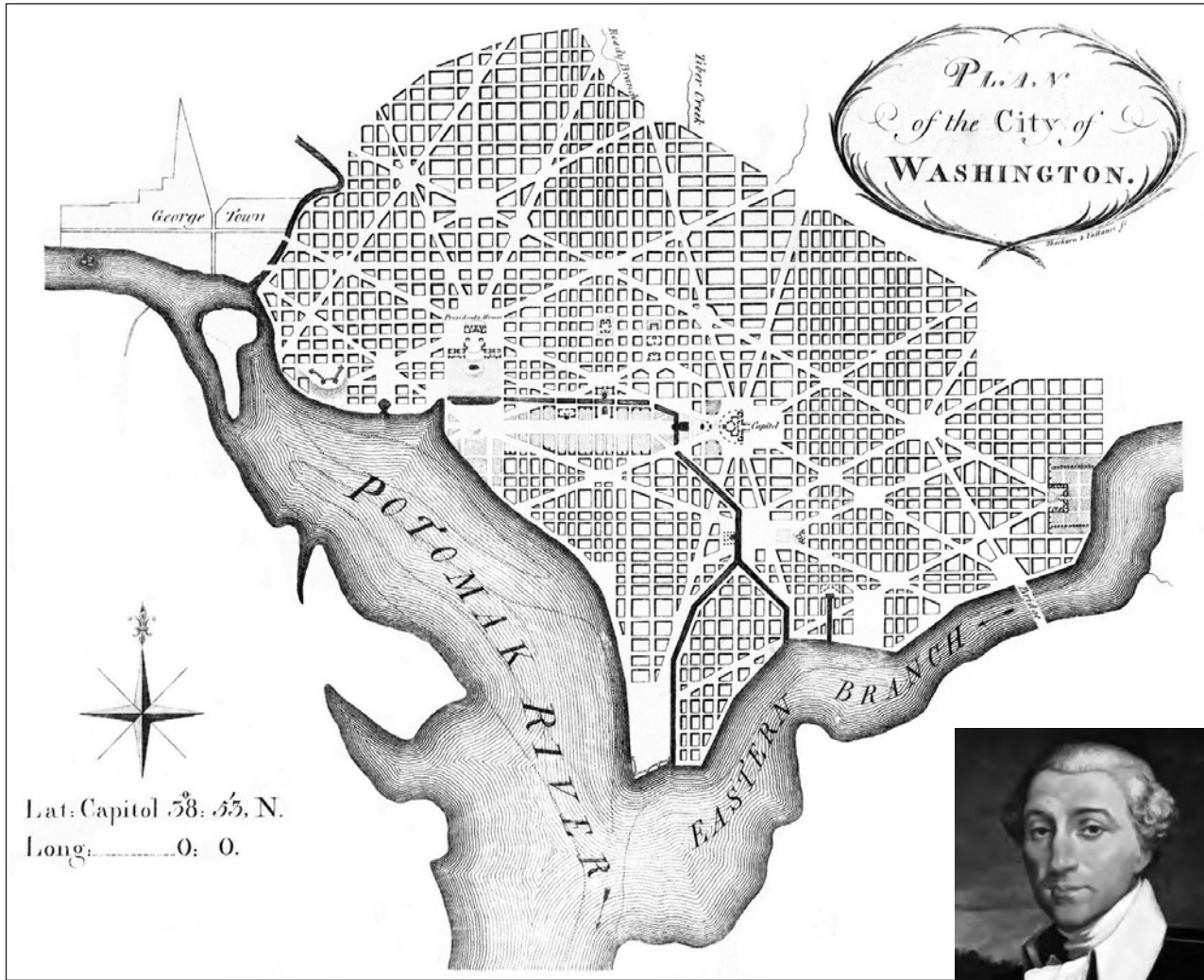
Another striking example of eighteenth-century town planning is provided by Edinburgh's New Town (figs. 4.3, 4.4). As well as resulting in an impressive legacy of Georgian architecture, it was significant as the first major exercise in town planning conducted by a municipality rather than an autocrat or central government. The initiative to plan a new town was driven by the city's provost, George Drummond, spurred by a desire to compensate for the city's loss of status as a national capital (as a result of Scotland's 1707 Union with England and Wales) and deter wealthy citizens from leaving the city and heading south to London. It was Drummond who insisted on a design competition for the layout of the New Town rather than exercising patronage—the conventional approach at the time. The competition was held in 1766 and won by James Craig, a mason's apprentice who had absorbed himself in architectural treatises. His plan was based on a simple grid, with three parallel main streets and formal enclosed squares at either end of the principal street, George Street.

The New Town was built out between 1767 and 1890 as seven successive residential developments. At first, little attention was given by the city to the architectural style of its showcase: it was taken as given that, as developments intended for the city's wealthy families, building would be in neoclassical style. Attempts to impose architectural uniformity were not made until the 1780s, after a series of awkward missteps. Thereafter, local by-laws and restrictive covenants ensured uniform elevations and massing. Some leading architects of the time, including John Adam and Robert Adam, William Chambers, and William Playfair, were commissioned by developers.

By the end of the eighteenth century the New Town provided both the setting and inspiration for philosophical inquiry, scientific experiment, and debate.<sup>16</sup> David Hume had moved in, hosting dinners and gatherings with Adam Smith and other Enlightenment thinkers. Social clubs sprang up, and institutions were founded to promote learning and debate such as the Assembly Rooms, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and the Royal Scottish Academy. The New Town became the material expression of eighteenth-century ideals of civic life. It was the good city, albeit for a limited stratum

*The New Town  
became the material  
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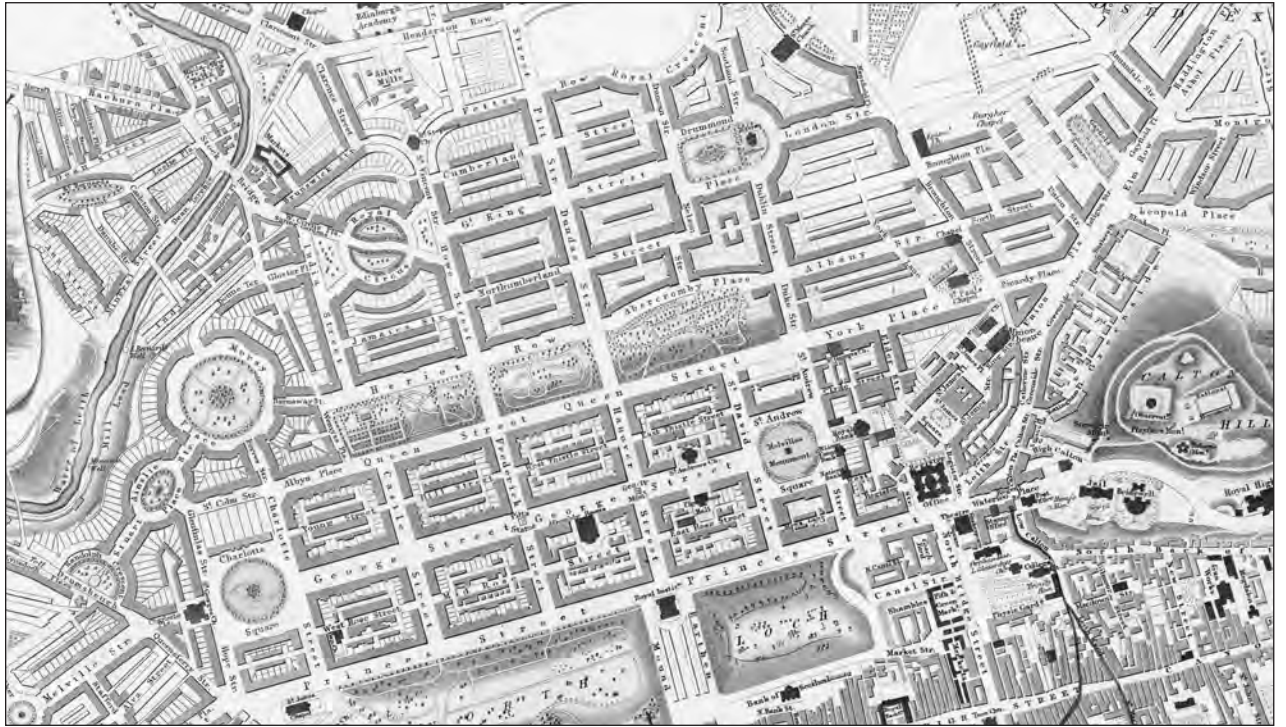




**4.2. Pierre Charles L'Enfant (inset) and his Plan for the City of Washington.** Before leaving France at the age of twenty-three to serve in the Continental Army, L'Enfant spent six years at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris. As a young boy he had lived at Versailles, where his father worked for the king and where he was exposed to the formal landscaping designed by André Le Nôtre. After the War of Independence he completed more than a dozen residential commissions before being appointed in 1791 to design a federal city as the capital of the new nation. The plan itself aspired to represent the new nation's ideals of independence and unity in built form.

**4.3 Edinburgh New Town in 1834 (right, top).** An important exemplar of a planned new residential district, Edinburgh's New Town was symbolic of the city's aspirations toward international standing in terms of art, architecture, literature, and philosophy.

**4.4. Charlotte Square, Edinburgh (right, bottom).** The final part of the initial phase of the New Town, completed in 1820. The city's large and well-educated middle-class community vigorously pursued the Late-Renaissance ideals of "progress, prosperity, order, and elegance." Designed by Robert Adam, the houses around Charlotte Square are integrated into blocks, each intended to appear as an urban palace.





of society, and it has had profound consequences for planners' conception of what a city should be.

### **Beauty, the Sublime, and the Picturesque**

The dominant conventions of taste did not go unchallenged. Neoclassicism fostered an historical awareness of the past that not only saw a gradual shift in emphasis from Rome to Greece but also a growing interest in nonclassical and nongeometric modes of expression such as the Gothic and the Oriental. The main sponsors of the new trends were the newly wealthy—bankers, merchants, brewers, and so on—many of whom were keen to make their own distinctive mark through the patronage of art and architecture.

There was also an intellectual strand to this aspect of eighteenth-century culture. Marc-Antoine Laugier, in his *Essai sur L'Architecture* (1755) questioned the universal in architecture and contended that architectural form should reflect the verities of nature rather than being tidied-up versions of past ruins. Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) argued that beauty cannot be understood in terms of the traditional criteria of proportion, balance, fitness, or perfection but, rather, in terms of the relaxing sensibilities of nature. Nature's awe-inspiring extremes, meanwhile, were identified by Burke as "the sublime," providing a rationale for extravagant or fantastical art and architecture. Burke's ideas on beauty and the sublime would become a strong influence on the Romantic and Gothic movements of the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, others were securing profitable commissions involving the interdependence of architecture and nature. Their legacy would be the nineteenth-century Picturesque movement in art and architecture and, later, the emerging fields of landscape architecture and urban design. An early exponent was painter, architect, and landscape designer William Kent, who carried out a series of landscape schemes in England in the 1730s featuring irregular layouts of sinuous paths and streams.

Two other English practitioners were especially important: Lancelot "Capability" Brown (fig. 4.5) and Humphry Repton. Brown's nickname is reputed to have come from his habit of describing landscapes as having "great capabilities." He sought to make country estates complementary to their mansions both functionally and aesthetically, tidying and rearranging nature to create elegant, balanced compositions using a small number of natural elements. His designs—more than 250 of them in the course of his career—included plantations, lakes, and carriage drives, or "ridings." But he is best known for his use of sunken fences or "ha-has" to confuse the eye into perceiving different compositional elements as one, keeping a pastoral landscape in view from the mansion while preventing livestock from intruding onto its immediate grounds and gardens. The broad expanse of the vista was then dotted with irregular groupings of trees and ornamented by garden buildings and water features (fig. 4.6).

*Burke's ideas on beauty and the sublime would become a strong influence on the Romantic and Gothic movements*

Repton (fig. 4.7) succeeded Brown as England's most celebrated practitioner and invented for himself the title of "landscape gardener." He treated landscaping as an art, using a painterly eye in designing more than four hundred gardens and country house estates, often advising the same thing at different places. He also brought landscape design to urban settings: he worked on more than fifty sites in London, including a number of prominent squares that had initially been laid out with hard, graveled surfaces. Unlike Brown, Repton normally only provided designs, with periodic advice and oversight as required, while others implemented the work. His hallmark was the gradual transition between house and grounds by means of terraces, balustrades, and steps. For prospective clients, he developed the technique of providing watercolor paintings with overlays showing "before" and "after" views of the landscape (fig. 4.8).

By the end of the eighteenth century the pictorial value of architecture and landscape in combination with each other had become widely appreciated among the educated classes. An appetite for the sublime was captured by Richard Payne Knight in his didactic poem "The Landscape" and by Uvedale Price, an enthusiastic amateur landscape designer, in his "Essay on the Picturesque." Both tracts appeared in 1794 and their emphasis on the roles of sensation and emotion contributed to a more naturalistic and less framed and orchestrated approach to landscape.

Up to this point, there had been general agreement—or, at least, an assumption—among artists and architects that people's aesthetic response to a building or vista is a direct result of the qualities of the object. It was a view based on Kant's assertion that a sense of beauty is inherent to humans, a distinct and independent aspect of the human mind. The idea that aesthetic responses might be conditioned by past emotions or experiences through a process of association had long been acknowledged but discounted as of minor importance until painterly interpretations of landscape opened the way to an appreciation of the subjectivity of aesthetic responses. Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790) emphasized what became known as the "Association of Ideas" in aesthetics. It was a concept whose time had come. It had a revolutionary impact on philosophy and lay at the heart of nineteenth-century Romanticism, of which the Picturesque would be just one manifestation. "In essence the acceptance of this view completely uprooted the classical idea of beauty. By interpreting aesthetic response as a subjective, internalized experience of the individual, it invalidated the classical assumption that beauty could be defined in terms of external and immutable laws."<sup>17</sup>

## A Growing Challenge

Meanwhile, the greatest challenge to creating and sustaining the good city was growing in scale and intensity as the pace of urbanization accelerated and severe overcrowding produced more and more substandard housing.



**4.5 Lancelot "Capability" Brown (1716-1783)** (left). Brown worked at over 250 sites, for a client list that included the majority of the country's big estate owners. His landscapes were simple and restrained, featuring sweeping pasture and screens of trees. They were designed to facilitate contemporary leisure pursuits including hunting, shooting and carriage-riding, and they became emblematic of arcadian English landscapes.

**4.6. Blenheim Palace grounds** (above). In 1764 Brown was called in to complete and modernize the landscaping around Blenheim Palace for the 4th Duke of Marlborough. He transformed the park by creating a serpentine lake and naturalizing the woods, placing clumps of trees in strategic positions.

**4.7. Humphry Repton (1752-1818)**. Repton viewed landscaping as an art form and provided clients with Morocco-bound folios ("Red Books") of plans, before-and-after drawings, and passages of writing. His drawings were effective, but his writing was described by one client as "a devastating mixture of servile pomposity."

**4.8. Watercolor overlay by Repton** (opposite). Repton's proposed landscape for the Earl of Bridgewater's grounds at Ashridge, Hertfordshire. His designs were influenced by the Picturesque movement as well as the work of Capability Brown, whose innovation of the 'ha-ha' is a central element in this proposal.





Late eighteenth-century wars—the American Revolutionary War, the French Revolutionary War, and Anglo-French, Anglo-Spanish, and Anglo-Dutch Wars—resulted in a sharp rise in the cost of land, materials, and wages. In order to keep rents within the reach of tenants, the size and structural quality of working-class housing was drastically reduced. New design solutions—mid-rise tenements and terraces of houses built back-to-back, with no through ventilation or yard space—were subject to the same jerry-building as older slums.

There were a few exceptions to this unplanned, poorly designed, and chaotic urbanization, and they were to be important precursors of nineteenth-century efforts to create the good city. They include the English factory villages of Winlaton Mill (founded by Ambrose Crowley, a leading supplier of ironwork to the Royal Navy), Cromford (Richard Arkwright's cotton-spinning village), and mill complexes with worker housing in Belper, Darley Abbey, and Milford established by Arkwright's competitors. In some cases these were simply blocks of basic housing, providing maximum accommodation at the lowest possible price. More ambitious was New Lanark in Scotland, where in 1784 David Dale established a cotton manufactory and provided cheap housing and dormitories for a labor force imported from the workhouses of Edinburgh and from the crofts of the Highlands. After 1800 Dale's son-in-law, Robert Owen, began a program of building communal facilities that became a landmark of urban planning, described in chapter 5.



# 5

## The Ideology of Progress

The first two-thirds of the nineteenth century brought a radically different class of problems and opportunities to the cities of Western Europe and North America. For a long time, responses to the problems of urbanization had been heavily influenced by the philosophical thought of the pre-industrial era: fatalistic and dominated by economic liberalism and Burkean conceptions of property. But new ideals and new ways of thinking did emerge as conceptions of the good city were adjusted in light of new class interests and concerns. For the first time the idea of creating and sustaining the good city began to extend beyond the bourgeois elite and their preoccupations with questions of virtue, taste, and embodied cultural capital.

There were two very different elements to this. First, competitive capitalism brought the enchantment of design to the expanding middle classes. So far, so good: it meant an expanding market for good architecture and a wider appreciation of good urban design. But, second, competitive capitalism also produced an even faster-growing proletariat whose living conditions threatened the well-being of both the middle classes and the bourgeois elite. While architects' attention was focused on serving an institutional, middle- and upper-middle class clientele, it was left largely to others to take up the struggle to mitigate the unwanted side effects of urbanization.

Industrial capitalism needed ever-larger concentrations of both labor and consumers in order to sustain its growth. Furthermore, in order to maximize the productivity of labor with minimal expenditure, it was necessary to compress vast numbers of the proletariat in close proximity to the means of production itself, thus creating the conditions under which hotbeds of dissent might proliferate. The crowding of impoverished populations into cellars, tenements, and jerry-built terraces also meant that communicable diseases were rife. Tuberculosis and dysentery were endemic; infant mortality was high; and there were regular outbreaks of smallpox, typhus, measles, chicken pox, influenza, whooping cough, mumps, diphtheria, and scarlet fever. Deadly cholera epidemics hit Europe and North America in 1831–1832, 1848–1849, 1853–1854, and 1866–1867. In Britain, Dr. James Phillips Kay described the situation of Manchester cotton workers in 1832:

The houses, in such situations, are uncleanly, ill-provided with furniture; an air of discomfort, if not of squalid and loathsome wretchedness pervades them; they are often dilapidated, badly drained, damp: and the habits of their tenants are gross—they are ill-fed, ill-clothed and uneconomical—at once spendthrifts, and destitute—denying themselves the comforts of life in order that they may wallow in the unrestrained licence of animal appetite.<sup>1</sup>



The moralizing tone has since been ever-present in the discourse on urbanization. Meanwhile, in such conditions, as Marx anticipated, the alienation of the proletariat might be converted into solidarity, solidarity into consciousness, and consciousness into action. In parts of Continental Europe, action amounted to revolutionary movements; in Britain and North America, the prospect of similar movements fostered the emergence of paternalistic impulses and socialist ideas.

Suddenly, conceptions of the good city acquired a more potent meaning in every way: economic, social, practical, and political. Unleashed by steam-driven printing, newspapers and pamphlets dramatically expanded the range and number of participants in debates over everything from the aesthetics of the built environment to the problems of urban development. Attempts to define, create, and sustain the good city began to be serious, and the roles and status of the design fields began to change in response.

### **Economic and Social Change**

Innovations in technology, transportation, and communications at the heart of the Industrial Revolution were accompanied by a revolution in economic organization. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the consolidation of two interrelated processes. On one hand, the factory system increasingly required large-scale investments of funds, which meant that producers were less and less willing to have their business regulated by governments. At the same time, the development of economic liberalism as a body of thought provided justification for a laissez faire policy framework that, it was assumed, would facilitate the transformation of land, labor, and capital into a self-regulating system.

In the United States, liberalism had already been squarely established in the Constitution. In Britain, it required a legislative program that included the spate of enclosures of common land that ran through the 1830s, the Poor Law Reform of 1834 (that improved the geographic mobility of labor) and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. This economic liberalism was rooted in Adam Smith's economic philosophy but buttressed by the arguments of Thomas Malthus and others, who accepted poverty and inequality as part of the natural order of things.

Inevitably, the doctrine and practice of economic liberalism was met with increasing critique and resistance from some quarters, not least because of the urban social and environmental crises caused by laissez-faire industrial capitalism. As the nineteenth century wore on, economic liberalism began to be challenged by electoral, labor, banking, trading, housing, and sanitation reform movements. This set the stage for many of the subsequent approaches to the good city. For the moment, though, most architects held themselves above the fray, while the notion of any kind of planning was restricted to a few utopian idealists.

Industrialization meanwhile drove urbanization to new levels. The urban population of England and Wales increased from about 30 percent in

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1801 to 50 percent in 1850, with the number of inhabitants in some towns increasing by as much as 40 or 50 percent in a decade or less. North America remained almost entirely rural through the early 1800s: the transition from a trading economy to a mature agricultural and embryonic industrial one did not take place until the 1840s, fueled by a great influx of immigrants from Europe. By 1850, 17 percent of the US population and 13 percent of the Canadian population were living in towns and cities. By 1870, the figures were 25 percent and 18 percent respectively, while in England and Wales it had risen to 62 percent.

### **The Ideology of Progress**

The Industrial Revolution was understood as a manifestation of human capacity for change. Shelley's 1819 poem "Prometheus Unbound" exemplified this view. "The sociopolitical upheavals of the period demonstrated to everyone that progress could be made, but they also showed that it was difficult and fraught with pain."<sup>2</sup> In Britain, the Great Exhibition of 1851 did more than anything to promote a culture of progressive change. Sponsored by Prince Albert, it was located in London's Hyde Park and housed in the Crystal Palace, a spectacular megastructure showcasing the new building technologies of iron framing and sheet glass. An adjacent tract of land was acquired by the Exhibition Commissioners for institutions intended to encourage the application of science and art to industry. In due course the district—"Albertopolis"—developed into a complex of museums, educational institutions, and display buildings including the Royal College of Music, the Natural History Museum, and the Royal Albert Hall.

This sense of progress extended to a popular culture of self-help. The 1820s saw the spread of Mechanics' Institutes, established by benevolent groups to provide inspirational and vocational reading matter and free lectures on arts, science, and technical subjects for "ordinary" people. In Britain the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge began publication in 1832 of a weekly magazine for the more educated public. In the United States, Andrew Jackson's term as president (1829–1837) was the "Age of the Common Man," with rapid demographic growth and an expanded electoral franchise combining to loosen urban political power from the exclusive control of the literate and the wealthy. Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* (1859) described how the working classes could "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" and became a bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic for decades.

Both countries were still deeply individualistic societies. In America especially, the idea that each individual should be free to pursue advancement through the accumulation of private property and material wealth was a cornerstone of culture and politics, prompting Tocqueville's famous observation, "I know of no other country where the love of money has such a grip on men's hearts."<sup>3</sup> Self-help was alloyed with self-interest.

The pervasive ideology of economic liberalism meant that there was strong resistance to state intervention. Central government retained a "night

watchman” role—analogous to a caretaker whose sole duty was preventing theft. The Age of the Common Man notwithstanding, local government was weak, disorganized, and corrupt, and unable to direct urban development in any straightforward or beneficial way. Towns and cities became increasingly perplexing, their overall economic growth accompanied by social polarization and mounting disorder, disease, and congestion.

### **Dislocation**

The shift from farm to factory and from countryside to city was a fundamentally dislocating experience. The world’s first Industrial Revolution had created its first urban proletariat, and the concentration of workers resulted in acute problems of overcrowding. The price of urban land and the economics of construction resulted in crowded tenements of wood or stone and terraces of brick back-to-back houses, tightly grouped around courtyards, with outside privies and washhouses for communal use. The rapidity of urban growth, the lure of quick profit, and, in most towns, the absence of any significant regulation, was perfect for the jerry-builder, described by urban historian H. J. Dyos as:

... the artful dodger of the suburbs, the builder of walls without footings, the bricklayer who knew how to mix mortar without cement, the carpenter who could lay floors over green joists, the plumber who knew just how to lay drains without traps or how to install cold water systems which had a positive, intimate, and lethal acquaintance with the sewage arrangements.<sup>4</sup>

Crowding was intensified by the demolition of housing to make way for railway construction and factory- and warehouse-building; and poverty was intensified by the economic disruptions of the War of 1812, the Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean War, the American Civil War, and the cyclical misfortunes of economic recession, the Cotton Famine, bad weather, and poor harvests.

There is no need here to catalog in detail the miserable conditions of the working poor, but it is worth quoting Friedrich Engels, whose book on *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), based on his observations of the working poor in Manchester, was to become critically influential.

One walks along a very rough path on the river bank, in between clothes-posts and washing lines to reach a chaotic group of little, one-storied, one-roomed cabins. Most of them have earth floors, and working, living and sleeping all take place in one room. In such a hole, barely six feet long and five feet wide, I saw two beds—and what beds and bedding!—which filled the room, except for the fireplace and the doorstep. ... The cottages are old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavement; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions; the atmosphere is poisoned by the effluvia from these, and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall factory chimneys.<sup>5</sup>

The intensity of hardship in crowded conditions also led to social disorder. Riots, often triggered by competition for jobs, were a hallmark of

American urbanization throughout the nineteenth century. In Cincinnati, for example, there were major race riots in 1829, 1836, 1841, 1853, 1855, and 1884. During the Civil War there were draft riots and bread riots in the Confederacy, several of which turned into race riots. The most notorious riot of all was the Haymarket Square riot in Chicago in 1886, when an atmosphere of near-insurrectionary tension turned into a riot after someone threw a bomb at police.

European cities had their own share of riots, driven mainly by food prices, labor unrest, and demands for political representation. In Britain, Luddite riots spread through industrial towns between 1811 and 1816. A revolutionary atmosphere was generated by the Spa Fields riot in London in 1816, and the following year Manchester textile workers marched on London. Continuing famine and mass unemployment, intensified by the introduction of the first of the Corn Laws, led to the notorious Peterloo Massacre in Manchester in 1819, when cavalry charged into a crowd of between sixty and eighty thousand. The peak year of labor unrest was 1842, with insurrections at St George's Fields, Liverpool; bread riots at Manchester; a mob of five thousand in Bolton; and rioting in Salford and Preston.

### **Romanticism and Determinism**

The intellectual climate of the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century was not at all sympathetic to the condition of the working poor. The apparent inevitability of poverty and the widespread acceptance of the naturalistic operation of markets left intellectuals free to speculate about other matters.

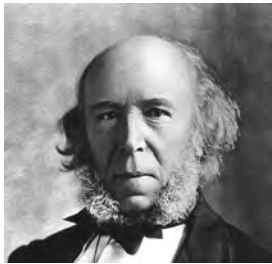
Bourgeois society—including design practitioners and their clients—was attracted to Romanticism and its celebration of individual creativity and the expression of inner feelings. Aesthetic sensibilities developed from Burke's ideas on beauty and the sublime, drifting away from Enlightenment notions of universal models of ideal beauty. Exemplars include the work of artists J. M. W. Turner and John Constable, the poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley, and novelists Thomas Hardy, Walter Scott, and Mary Shelley. In the United States, Thomas Cole's painting captured both the sublime and the Picturesque in American landscapes, while the literary culture of the so-called American Renaissance, rooted in the works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell, sought to create a genteel American literature on a par with European models.

It was a cardinal tenet of Romanticism that natural scenery had a positive impact on the mind. This strain of environmental determinism was popularized by Johann von Zimmermann, a Swiss physician and author whose book, *Solitude Considered*, ran in at least seven English-language editions between 1796 and 1840. It was a theme taken up in America by transcendentalists, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The transcendentalists were not only pro-Nature but explicitly antiurban, viewing cities as diseased, dangerous, and even infernal. Thoreau famously observed that

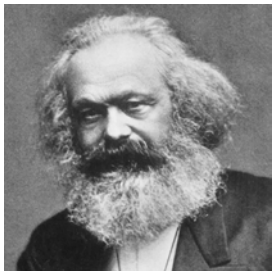
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**5.1. Thomas Carlyle** (1795-1881). Historian and essayist, whose “Great Man” theory would echo through narratives of the design professions.



**5.2. Herbert Spencer** (1820-1903). Philosopher and liberal political theorist, best known for his evolutionary theories of social change.



**5.3. Karl Marx** (1818-1883). His work brought together the analysis of history, economics, politics, and social change.

in industrial cities “the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” In his book *Walden* (1854) he advocated accessibility to Nature as a spiritual well-spring for city dwellers. More generally, Romanticism propagated the ideal of settings in which humans and Nature could achieve a state of balance—what landscape architect Leo Marx has described as a “middle landscape” of pastoral and picturesque settings.<sup>6</sup>

Other—often cruder—versions of environmental determinism were commonplace. Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier thesis” held that the American national character was decisively shaped by the exhilarating conditions of the open frontier as settlement moved westward. Many writers, including Thomas Jefferson, believed that tropical climates encouraged laziness and relaxed attitudes, whereas the frequent variability in the weather of middle and northern latitudes led to stronger work ethics and civilized societies. In France, results from Le Play’s innovative fieldwork among working families reinforced the idea that the design of physical settings could determine the quality of social life. It took a French geographer, Paul Vidal de la Blache, to point out that, within limits, people can modify their environment as well as being influenced by it. His theory of Possibilism and the related concepts of distinctive *genres de vie*, *milieux*, and *paysages* would later become strongly influential in the development of urban and regional planning thought.

### The Great Man Theory

A different kind of determinism was meanwhile advocated by philosopher and historian Thomas Carlyle in his “Great Man” theory: “The history of the world is but the biography of great men.” Carlyle (fig. 5.1) saw history as having turned on the decisions of heroic figures, his book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) setting out detailed examples of how individuals apparently turned the course of history. This rather naïve and simplistic perspective has always enjoyed wide appeal but, even as Carlyle was writing, others were developing a more sophisticated basis for understanding change through what would become social science. Auguste Comte made the case for positivism: that knowledge must be based on phenomena and their properties and relations as verified by empirical, scientific methods. Comte believed that social phenomena could be reduced to laws in the same way as the physical world, and made a distinction between social statics, the forces that hold society together; and social dynamics, the causes of social change.

One of the most forceful critics of Carlyle’s formulation of the Great Man theory was Herbert Spencer, who coined the expression “survival of the fittest” after reading Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. Spencer (fig. 5.2) asserted that Carlyle’s so-called Great Men were merely products of their social environment: “Before he can remake his society, his society must make him.”<sup>7</sup> And as Marx (fig. 5.3) put it: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected

circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>8</sup>

Their perspective has been borne out by 150 years of social science, but the Great Man theory has never disappeared altogether. American historian Frederick Woods sought to revive the Great Man theory in his book *The Influence of Monarchs: Steps In a New Science of History* (1913). While not in fact any kind of science at all, the approach made for an easy way of organizing school history classes and was widely adopted throughout Western educational systems. More to the point here, it was of particular appeal to architectural historians who could organize material around the combination of Great Men and great buildings (thereby neatly excising 95 percent or more of the built environment from their field of study).

Even so, for every design hero in future achievements toward the good city there would be other “greats” and countless unmemorable developers, clients, and politicians without whom their creativity would count for little. For every Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted, Frank Lloyd Wright, Corbusier, Gropius, Van der Rohe, Geddes, Abercrombie, Fuller, Koolhaas, and Hadid there would be an Owen, Chadwick, Mayhew, Salt, Bourneville, Bazalgette, Haussmann, Peabody, Moses, Addams, Cubitt, Toynbee, Pullman, Lever, Cadbury, Tugwell, Atlee, Beveridge, or Jacobs. Meanwhile, the “Consecrated Genius/Great Buildings” narrative, combined with confident assertions of environmental determinism, would become the preferred platform for an emerging profession that had already ceded most of its technical claims to structural engineering.

### **Changing Conceptions of the Good City**

The pro-urban ideals that had survived from the Greeks through the Renaissance and the European Enlightenment were swept away by industrialization. The Athenian good city for the beneficent and virtuous life:

morphed into Frederick Engels’ Manchester, Henry Mayhew’s London, and Upton Sinclair’s Chicago, to name but a few representations of the industrial city as dirty, dark, crowded, anonymous, threatening to the weak, a jungle of brick, stone, and smoke. ... Gone was the city of intellectual discovery, artistic achievement, and political progress; in its place was L. S. Lowry’s city of mighty factories sapping the life out of its faceless citizens.<sup>9</sup>

There was widespread condemnation of the values and ethics of the commerce and industry that were transforming urban society. Industrial development was associated with corruption, exploitation, and moral degeneration. At the same time, there was an abiding fear of the social and physical consequences of this: the alienated “mob” and its squalid and unhealthy neighborhoods. It forced a major rethink about what should properly constitute the good city, in the process establishing several themes that would later shape the ideology of the design professions. Implicit in much of the discourse was the idea of social mix. The educated middle classes idealized

*The educated middle  
classes idealized  
pre-industrial  
villages and country  
towns*



pre-industrial villages and country towns, with their apparently harmonious mingling of classes and vocations, their neighborly values, easy social communications and implicit social controls. The good city would have to foster the same degree of mingling in order to “raise the standards of the lower classes” and nurture a “spirit of emulation.”<sup>10</sup>

The common aspiration of early and mid-nineteenth century reformers was for social harmony, free from conflict, crime, and poverty. To achieve this, many believed that the ideal city would have to sever all ties to the compromised industrial city and offer a fresh start. Taking the Victorian sense of progress to another level, utopian “perfectibilism” held out the possibility of creating a perfect society. For Henri de Saint-Simon, writing in France in the 1820s and 1830s, this was best achieved by way of a combination of technology and expertise: an idea that would resurface much later. Saint-Simon argued that society should be governed by an urban “avant-garde” of scientists, engineers, industrialists, and artists who would correct dysfunctions in the social system through the application of expert technical knowledge. Saint-Simon’s vision was for the technologies and organizational innovations of the Industrial Revolution to be deployed in creating a rational hierarchy of urban settings.

Charles Fourier, a bitter antagonist of Saint-Simon’s, prompted yet another important strand of utopian thinking: communitarianism, without the need for government intervention. He also anticipated what sociologist Colin Campbell calls the “spirit of modern consumerism”<sup>11</sup> in his concept of “phalansteries.” These would afford “collective forms of luxury” in interconnected buildings containing complexes of lavish public rooms: theaters, libraries, ballrooms, and dining rooms. Phalansteries would be people’s palaces, miniature towns accommodating 1,500 to 2,000 people but without open streets; every part of the complex would be reached by a wide street-gallery on the first floor (thus foreshadowing some of the Modernist housing solutions of the 1970s).

Fourier also proposed a scheme for what he called the City of Garantism, composed of three concentric zones separated by a narrow band of shrubbery: a commercial core, an industrial zone, and an agricultural zone. Public open space would double in the industrial zone and triple in the agricultural zone. For American readers, Fourier’s belief in the human appetite for comfort, harmony, and group identity was interpreted by Albert Brisbane as “Associacionism.” A small version of the phalanstery was actually built at Guise, northeast of Paris, by a young industrialist, Jean-Baptiste Godin. In the United States, some forty-five Fourierist/Associacionist communities were planted, including the West Roxbury Community outside Boston, the North American Phalanx in New Jersey, and La Reunion in Dallas County, Texas; though none of them lasted long.

### **Model Communities**

The landmark utopian initiative of the early nineteenth century, and the first in what would become a long line of iconic planned communities,<sup>12</sup> was New

Lanark, the mill village that had been established in 1784 by David Dale and taken over by his son-in-law, Robert Owen, in the early 1800s. Owen's ideal was for "cooperative union in the business and amusements of life." But Owen insisted on setting his own rules of comportment, participation, and cooperation. And although New Lanark's mills were very profitable, Owen's partners were unhappy about the cost of his welfare programs. He bought them out in order to be able to continue with reforms. In New Lanark he opened Britain's first ever infant school (in 1816) and saw the construction not only of solid workers' housing but also public buildings designed to improve social and moral well-being.

As well as a school, a cooperative grocery store, a bakery, a slaughter house, a vegetable market, a communal wash-house, and community dining halls, New Lanark had an ominous-sounding Institute for the Formation of Character. Owen authored a book, *A New View of Society*, and traveled around Europe and the United States promoting his ideas. His architect, Stedman Whitwell, presented a model of an Owenite settlement to President John Quincy Adams, and it was exhibited in the White House in 1825.<sup>13</sup> Owenite communities were subsequently set up at New Harmony, Indiana, where Owen and his family lived for some time; Yellow Springs, Ohio; and Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

The first truly planned company town in the United States was Lowell, Massachusetts, established in the 1820s by Francis Cabot Lowell, who built the first completely mechanized cotton mill in the country. Like New Lanark, it was highly paternalistic, its workers leading regimented lives in company boardinghouses, required to attend church and to lead a "moral" life. The regime could not be sustained, and after a couple of decades the model community began to be absorbed into a larger, unplanned settlement. Nevertheless, Lowell provided the template for a number of other planted manufacturing villages in New England, including Nashua, Somersworth, Dover, and Manchester, New Hampshire; Lawrence and Holyoke, Massachusetts; and Biddeford and Lewiston, Maine.

In Britain, Owen's ideas blossomed in the 1850s among certain elements of the new class of self-made industrialists. The Wilson family, for example, founded their industrial village, Bromborough Pool, in Cheshire in 1853 for Price's Patent Candle Company. It was an open village of short terraces and semidetached cottages with large gardens and plenty of public open space. The Ackroyds and the Crossleys, two industrial families in Halifax, developed model housing for their workers in Westhill Park and Ackroydon respectively, but at a high density, with no gardens, and no concept of overall layout. The chief innovation in Ackroydon was in its financial arrangements: a scheme for workers to buy their own homes through the novel method of a building association.

The most famous, and most ambitious of the early model communities was Saltaire, built by Titus Salt in the Aire valley outside Bradford. Like New Lanark, Saltaire is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Between 1853

and 1863 Salt built eight hundred houses around his new textile mill, with a careful stratification of house types and sizes according to class of worker. The big innovation was his provision of institutions and amenities: almshouses, public baths, wash-houses, a grand Congregationalist chapel, four other chapels of different denominations, a school, public baths and wash-house, assembly hall, hospital, and community institute, all in neo-Venetian Gothic style. These early model communities were all cases of enlightened self-interest, the increased health and contentment of their factory workers leading, it was expected, to increased productivity. Like New Lanark and Lowell they were also paternalistic, the factory owners imposing their values on their respective communities in ways that were not always appreciated by their tenants.

There were also some interesting schemes that were ultimately unbuilt. In 1829, J. C. Loudon published an essay in which he introduced a design for the layout of an ideal London, featuring concentric zones of rural parkland—“Breathing Spaces,” each a half a mile deep—to be imposed on the existing fabric of the city over the next century through a piecemeal process of land-use reallocation.<sup>14</sup> In 1848, with steam-powered railways poised to reach the fringes of built-up London, the *Edinburgh Magazine* published a scheme for a village near Ilford railway station that would accommodate a mixed group of commuters in “pretty self-contained cottages” in an attractive rural setting abounding in “air and space, wood and water, schools and churches, shrubberies and gardens.” Each of the tenants of the three classes of rental dwellings would receive a first-class, second-class, or third-class rail tickets, depending upon their house rent. The aim was to establish housing groups small enough to achieve a “country character” but “not too small to diminish the probabilities of social intercourse.”<sup>15</sup>

The following year, James Silk Buckingham, a British manufacturer and Member of Parliament, described his own concept of a model town (respectfully called Victoria) to accommodate ten thousand people. He proposed a box-like layout for the town, with eight radial avenues leading from a central plaza to a surrounding belt of industry and about ten thousand acres of agricultural land. The names proposed for the eight principal avenues in the town were reflective of what by now was the legacy of a long history of utopian thinking: Peace, Concord, Fortitude, Charity, Hope, Faith, Justice, and Unity.

### **Structures, Institutions, and Agents**

The accelerating growth of actual towns and cities required a new—or at least radically modified—system of building provision, with access to new land, new financial institutions, modified legal frameworks, new forms of business organization, and new kinds of specialists and professionals. Urbanization fueled the growth of a rentier class of landowners, developers, property lawyers, commercial bankers, and construction entrepreneurs and opened up opportunities for technical specialists. Not least among the latter, of course,

*These early model communities were all cases of enlightened self-interest*

were architects and landscape architects, who had to identify where and how they could contribute (and profit) most while staking out their identity and legitimacy. In the Bourdieuan sense, the “field” of urban development was beginning to take shape, with each class of actors, or agents, competing for different combinations of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital.

### **Land and Property**

Land ownership was fundamental to the system of building provision. In the United States, as urban historian Sam Bass Warner Jr. put it, land was regarded as a “civil liberty.” Having been appropriated by settlers “joining” their labor to the land, “it meant freedom for even the poorest farm family to win autonomy, freedom to profit from rising land values in a country teeming with new settlers, and freedom to achieve the dignities and prerogatives that went with the possession of even the smallest holding.”<sup>16</sup> But treating land ownership as a civil liberty had some profound consequences for the nature of urban development. When public lands came to be disposed of in the nineteenth century, much of the country was delivered up to the control of private speculators:

Those who had private capital, or who were bankers or agents for Eastern money, had an enormous advantage. Such men could purchase a whole valley, a promising townsite, whatever they wished. They could then sell part of it cheaply to settlers and retain large tracts and await the substantial price rise that would follow in the wake of the development of adjacent land.<sup>17</sup>

Speculative land development “settled a vast class of conservative interest across the nation: It installed men who saw the duty of government to be the defense of private property in every town in North America.”<sup>18</sup> The onset of industrialization also began to reveal some other disadvantages of enshrining property rights as a civil liberty. With no controls over land use and little regulation of the sale of land, urban development became a free-for-all. Although individual freedoms were protected, cities provided less stable and less efficient settings for businesses and less healthy settings for everyone.

In Britain, “traditional” landowners—Crown and Church, landed gentry, and institutions such as public schools, charities, and hospitals—remained important players. Urbanization brought more aristocratic estates within city boundaries, inviting big, established landlords (like the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, Eton College, the Foundling Hospital and the Cavendish, Eyre, Fitzroy, Grosvenor, Jermyn, Portman estates in London, the Earl of Sefton in Liverpool, and Duke of Norfolk in Sheffield) to capitalize on their holdings. These wealthy traditional landlords were less interested in short-term profit than in the long-term value of their assets and the political power and prestige associated with them. As a result they opted for the most part to follow eighteenth-century precedents based on long leasehold arrangements, buttressed by restrictive covenants. The owners of large country

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estates within easy distance of growing cities meanwhile scrambled to secure Acts of Parliament to abolish ancient rights of public access to their land. The process had been simplified by the Enclosure Consolidation Act of 1801, which routinized the legal procedures of ensuing Acts of Parliament and expedited a massive, stealthy privatization of greenfield sites.

With further legislation easing almost every aspect of real estate law, more land became available to accommodate the surge of urbanization. With the expansion of international trade and the development of faster and more efficient transportation systems, it became easier to bring fresh food into cities from relatively far away. The corollary was that the relative profitability of peri-urban farmland began to diminish and, for many owners, selling off parcels of land to speculative developers of suburban tracts became irresistible. Meanwhile, the introduction of estate duties in 1857 began to force the break-up of some of the landed estates surrounding towns and cities.

### **Developers and Finance**

Speculative developers needed capital in order to take advantage of the newly available land. Much of the finance for small- and medium-sized speculative builders, who made up the vast bulk of the industry, was provided by lawyers who had clients with money to invest. Commercial property development and large-scale residential development required an altogether different source of funding. By the 1850s, insurance companies had amassed sufficient capital to be able to lend to speculative developers of commercial property as well as large residential schemes for middle-class or “superior” working-class dwellings. Property companies also emerged in response to one of the main obstacles to investment in real estate: the indivisibility of property assets. Property companies overcame this problem by “unitization,” the division of property assets into a number of identical financial units. They too would become important actors in twentieth and twenty-first century urbanization.

### **General Contractors**

The speculative developer of large developments—“that confidently bowler-hatted field-marshal”<sup>19</sup>—relied on another new actor in the political economy of Victorian urbanization: the pioneering big building contractor. It was the urgent need for military installations and barracks during the Napoleonic Wars that first drove innovation. Alexander Copeland, one of the few master builders of late eighteenth-century London, was well positioned to take advantage of government contracts and, having secured them, set up a comprehensive organization. He directly employed all labor—up to seven hundred men at times—bought all materials, and provided workshops, sawpits, and brickworks. Subsequently, the press of speculative development and the need for many new kinds of public buildings and infrastructure also required contractors capable of delivering big projects. Together, these forces triggered a significant reorganization of the construction industry.

In the years after 1815 exceptional wartime demand was replaced by a peacetime boom. Thomas Cubitt, though not (as is often asserted) the originator of large-contractor building, was the man who took most advantage of the new opportunities. Cubitt (fig. 5.4) was the first reputable builder to offer houses completely ready for sale. He began building in London in about 1810 and by 1815 he was constructing whole buildings, subcontracting for the more specialized work. By 1820 he was moving into large-scale speculation in estate development and housebuilding, his organization complete with foremen, bricklayers, and plasterers, thus creating the role of the general contractor. His company was vertically integrated, with its own supply lines of building materials, an army of one thousand workers on permanent employment and a weekly payroll of up to two thousand workers during boom years. His organization consisted of three divisions, one for legal work, another for financial affairs under the direction of a confidential clerk, and a third general office staffed by builders' clerks. "These versatile jacks-of-all-trades were expected to be fully competent to fulfil the several duties of architects, builders, and artisans, to be thorough draughtsmen and accountants and yet to be practically acquainted with work."<sup>20</sup>

The scale of Cubitt's operations required him to spend considerable sums of money draining and preparing the ground and installing sewers, road surfaces, and pavements. Contracted by Robert Grosvenor to develop Belgravia on the edge of London's West End as an exclusive residential district, his workers dug out the district's clay (turning it into bricks) and replaced it with enough soil and gravel from excavations at St Katharine Dock, three miles downriver, to raise the site above flood level. Cubitt was one of the first to understand the importance of the integrity of urban design. He realized that Belgrave Square, the centerpiece of the Belgravia development designed by the young architect George Basevi, had to succeed as a unified element, with no risk of individual parcels being built out to different designs just as and when the speculative market permitted. He therefore financed the building of the entire square with a group of City bankers whose credit would guarantee that the project was completed as planned. As a result, the unity of the whole scheme was maintained over the ten years of its development.

Cubitt used the same approach to the development of Clapham Park, which was to become in effect the first garden suburb of London. By the end of the nineteenth century his methods had been adopted by others, including James Watt in Catford, Cameron Corbett in Ilford, Edward Yates in Camberwell, and fifteen or so other general contractors who together accounted for more than 40 percent of London's new houses.<sup>21</sup> By that time large general contractors in US cities—Samuel E. Gross in Chicago, for example—had adopted similar business practices. The size and scope of their activities not only represented a significant change in the system of building provision but also an especial challenge to the role of designers:



5.4. Thomas Cubitt (1788-1855). One of London's great entrepreneurial developers and among the first to understand the importance of the integrity of urban design.

The advent of the general contractor, as essentially a businessman with a financial relationship to design, profoundly affected the historic tripartite relationship between client, designer, and craftsman. It also involved the emerging architectural profession with the fundamental problems of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>22</sup>

### **Centrifugal Tendencies**

The growth of integrated national economies facilitated by canal and railroad systems generated an unprecedented accumulation of capital, much of which funded the surge in the number and complexity of building types needed to sustain economic growth. The speed of change imposed a centrifugal effect on the system of building provision, splitting up the traditional idea of the architect into its component elements: the builder, the surveyor, the architect, and the engineer. By the 1830s architects were struggling to establish themselves as the most prestigious members of this competitive quartet. The specialist skills of the quantity surveyor had become essential: commercial clients demanded detailed costing based on bills of quantity. Engineers had plenty of work on infrastructure projects and were inserting themselves more and more into building construction. They were also well ahead of architects and surveyors in setting up professional societies. In Britain, for example, the Society of Civil Engineers had been founded in 1771 and the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1818.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, more and more master builders were receiving commissions for ambitious buildings like schools, hospitals, town halls, asylums, penitentiaries, hotels, banks, and exchanges.

Gentlemen-architects were not amused. John Nash, the Prince Regent's favorite architect, dismissed engineers as "an excrement from the architectural profession." Augustus Pugin, a leading English architect, artist, and critic, declared that "No engineer ever was a decent architect, and if they attempted Gothic it would be frightful." His contemporary, James Elmes, also an architect and writer on the arts, took a similar line:

The indiscriminating mixture of the artist and the artizan is one of the principal causes of the decadence of true taste, which should be removed as a deadly fungus from the incumbered stem of the fine arts.<sup>24</sup>

But architects themselves were struggling to give expression to the spirit of the age, to national identity, and to the novel and different types of building that industrialization required. By the 1860s, architecture was still a "gentleman's profession" but, as architectural historian John Summerson put it, "only just." The sheer volume of work induced a flood of self-styled architects with few qualifications and little experience, while the increasingly fast-paced and competitive business environment imposed centrifugal forces within the field of architecture itself, resulting in a division of labor around specialized building types (offices, factories, residences, and so forth), specialized styles (Greek Revival, Italianate, Gothic, and so forth), and specialized tasks (schematic drawing, model making, technical drawing, preparing documents for tender, and so forth):



Ironically, then, the architects' efforts to take advantage of an expanding market ... undermined the relative autonomy of the discipline. Control evaporated as the structure of patronage became more diffuse, and architects took advantage of the loosening ties to a narrow community of patrons and the uncertainty of elite taste to push their autonomy in the direction of eclectic stylistic innovation. A disciplinary crisis was brought about not by threats from outside the profession, but by centrifugal tendencies generated from within—particularly by elite practitioners at what had been the core of the discipline.<sup>25</sup>

### Professionalization and Path Dependency

John Soane, in Britain, was among the first to recognize the dangers of professional dilution. “In this country,” he told the students of the Royal Academy:

... we have long had too much reason to complain of mechanics of every description, from the bricklayer to the paper-hanger, being identified with Architects; and, of what is equally fatal to the advancement of the Art, that architects, who ought always to be the intermediate persons between the employer and the employed, lose that high distinction and degrade themselves and the Profession by becoming Contractors [and speculators] ... prostituting the credit of their Profession, sometimes by taking large tracts of Ground and parcelling it out to the Tradesmen employed by them, and at other times by taking the Ground and becoming builders themselves.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, in a letter to *The Artist* in 1810, Soane sought to put builders and surveyors in their place: “The claims of the untaught, ignorant and presumptuous, must not only be disallowed, but repelled with indignation and contempt, till at length they are consigned to that obscurity whence they ought never to have been suffered to emerge.”

Putting others in their place meant claiming special skills and knowledge. This distinctiveness could then be defended through selective membership and restrictive practices: formalized educational requirements and professional associations. It would prove to be a process full of path dependencies, as the separation of architect and builder left the way open for the rise of the general contractor, while the separation of architect from both surveyor and engineer left architects with a significantly restricted share of profit from the building enterprise.

Framing the claim to distinction in terms of aesthetics would prove to be the most important event of all in the path-dependent process of professionalization. For educated gentlemen-architects, distinction could only be based on creativity and the command of taste. Theirs, after all, was the legacy of Vitruvian “delight,” Palladian refinement, Kantian philosophy, and the moral significance of art and taste as advocated by the Académie Royale d'Architecture in France and the Royal Academy in Britain—all reassuringly confirmed by the wonders of the Grand Tour. With a bit of a stretch, architecture could even be placed at the very top of the aesthetic fields. Thomas Walter, a Philadelphia architect and a leading figure in the professionalization of architecture in America, maintained that architects were an artistic

*Putting others  
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knowledge*

elite because their works were totally imaginative. Painters and sculptors merely copied Nature, but architects created anew.<sup>27</sup> But buildings are a very expensive art form, obliging architects to depend heavily on connections with Establishment institutions, prestigious patrons, and a bourgeois clientele.

Aesthetics need not be the only claim to distinction, however. Swelling numbers of practitioners were drawn from the educated upper-middle classes and, while not disavowing claims to aesthetics, many saw science as another avenue for professional distinction. The Industrial Revolution had been accompanied by a flood of scientific and technological advances, and “science” had come to be understood by the general population as any systematic, knowledge-based learning that was useful. The idea of an “architectural science,” whatever that may have been, sounded progressive to both practitioners and prospective clients. The immediate consequence, though, was to intensify centrifugal forces within the field, differentiating “practical architecture” (a step or two above the product of journeyman builders) from architecture as art. In the long run, it would become a dualism that the field could never resolve.

### **Institution Building**

The natural response to centrifugal forces and the increasing division of labor within systems of building provision was professionalization. New fraternal organizations of all kinds—with their own ceremonies and regalia intended to bestow dignity, social status, and concrete socioeconomic privileges—sprang up across many fields at exactly this time. There were several false starts among architects before robust institutions emerged. Many, like the Architects’ Club, founded in London in 1791, were basically no more than gentlemen’s dining clubs, too exclusive and too amorphous to serve the needs of actual practitioners. The London Architectural Society, founded in 1806, had an eclectic membership but “rules of almost Draconian severity” and did not last long, nor did the London-based Architects’ and Antiquaries’ Club, founded 1819.<sup>28</sup> The foundation for a more sustainable professional framework for British architects was established with the charter of incorporation of the Institute of British Architects in 1837. The institute was “founded for facilitating the acquirement of architectural knowledge, for the promotion of the different branches of science connected with it, and for establishing ... uniformity and respectability of practice.”<sup>29</sup> It became the RIBA in 1866 after the designation “Royal” was conferred by Queen Victoria.

The institute was clear about its role in boundary maintenance, preventing “carpenters, cabinetmakers, ironmongers, upholsters, painters and undertakers” masquerading as architects. Its members vowed “to uphold in ourselves the character of Architects, as men of taste, men of science, men of honour.”<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, honorary fellowships were available to noblemen on payment of not less than twenty-five guineas and indeed to any other

*Many saw science  
as another avenue  
for professional  
distinction*

gentlemen “unconnected with any branch of building as a trade or business.”<sup>31</sup> Among the first priorities of the institute were formulating a code of professional ethics and attempting to impose some uniformity over fee structures. Junior architects, excluded from the RIBA for not being in practice for the requisite number of years, formed themselves into the Association of Architectural Draftsmen, becoming the Architectural Association in 1847. “From the start the tone of the AA was as iconoclastic as it was democratic, and its regular papers, reported sympathetically in *The Builder*, provided an essential forum for free-ranging discussion outside the inhibiting atmosphere of the RIBA.”<sup>32</sup>

American institution-building suffered similar false starts and diletantism before the beginnings of a modern association could gel. An American Institution of Architects was established in 1836 with the aim of propagating professional etiquette as well as “architectural science”: principles of design and composition, principles of construction, and the nature and property of materials. They only met twice, and it took another twenty years before another attempt was made. This time the organization was called the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Like its contemporary, the Institute of British Architects, it began as an exclusive gentlemen’s club and mutual admiration society for experienced principals. It was not until 1869 that AIA members were required to be in “honorable practice” (that is, resistant to bribes from builders or suppliers), but by then only 140 of the 2,000 or so practicing architects in the United States were members of the AIA.

## Education

If professional associations were ineffective in credibly establishing a distinctive field for architectural practice, formal education might offer an alternate strategy. For the first half of the nineteenth century in both Britain and the United States architectural education was based on pupilage. In this system, an articulated pupil paid cash to be taught by an established practitioner. Pupilage usually lasted five or six years, supplemented, if possible, with foreign travel and attendance at an arts academy or museum. The quality of education under pupilage depended entirely on the skills and personality of the principal, but in general the system emphasized proficiency in draftsmanship. Winning a competition after a few years in pupilage was the best way that a young architect could demonstrate competency to practice independently. But this carried additional freight: young architects, knowing that their entries would be judged by members of local or national arts academies, tended to produce pictorial and picturesque effects. The cumulative result—carried through into twenty-first century university education—was a tendency to emphasize drawing-board architecture, designing buildings from the outside inward, and reinforcing the field’s prioritization of the visual and the sculptural.

It took a long time for pupilage to be replaced by formal educational programs. Traditional universities regarded the concept of vocational

*Drawing-board  
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from the outside  
inward*

training as repugnant (with honorable exceptions for law and medicine), and were quite content to leave emerging professions to educate their own. The closest thing to formalized architectural education was the *École des Beaux-Arts* in France. It was based on the atelier system, essentially a student-run studio with projects designed under the direction of an atelier master who mentored the students and critiqued their work. The atelier master was typically an established architect who practiced out of another office. Like the Anglo-American pupilage system, its overwhelming focus was on drawing-board architecture, but it included a heavy dose of art history and theory and was quite successful in reinforcing the distinction between architects and builders.

Geopolitics and national prejudices discouraged any British interaction with the French system, but some aspiring American architects did move to Paris to study at the *École*. Their number eventually included the influential Richard Morris Hunt, H. H. Richardson, Charles McKim, and Louis Sullivan. Many more were receptive to the principles of the *École*, and in 1867 the AIA proposed the creation of an architectural school that might counter centrifugal forces, combining elements of its curriculum with those of American and British mechanics' institutes and central European polytechnic institutes. With such a school, the architectural profession might be firmly restored to the center of the building process. "The AIA school was to consist of evening classes in drawing, modeling, and construction for building mechanics; a three-year technical curriculum of drawing, mechanics, astronomy, construction, and civil engineering; and a two-year academic program of drawing, aesthetics, and the history of art and architecture."<sup>33</sup>

The AIA school did not come to anything, but the federal government had meanwhile recognized a broader issue: the changing needs of the labor force with the gathering pace of the Industrial Revolution. This required advanced teaching in practical subjects: agriculture, science, and engineering, in particular. The 1862 Morrill Act created land-grant colleges to serve this need, and several of them included architectural studies. William Robert Ware set up the first systematic courses in architectural study in the United States at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1868, and others soon followed at Columbia, Cornell, the University of Illinois, and Tuskegee, Alabama. Their courses were taught within the context of engineering or industrial arts programs, and most featured the now-fashionable Beaux-Arts method of working a design up from a sketch of the *parti*, the initial summary of the overall intent and organizational strategy of a project.

Some specialized instruction in architecture had meanwhile been offered since the 1840s in Britain: King's College and University College at the University of London both appointed a professor of architecture, but they offered only illustrative lectures intended to supplement pupilage, not as any sort of substantive education in the discipline. T. L. Donaldson, professor of architecture at University College, "gave two courses of lectures for part-time students on 'Architecture as a Science' and 'Architecture as an

Art’—a symbolic division that was to flaw Victorian architecture throughout the century.”<sup>34</sup>

### **In Search of the Good City**

Whether as an art or science—or both—architecture had to find its place in the political economy of competitive capitalism. Industrialization not only required new kinds of buildings and brought new materials and technologies, its attendant social changes also brought new patterns of demand, played out within rapidly changing spatial frameworks. As society transformed, so the patrons of architecture changed. As John Summerson put it, “an aristocratic society with bourgeois leanings had become a bourgeois society with aristocratic yearnings.”<sup>35</sup> With this shift, architects had an opportunity to contribute to the good city for the more affluent middle classes, not just the truly wealthy. But architects themselves continued to struggle with the increasingly difficult problem of giving adequate expression in built form to this changing economic, technological, and social landscape.

The dislocation and new experiences introduced by the industrial era resulted in new ways of seeing, new ways of representing things, and a good deal of confusion and conflict over the appropriate physical expression of the new age. All this played out with great intensity in artistic and literary circles. Contending styles were advanced as symbolic or representational of all sorts of ideals, including upper-class values, national identity, national culture, religious probity and moral rectitude. The initial overall response to the radical changes of the Industrial Revolution, as would be the case throughout most of the century, was reactionary. For many observers, the shock of the new political economy was overwhelming, prompting them to fall back on nostalgic and idealized notions of the rural and small-town past as an antidote.

In the face of turbulence and change, architects, builders and their clients opted for the reassurance of the traditional. For the first two decades of the nineteenth century, this was manifest in a combination of arcadian and aristocratic motifs. The latter were expressed in the Georgian derivatives favored by the Federalist aristocracy of East Coast America and the Regency architecture of Britain’s upper-middle-class townhomes. Regency architecture featured flat stuccoed façades with bow windows and ornamental ironwork. Decoration was sparingly applied, and favored the plainer classic orders, Doric and Ionic. Arcadian impulses were manifest in villa suburbs. One of the most influential was built in Marylebone Park Fields, where the Prince Regent had decided to build himself a summer palace. It was never built, and the fields were developed instead as Regent’s Park, a villa suburb for the very rich, laid out by John Nash in the English Picturesque style that had been made fashionable by Humphry Repton.

Most of the housing was located around the edges of the park, with just a few large villas placed inside. Each of these was cunningly landscaped such that none could be seen from any other or from the terraces of houses

*An opportunity to contribute to the good city for the affluent middle classes, not just the truly wealthy*

overlooking the park. Nash strove for an ostentatious effect that would appeal to the wealthy-but-aspiring. His terraces were all neoclassical in style, craftily designed to look like a series of palatial mansions. The privacy and seclusion of the development were initially absolute. There were gates at the entrances, and only “persons well-behaved and properly dressed” were allowed to pass through on its main roads. Just beyond the park, Nash developed the more affordable villa suburb of Park Village. As in Regent’s Park, the design adhered to the Picturesque concept of congruency, whereby architectural design and style must reflect the character of the setting.

### **The Good Suburb**

Together, Regent’s Park and Park Village became the prototype of countless other picturesque suburban enclaves. Among early examples in Britain were the southern reaches of St John’s Wood in London; the Newbold Comyn Estate, Leamington; Victoria Park, Manchester; Prince’s Park, Liverpool; and Birkenhead Park outside Liverpool. The first in the United States was New Brighton, on Staten Island, where British emigre architect John Haviland arrayed three rows of villas on a hillside overlooking the reaches of the Hudson River. By mid-century, the villa park model had influenced the character of many speculatively planned suburbs while the model itself matured into early versions of garden suburbs such as Llewellyn Park (fig. 5.5), a railway commuter suburb in West Orange, New Jersey, and Pollokshields, outside Glasgow, Scotland.

Villa parks in Britain also brought to prominence a new architectural form: the semidetached house. Builders were able to cater to the desire for social distinction by providing pairs of semidetached houses with a single pediment and treating the fronts as a single elevation. In this way a pair of relatively modest houses might give the illusion of a single fashionable one. Developed in early villa parks and a series of speculative London suburbs—De Beauvoir Town in Hackney, Ladbroke Grove in Notting Hill, and the Cator Estate at Blackheath Park—the new format became the prototype for Victorian suburbia in Britain.

The semidetached format had limited appeal in North America, where the abundance of land meant that single-family homes were the norm. The suburban ideal—the good city for the comfortably well-off—was championed in the United States by architect Alexander Jackson Davis (fig. 5.6) and writer and self-trained “rural architect” Andrew Jackson Downing (fig. 5.7). Downing’s books on *Cottage Residences* (1842) and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850) were influential and resonated with the homespun values associated with the popular president Andrew Jackson. Together, Downing and Davis popularized what came to be known as “Carpenter Gothic” domestic architecture (fig. 5.8). But as urban historian Robert Fishman observes:

When true suburban design came to the United States ... it did not simply follow English developments in time but consciously imitated them. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine American urban form taking the direction it did without the constant example

*Park Village became the prototype of countless other picturesque suburban enclaves*





5.5. Llewellyn Park. A railway suburb that introduced several key innovations that became commonplace: landscaping that was carefully manipulated to give a natural appearance; detailed deed restrictions covering architecture and domestic landscaping; and a homeowners' association to enforce these restrictions and to administer the commonly owned landscaped areas.



5.6. Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892). Designer of Llewellyn Park and an architect known for Picturesque and Gothic Revival styles.



5.7. Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852). The first great landscape designer in the United States and architect of single-family rural houses built in Picturesque Gothic and Italianate styles.



5.8. Carpenter Gothic. The Timothy Copp "cottage," Sinclairville, NY. A typical example of the style popularized by Davis and Downing.

of English precedents. ... Andrew Jackson Downing was deeply indebted—to use a polite word—to J. C. Loudon, the landscape architect and journalist who was the principal English publicist for the suburban idea in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>36</sup>

In more general terms, aesthetic responses to the social, cultural, and technological challenges of first half of the nineteenth century were confused and chaotic (subsequently dignified as “Creative Eclecticism” by architectural historians<sup>37</sup>). Most architects retreated into sober historicism. Greek Revival styles were dominant at first, beginning in Britain but becoming especially prevalent in the United States, where an infant profession relied heavily on catalogs of classical structures. As architectural historian W. Barksdale Maynard observes, Americans were almost desperate in their desire to be considered tasteful by British standards, and the only way to avoid architectural solecisms was to obey classical taste rigidly. “Accordingly, Americans became more than ordinarily obsessed with the rules and with building by the book, ... Greek Revival ... was if anything an eager—one could almost say servile—acquiescence to foreign preferences.”<sup>38</sup>

Greek Revival crested in Britain in the late 1820s and was displaced by the Italianate by the mid-1830s, followed by an eclectic mix of Romanesque, Tudor, and Gothic Revival styles. Lasting up to about 1850, this was the age of architectural revivalism, “a period in which humanitarian social ideals were wedded to fervent romantic feelings of individualism and a nostalgia for cultures far removed in time or place.”<sup>39</sup> It became increasingly difficult to distinguish between purposeful creativity, pointless eclecticism, and simple ignorance. At the same time, revivalism did not always lend itself very well to the new building types of the era: specialized industrial buildings, railway stations, town halls, bath and wash houses, libraries, art galleries, museums, and big new military installations.

### **New Building Technologies**

Revivalism was especially anachronistic in the context of the new building techniques and materials that offered the possibility of new design solutions. The use of coal instead of timber for the firing of bricks allowed buildings to be framed with load-bearing brickwork, while new techniques in ironmaking allowed for the use of cast-iron beams and columns. Mass-produced machine-sawn lumber—including imported Baltic softwood and Caribbean hardwood—introduced the standardized two-by-four stud that could be quickly assembled into frames using cheap mass-produced wire-cut nails. “Thus freed of the intricate joinery and assembly of the traditional heavy timber frame, ... a mechanic-builder of midcentury, using a handbook for instructions, could nail together a house frame in one day. Such houses were said to have ‘balloon frames.’”<sup>40</sup> Improved techniques for producing concrete helped improve footings and foundations, while in England Robert and James Chance developed significantly improved techniques for the production of thin sheets of blemish-free glass.

These new technologies were first deployed in vast warehouses and multistory factories with large windows and “fireproof” iron framing strong enough to withstand the bulky, heavy machinery that produced strong vibrations. For some, it offered the prospect of an entirely new architecture. William Vose Pickett pleaded the case in his 1845 address to the Royal Academy:

We possess in our own country and in this very day an abundance of available materials, sufficient for all the purposes whether as regards effects of utility, of A FUNDAMENTALLY NEW ARCHITECTURE. It need scarcely be added that the materials referred to are metals, in almost every form and method of preparation, in which modern science and manufactures have presented them. ... England, and the world, are now in possession of the means, by which a new and entirely dissimilar, and a more beautiful architecture may be realized and established.<sup>41</sup>

Pickett was confident of the aesthetic potential of these new materials, and his vision of an architecture featuring curved lines, skeleton construction, and suspension systems anticipated many of the innovations of designers a century or more later. But he was unable to illustrate his ideas with compelling images: a fatal omission in addressing a field so entirely fixated on the visual.

Nevertheless, it was not long before some radical innovations had emerged in built form. The spectacular size of the Crystal Palace, built to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, depended on large-span iron framing and modular assembly with standardized interfaces. On the other side of the Atlantic, an equally important trailblazer was the emporium built for E. V. Haughwout in New York in 1857. Made almost entirely of cast-iron columns and girders and faced with cast-iron keystone arches to a design by John P. Gaynor, it also featured Elisha Graves Otis’s first steam-powered passenger elevator. (It was only a five-story building; Haughwout’s intention was that visitors would come to see the elevator and then stay to shop for china and silver.) But the question of what this modernizing world should look like was still perplexing, and most architects relied on some sort of revivalism. The Haughwout building, while structurally and technologically innovative, was modeled on a sixteenth-century Venetian library.

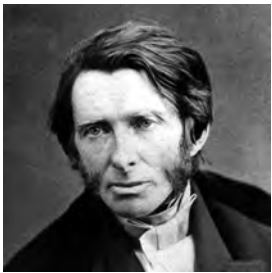
### **The Battle of the Styles**

A spirited debate on design ran throughout the nineteenth century, drawing in leaders of industry, newspaper editorials, and an increasingly opinionated public as well as professional designers and critics. Commercial concerns were focused not so much on architecture as on the competitiveness of product design in an increasingly international marketplace. In Britain, the 1836 report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Art and Manufactures led the government to establish schools of design. The schools taught that decoration should be secondary to form; that form should be dictated by function and materials; and that design could derive from historical British

and non-Western motifs as well as Nature. Intellectual concerns focused on the widening spiral of eclecticism in design and on competing claims for the rationale and moral significance of particular architectural styles. Public interest was intensified by an ever-growing “art world” of cultural institutions, lay involvement in building committees, and journalism featuring design competitions for prominent buildings. And, as Anthony Sutcliffe observed, “the reduction of architecture to simple elevations meant that even the most ignorant could hold an obdurate and raucous opinion (the ‘gentleman’s club effect’).”<sup>42</sup>

The scope and content of debate undermined the hegemony of traditional elites on matters of taste. “New money” rentier capitalists were now the principal patrons of art and architecture but most were uncertain with regard to matters of taste. Artists and architects took increasing advantage of the loosening ties to traditional conventions of taste to push their autonomy in the direction of eclectic stylistic innovation.<sup>43</sup> This was most clearly reflected in domestic architecture. Classical Revival styles dominated through the 1830s and into the 1840s. But the Victorian upper-middle classes had money to spend and social standing to establish. One outcome was an ever-increasing amount of Italianate design, along with elaborate iron balconies, window guards, railings, and finials. Stuccoed terraces of town mansions had become popular in London suburbs like Ladbrooke Grove and Kensington, and Andrew Jackson Downing had introduced Italianate design (without stucco) to America in his two influential books. Bay windows also became popular, not only because they enlarged front rooms by a yard or more and let in more light, but also because they broke up the frontages of terraces of townhomes and lent an air of distinction. (They also served a social function, allowing residents a discreet means of keeping tabs on the doings of neighbors and passers-by.) Suburban streets sported an increasing amount of Italianate detail around doors and windows, along with what the urban historian H. J. Dyos called “architectural millinery.”<sup>44</sup>

The art world itself was more concerned with establishing an active commitment to a philosophy of design. In Britain, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of painters, poets, and critics, along with the art critic John Ruskin (fig. 5.9), represented the most influential school of thought. The proper response for art and architecture, they argued, was a celebration of Nature and its therapeutic and uplifting properties. Ruskin was a revered figure within the British labor movement, having written a series of articles that denounced free-market economics. The idealization of a laissez-faire society, he argued, is a fundamental misconception of human nature. He railed against the ugliness of nineteenth-century industrialism. His own preference for one style of architecture over another was “founded on a comparison of their influences on the life of the workman.”<sup>45</sup> It was a Quixotic form of design determinism, an aesthetic tilt at poverty and its material effects. As to architectural form, Ruskin strongly rejected both classical architecture (too bourgeois) and the muscular functionality of the industrial



5.9. John Ruskin (1819-1900). A thought leader and public intellectual, Ruskin was a critic of art and architecture with a deep concern for the cultural condition of his age.

era (too philistine). Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851) emphasized the importance of medieval Gothic style for what he saw as an art of communal togetherness, created by a morally superior age that respected honest work and condemned capitalist usury. Augustus Pugin, an architect and critic, was another vocal advocate of Gothic Revival styles, seeing them as symbolic of English tradition, religious probity, and moral rectitude.

Pugin's design determinism was shared by the religious establishment. A succession of church-building acts early in the nineteenth century had stipulated Gothic style for the state-sponsored churches that were intended to secure the souls of Britain's burgeoning suburbs for the established Church. Speculative developers who made provision for an estate church as a symbol of respectability and order followed suit, as did the architects of the suburban mansions of many of the newly affluent Victorian entrepreneurial class. Before long, variants and hybrids had been introduced. Such styles lent themselves especially well to detached and semidetached houses, and the dominant outcome on both sides of the Atlantic was an eclectic "Speculator Gothic" featuring pointed windows, turrets, towers, battlements, steep roofs, and tall chimney stacks. As further novelty, developers offered brickwork in a great variety of colors and patterns.

None of this amounted to consensus, however: something that was made clear by a very public "Battle of the Styles" for British government offices. By the middle of the nineteenth century London was the capital of an expanding worldwide empire and of a radically changing domestic scene that required increasing state involvement in various aspects of the economy and environment. In order to cope, new government departments were created and existing ones greatly expanded and reorganized. This resulted in the need for a huge amount of new office space, which, in turn, raised the vexed question of the appropriate architectural style for government buildings. A competition in 1857 to design the Foreign Office sparked a fierce public debate about whether Gothic or classical architectural style was to be preferred. Although the Gothic character of the newly rebuilt parliamentary complex at the Palace of Westminster (designed by Pugin) was popular, the competition was eventually won with a classical Revival style designed by George Gilbert Scott. Classical Revival styles were also the preferred solution for US government buildings such as the Patent Office, the Treasury Department (both Greek Revival) and the State, War, and Navy Building (now the Eisenhower Executive Office Building) in Second Empire baroque style in Washington.

## **Reform**

The unwanted side effects of laissez-faire industrialization and urbanization were significant challenges to the Victorian ideology of progress. Poverty, disease, violence, and environmental disasters were broadly seen as urban problems rather than economic, social, or political problems: problems of the



city rather than problems in the city. City slums were effectively *terra incognita* to the better-off, but they were nevertheless understood as a threat to the very material and spiritual foundations upon which the established order was built.

Employers were unhappy that their employees were sickly (and therefore less productive) and fearful of labor unrest turning into mob violence. Property owners resented their vulnerability to fires. The respectable middle classes were worried about the breakdown of moral order and the contaminating effects of crime and drunkenness. Everyone was fearful at being constantly exposed to life-threatening diseases. The responses of reformers, philanthropists, and municipalities would set in motion another set of path-dependent processes that would condition the field of urban planning, open up opportunities for the emerging field of landscape architecture, and establish key precedents in urban design.

Contemporary attitudes to city slums reflected a mix of prurience and piety, fear and compassion. Above all, slums were seen as “haunts of vice” that harbored moral degeneration, which in turn was seen as a fundamental cause of both poverty and disease. This interpretation of the sociospatial dialectic provided plenty of opportunity for deterministic reasoning to flourish among campaigning reformers and philanthropists. Moral environmentalism had its intellectual roots in the notion originally advanced by Archibald Alison that mental associations acquired through personal experience influence the human character or psyche; and in particular that the experience of great beauty—such as paintings or natural scenery—improves the imagination and stimulates moral sensibilities.

On the other hand, it was believed, lack of elevating stimulation and exposure to debasing experiences leads the moral faculties to degenerate. The ideology of progress and nineteenth-century thinking about self-help, spiritual redemption, and the sources of disease all converged to produce a moral environmentalist approach and the idea that the physical disorder and dilapidation of the slums determined, or helped to determine, the physical and moral condition of their inhabitants.

### **Voluntarism and Philanthropy**

The first fully articulated concerns came with Britain’s Royal Commission on the Health of Towns, chaired by Edwin Chadwick, first secretary of the Poor Law Board. His path-breaking 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Classes of Great Britain* included improved statistics on disease and death rates that became available from 1838 with the establishment of the General Register Office for England and Wales. The shocking details in the report encouraged progressive-minded liberals to form themselves into voluntary associations such as the Health of Towns Association, the Association for Promoting Cleanliness Amongst the Poor, the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, and the Metropolitan Association for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Classes.

*Reformers,  
philanthropists, and  
municipalities set in  
motion another set  
of path-dependent  
processes*

At first these associations limited themselves to discussions and the passing of resolutions, but soon they began to lead by example in constructing demonstration projects that sought to show how decent housing could be built for working-class households with affordable rents that still yielded a (modest) profit. In the United States, Chadwick's most influential disciple was John Griscom, a physician who had worked in New York City's medical dispensaries for the poor and had served as city inspector of New York. Dismissed by the Board of Aldermen as a result of his progressive proposals, he launched a campaign for public health, publishing *The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York* in 1845. In Boston, Lemuel Shattuck's 1850 *Report of a General Plan for the Promotion of Public and Personal Health*<sup>46</sup> was equally influential.

As in Britain, the initial response was the formation of voluntary associations: the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, for example, and Boston's Model Lodging House Association. The problem was that the profit margins on the demonstration projects undertaken by voluntary associations were far too modest to attract much serious attention from investors or developers, and meanwhile the urban crisis intensified. By the 1860s, the liberal response in Britain was dominated by wealthy philanthropists such as the Guinness family and American banker and diplomat George Peabody (fig. 5.10), who were willing and able to build worker housing that yielded profits that were, for the period, strikingly modest: typically around five percent.<sup>47</sup> On this basis, the Peabody Trust alone built more than five thousand dwellings in London between 1864 and 1890, many of them designed by Henry Darbishire, the trust's architect. The first Peabody estate, in Spitalfields, was opened in 1864. Peabody tenements (figs. 5.11 and 5.12) had such unheard-of amenities as separate laundry rooms and space for children to play. Peabody was part of a circle of reformers that included Sydney Waterlow, whose Improved Industrial Dwellings Company was established in 1863. Like Peabody, Waterlow built five- and seven-story tenements with self-contained apartments but from standardized plans prepared by a surveyor rather than an architect.

Such philanthropy did not affect the poorest of the poor (who could not afford the rents), nor did it make significant inroads to the ever-worsening conditions of industrial cities; but it did help to gain some attention within polite society on the issue of how to address the conundrum of industrial cities: sustaining environments in which investors could make profit in both the labor market and the housing market without leaving large numbers of households so poor that their slum neighborhoods threatened the health and security of everyone else. One outcome of the debate was the notion that the poor could be divided into three categories: the industrious or "deserving" poor; the incapacitated poor, such as the disabled, orphaned, or elderly; and the morally degraded poor who were too lazy to work, instead wallowing in vice, crime, and immorality. As Henry Mayhew put it in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) a landmark publication based on his newspaper articles: "those that will work, those that cannot work, and those that will not work."



5.10. George Peabody (1795-1869). Born in Massachusetts, he spent most of his later life in London after a successful career in shipping. He was part of a circle of reformers that included Lord Shaftesbury and William Cobbett and established a philanthropic trust that pioneered model dwellings.



It was a notion fully in accord with Victorian notions of the hierarchy of social class and it provided a comforting rationale for developing philanthropic housing for “steady, thrifty and socially ambitious working men” who could afford the rents that would ensure a modest return of around five percent. It also encouraged another influential assumption: the operation of a filtering process whereby households capable of paying the rent for model dwellings leave their former residences for the class fraction below them; and they in turn leave vacancies for the very poorest. In the twentieth century, this would become articulated as part of conservative claims to building the good city: facilitating new construction for affluent households and thereby triggering vacancy chains that allow the filtering of households up the housing scale. In reality, such a process only works if city populations are not growing; and even then vacancy chains may be ended prematurely through conversion to nonresidential uses or redevelopment schemes that involve a net loss of dwelling units.

Philanthropic housing was self-interested benevolence, “helping to maintain the existing order of industrial capitalism by ensuring the physical and social reproduction of labor, inculcating a curious mixture of deference and self-help, promoting respectability, and—by providing centrally-located housing at relatively low rents—allowing the perpetuation of a low-wage economy in which workers lived close to potential workplaces and could be hired or laid off at short notice.”<sup>48</sup> At the time, many were fearful that philanthropy for those who could help themselves—“those that will work”—would, quite literally, be demoralizing, and that it would undermine the free market and impair the profits of commercial investment. The limited scale of philanthropy meant that such fears were never realized. Slums persisted and proliferated, as did contemporary accounts of them. The poet James Thomson coined the phrase “City of Dreadful Night” in his 1874 poem characterizing city slums as places of loneliness, alienation, and unremitting gloom. It would take municipal reform to begin the task of restricting the growth of the slums and beginning to build both the legal and physical framework for the good city.

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**5.11 Peabody Square, Shadwell, London** (opposite, top). Completed in 1867 to the designs of Henry Darbishire. The six-story buildings with washhouses and baths on the attic floor were arranged around a rectangular courtyard. The flats were not self-contained: there were shared sinks and lavatories on the landings, in a style known as “associated dwellings.” One of the earliest Peabody projects, the Shadwell Estate became a model for those that followed, establishing a distinctive and dignified architecture for the Peabody Trust that is now an important part of London’s historic fabric.

**5.12 Peabody Buildings, Southwark Street, London** (opposite, bottom). Another Darbishire design, opened in 1876 with twelve five-story blocks, each with twenty-two flats.

## Municipal Socialism

The combination of intensifying slums and the realization that markets require collective action to function adequately was eventually sufficient to introduce a degree of “municipal socialism”: local government intervention in the marketplace in order to impose standards and to ensure the provision of key services and basic amenities. Along with the “hidden hand” of market dynamics, the visible hand of the state was needed: in particular for investment in urban infrastructure, the control of land use, and the regulation of the built environment as “part of a broader system of social and moral governance that seeks to (re)produce places consistent with normative considerations of what the good city is, or ought to be.”<sup>49</sup>

It was a piecemeal process that gathered momentum in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. It was the threat to public health—cholera epidemics, in particular—that led on both sides of the Atlantic to a willingness to raise taxes and impose regulations to address a range of public health needs, including the regulation of polluting industries, the identification of houses unfit for habitation, the provision of water and gas supplies, the creation of sanitary cemeteries, and the introduction of strict building codes.

In Britain, building regulations introduced in 1875 outlawed the long-standing practice of building back-to-back terraces of housing, introduced model bylaws, required minimum street widths and private external space. The primary objective “was to ensure the through-ventilation of dwellings, based on the then-current medical theory that diseases were mainly transmitted by vapors from rotting matter. The free movement of air in and around the house was considered essential, and each house was required to face what was then considered a wide street, and have an open space behind it.”<sup>50</sup> From a design perspective:

... nothing else made so much difference to the physical appearance and condition of British towns. Large parts of them were built under this regime and still survive. They seem a grim and depressing legacy, yet they represent a considerable advance on what came immediately before. The streets of this time were monotonous, but the monotony of order was an advance on the earlier monotony of chaos. They were devoid of all inspiration but at least they were sanitary, exposed adequately to air and moderately to light.<sup>51</sup>

More significant, in broader perspective, was the moral dimension of building regulation. As the eminent urban historian Donald Olsen observed:

Street improvements and slum clearance schemes were designed to bring the poor out into the open, where they could be observed, reprovved, and instructed by their superiors. ... Ventilation, that is to say, was as much a moral and psychological as a sanitary passion. ... The open stairways and balconies of model dwellings and twentieth-century council flats are as symbolic of the openness of the poor to bracing

*Along with the “hidden hand” of market dynamics, the visible hand of the state was needed*



draughts and paternalistic inspection as are the garden walls and box hedges in suburbia of the comfortable withdrawal of the middle classes into their domestic retreats.<sup>52</sup>

The introduction of taxation and the increasing responsibilities of local authorities meanwhile brought a radical change to the dynamics of urbanization. Municipal incorporation conferred limited liability and, therefore, the opportunity for debt financing through issuing bonds. Bond repayments for incorporated places were relatively secure: they could reasonably be assumed to be met from property taxes, revenues from which could be expected to increase as a result of the growth stimulated by the new infrastructure and improved services financed by bond issues.

As a result, urban governance and politics came to be founded on a web of debt financing, economic growth, and increasing property values. “Cities borrowed to their limits to subsidize rail links and thus make themselves transportation centers. They borrowed for docks, warehouses, and other aids to trade and manufacturing. They borrowed for street paving to make internal transportation efficient. They borrowed to bring running water, gas, electricity, and transit to their people. ... City governments in effect borrowed against their future growth to provide the collective resources necessary to support rapid growth in private enterprise.”<sup>53</sup> This, in turn, attracted a variety of new, self-made entrepreneurs—local merchants, manufacturers, building contractors, and real estate developers—to vie for political control in order to steer the expanded range of public policies in directions suited to their own interests. The design fields now found themselves operating in an entirely new political economy.

### **Didactic Landscapes**

Reformers meanwhile persisted in connecting virtue and character with the built environment. Progressive intellectuals conjured a vision of ideal urban landscapes that combined the morality attributed to Nature with the enriching and refining influences of cultural, political, and social institutions. Andrew Jackson Downing was a particular advocate, his recommended program of “popular refinement” based on the promotion of public libraries, museums, and art galleries, as well as parks and gardens in order to cultivate feelings of honesty, beauty, wholesomeness, cleanliness, and natural order and bring out the best in “ordinary” people.

The first manifestations of these ideals came in the arcadian landscapes of “rural” cemeteries. The forerunners were four municipal cemeteries on the outskirts of Paris: Montmartre, De Vaugirard, Montparnasse, and Père Lachaise, all established in the first decade of the nineteenth century. They were designed to serve both as parks organized for family visits and as museums of the illustrious dead. The escalating populations of cities elsewhere were meanwhile filling up small churchyards, burial grounds and vaults, resulting in routinely gruesome practices with appalling and

dangerous results. In 1832, in the aftermath of London's first major cholera epidemic, a parliamentary bill was passed to establish privately owned cemeteries beyond the built-up area of the city, following the Parisian examples. The first, Kensal Green Cemetery, was opened the following year, and it established the look and layout of other suburban cemeteries—with walkways and processional routes amid landscaped grounds with groves of ever-green trees.

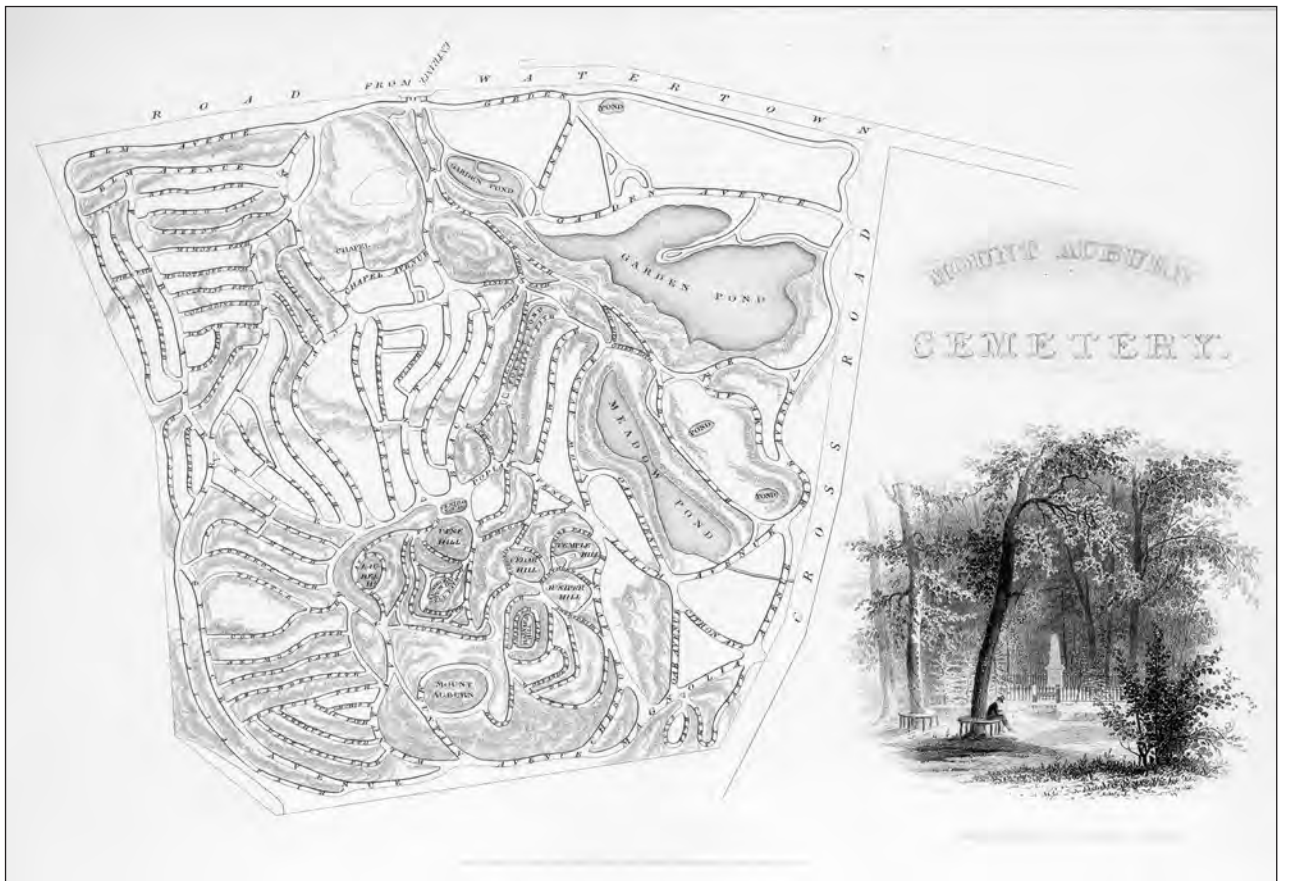
Within a decade the rest of the “Magnificent Seven” Victorian garden cemeteries in London had opened: Abney Park and Highgate to the north, Brompton to the west, Norwood and Nunhead to the south, and Tower Hamlets to the east. The largest of all Victorian garden cemeteries was Brookwood, laid out on two thousand acres of Woking Common, twenty-five miles from central London. Brookwood was extravagantly landscaped, with “neighborhoods” that echoed the structure of Victorian society. Specific parts of the cemetery were reserved for particular professional groups, organizations, and nonconformist groups as well as for the (former) residents of certain parishes, and its geography reflected their relative socioeconomic standing. The 1830s also saw the creation of “garden” cemeteries in the United States, including Laurel Hill in Philadelphia (fig. 5.13), Mount Auburn in Cambridge (fig. 5.14), and Green-Wood in Brooklyn. Like their British counterparts, their designs represented an attempt to express religious and social ideals. Religious ideals were expressed through monumental portals and sculptures, while social ideals were expressed in spaciousness and naturalistic scenery.

These cemeteries were influential because they inspired the creation of public parks as a means of carrying progressive ideals into the heart of the city, where, it was hoped, they might provide a civilizing, spiritually uplifting, and socially instructive setting. They also foreshadowed city planning in miniature: the scale of the big new cemeteries involving streets and pathways, zoning, landscaping, and infrastructure, worked out in ideal environments, unconstrained by property complications. The earliest models were from Germany and their eighteenth-century concept of the Volksgarten as a medium for public education and the mingling of social classes. In the English-speaking world, the idea of a public park was propagated by J. C. Loudon in the 1820s. Loudon believed parks could be a means of “raising the intellectual character of the lowest classes of society.” In 1833 a Parliamentary

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**5.13 Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia** (opposite, top). Founded in 1836, it was the first “garden” or “rural” cemetery in the country to be designed by an architect (John Notman). Laurel Hill introduced new landscape ideas and became a model for the rural cemetery movement.

**5.14 Mount Auburn Cemetery, Boston** (opposite, bottom). The first of its kind, with a design influenced by Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. Mount Auburn quickly became the model for the American “rural” cemetery movement and is now recognized as one of the country’s “most significant designed landscapes,” listed in the National Register of Historic Places as well as being a designated National Historic Landmark.



Select Committee on Public Walks reported that in the whole of London the only open spaces available to “all classes” of society were Hyde Park and Green Park.

The first genuine new public park in Britain was Birkenhead Park, across the River Mersey from Liverpool, designed by Joseph Paxton in 1843. Victoria Park opened in 1845 on the fringe of working-class neighborhoods in East London, making up a little for the fact that the rest of London’s parks at the time were at the fashionable West End of town. Designed by architect James Pennethorne, Victoria Park was planted with forty thousand trees and shrubs and featured a series of lakes, waterfalls, bedding displays, and ornamental buildings. Angela Burdett-Coutts donated an extravagant drinking fountain designed by Henry Darbishire, the architect of her Columbia Square philanthropic housing scheme in Bethnal Green. Victoria Park did indeed become an essential amenity for the working classes of the East End but, ironically, given the ideological roots of the park movement, it promptly became a setting for radical political speeches and rallies, gaining a reputation as the “People’s Park.” *Harper’s Magazine* in February 1888 carried this description:

On the big central lawn are scattered numerous groups, some of which are very closely packed. Almost all the religious sects of England and all the political and social parties are preaching their ideas and disputing. ... On this lawn the listener, as his fancy prompts him, may assist on Malthusianism, atheism, agnosticism, secularism, Calvinism, socialism, anarchism, Salvationism, Darwinism, and even, in exceptional cases, Swedenborgianism and Mormonism.<sup>54</sup>

In the United States the park movement was endorsed by leading intellectuals of the American Renaissance. The most influential figure was Frederick Law Olmsted (fig. 5.15), who had visited Birkenhead Park in 1850. In 1858 he and Calvert Vaux won the competition for the design of Central Park in New York City. Their design, which was completed in 1862, featured a picturesque landscape integrated with the city by means of four avenues laid out with an elaborate system of independent traffic lanes, bridges, and underpasses (figs. 5.16 and 5.17). Olmsted had a strong streak of paternalism and doggedly resisted any attempt by ordinary people to use his parks for sports and other boisterous recreation rather than the quiet contemplation he thought was appropriate.

Nevertheless, the result was widely acclaimed, and by the turn of the century the design of municipal parks became a matter of civic pride. Large parks were established in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, St Louis, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. New York had eleven parks of one hundred acres or more. Boston had initiated the first planned metropolitan system of parks: an “emerald necklace” of parks and parkway links. Olmsted himself went on to design park projects in other cities (including Boston, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Newark, Philadelphia, and San Francisco) and campuses for the University

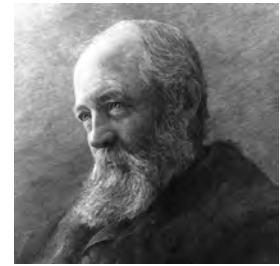
of California at Berkeley and Columbia University in New York. Smaller parks proliferated in cities everywhere: ornamental parks, zoological parks, parks for strolling, boating, lunching, skating and team sports, waterfront parks, downtown parks, and neighborhood parks.

In addition to being the leading landscape architect of his generation, Olmsted was also one of the country's leading public intellectuals. His many writings appeared in publications such as *Putnam's Monthly*, alongside writings by Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Charles Dickens. A decade after completing the design for Central Park, Olmsted brought his reputation, his experience of traveling around the English country parks that he so admired, and his close connection with the ideals of the American Renaissance and the transcendentalists, to another collaboration with Vaux: the Romantic-styled railway suburb of Riverside near Chicago. Built to generous specifications as an elite district, it was one of the country's first commuter suburbs. Riverside was remarkable for its innovative street plan and carefully crafted public open spaces (fig. 5.18). Olmsted and Vaux used the floodplain and the riverbanks as an organizing element and took advantage of topography to enhance the perception of open space and to choreograph the vistas and views inside the district. Olmsted hoped that the natural simplicity of pastoral landscape "would inspire communal feelings among all urban classes, muting resentments over disparities of wealth and fashion."<sup>55</sup> But he also acknowledged the desire for people of "more intelligent and more fortunate classes" to remove themselves from the conditions present in the city. This was just as well, since this was in fact the basis of his client's vision for Riverside.

Riverside later became a landmark district in urban planning, and urban historian Robert Fishman has suggested that Olmsted himself is the single most important figure in the history of American urban planning.<sup>56</sup> But more important still was the fact that his work gave prominence and legitimacy to the field of landscape architecture, presaging its professionalization and exerting further centrifugal pressure on what had been an undifferentiated field of gentleman practitioners just a few decades before.

A systematic approach to city planning and urban design would take longer to develop, but it is worth noting that the vision of a rationally developed and conceptually grounded approach was being explored in Barcelona while Olmsted and others were designing morally uplifting arcadian landscapes. Ildefons Cerdà, an engineer and parliamentarian, believed that the built environment should be planned and designed in context of the dynamics of social, economic, and technological change. He had come into contact with the utopian socialism of Étienne Cabet and was sympathetic to the ideas of Henri de Saint-Simon regarding the potential role of an urban "avant-garde" of scientists, engineers, and industrialists who could apply expert technical knowledge to urban development. Cerdà designed a middle-class extension to Barcelona, the Eixample district, with a grid plan featuring distinctive chamfered corners to the building footprint at intersections, creating

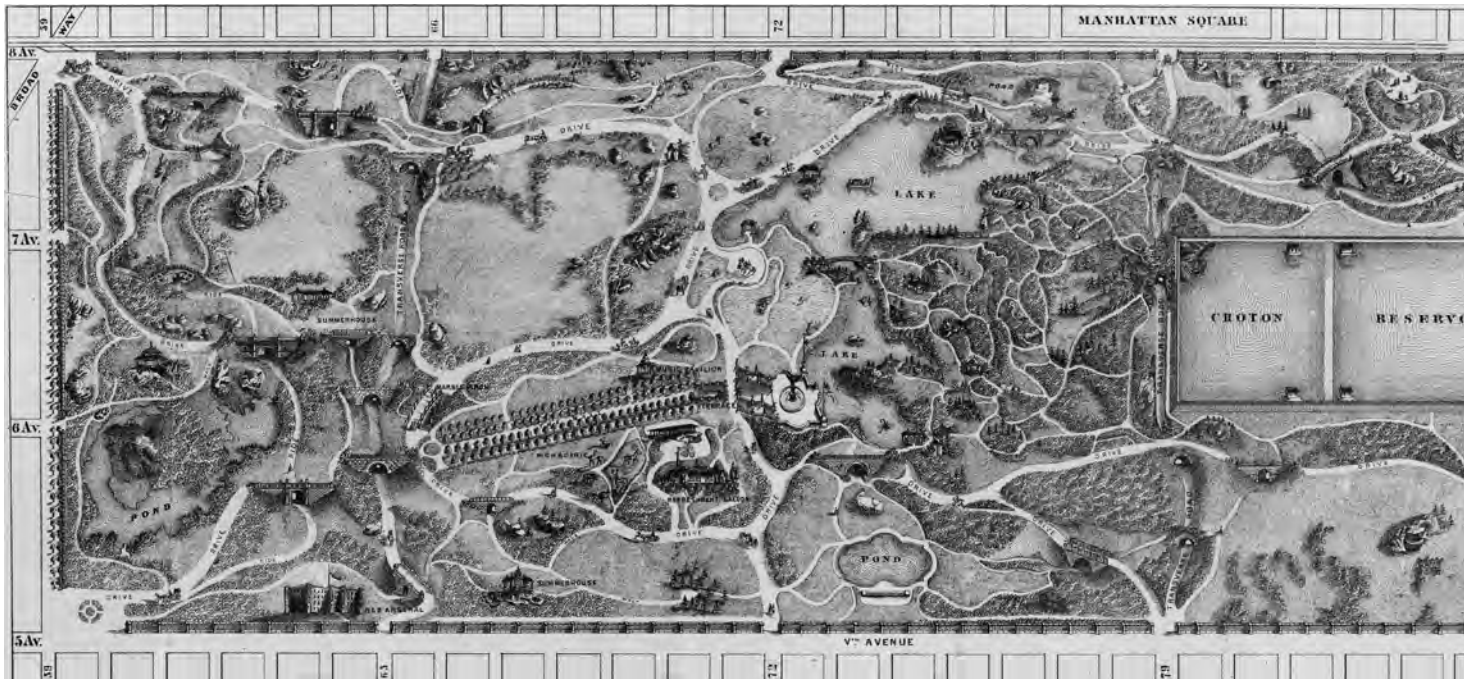




5.15. Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903). Olmsted was a strong believer in the civilizing influence of urbanism. His ideas shaped the fields of both urban planning and landscape architecture.

5.16. Central Park, New York City. Bridlepath underpass beneath a carriage driveway.

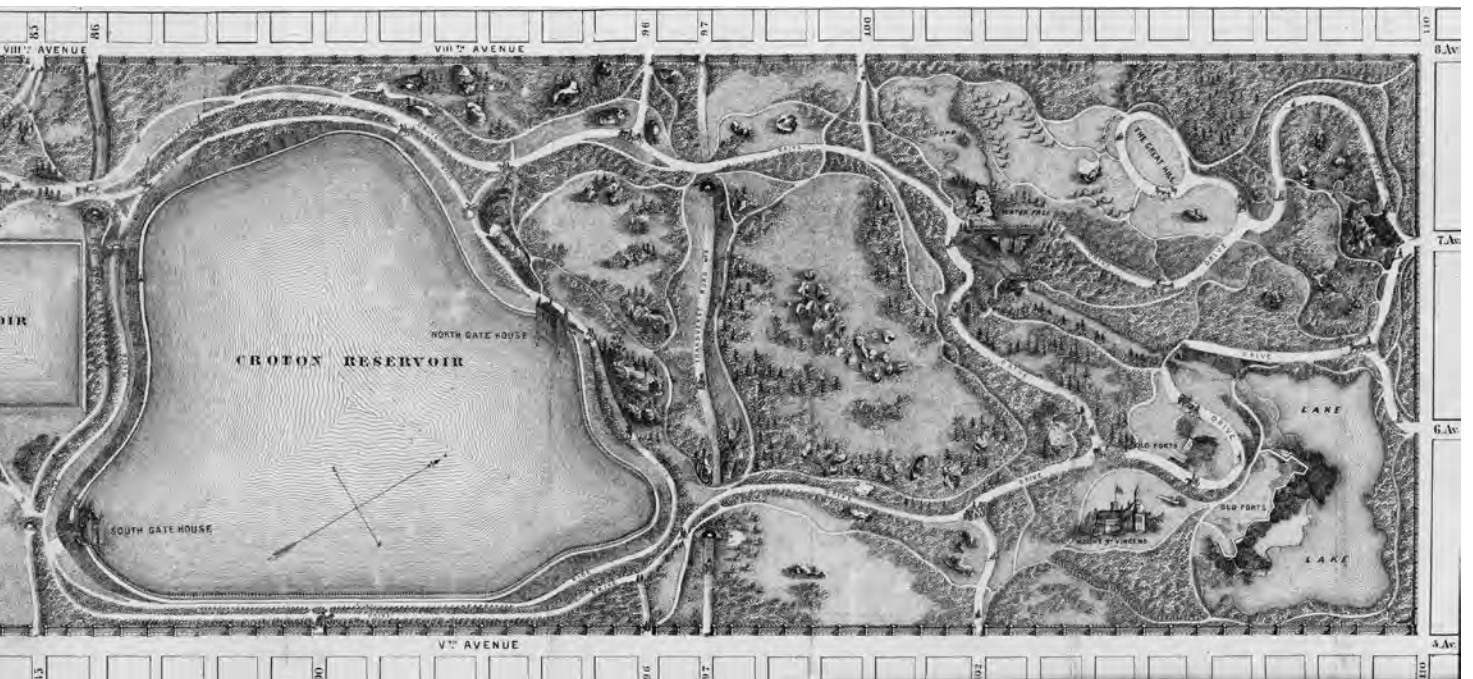
5.17. Central Park, New York City. A vast undertaking (843 acres) containing wooded sections, meadows, ponds, pavilions, driveways and bridlepaths. The first sections were opened to the public in late 1858.







5.18. Riverside, Illinois. Widely recognized not only as one of the first planned suburban communities in the United States but also as one of the first railway commuter suburbs and a landmark district in urban planning. Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux, Riverside was remarkable for its innovative street plan and carefully crafted public open spaces. Its success as a suburban subdivision with an attractive arcadian aesthetic made it one of the most influential early examples of speculative suburban development.



a sense of public space while easing traffic flows. But his most significant contribution was his *General Theory of Urbanization*, published in 1867. Long overlooked, it foreshadowed the technocratic approach to Anglo-American city planning established by Ebenezer Howard, Raymond Unwin, and others in the early twentieth century.

### Beyond Municipal Socialism

As cities grew larger and more complex, national rulers looked to planning and urban design to impose order, safety, and efficiency, as well as to symbolize the seats of power and authority in industrializing nation states.<sup>57</sup> This went well beyond municipal socialism, requiring an unprecedentedly strong directive from central authorities. It also went well beyond reform, involving radical restructuring of the built environment: much more radical than most practitioners in the design fields had ever contemplated.

The most important early precedent was set in Paris by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (later declared Emperor Napoléon III), who presided over a comprehensive program of urban redevelopment and monumental urban design. Within a year of the Paris riots that led to political revolution in 1848, he set about implementing much-discussed plans for urban renewal. A few years later, when Georges-Eugène Haussmann (fig. 5.19) was assigned as prefect of the Seine département, the modernization of Paris gathered pace. Haussmann took advantage of early planning laws to create wide boulevards, install a new water supply system and gigantic networks of sewers and street (gas) lighting. He built new bridges, a new opera house, and other public buildings, laid out the enormous parkland of the Bois de Boulogne, and made extensive improvements in smaller urban parks that turned them into places of sociality and leisure.<sup>58</sup> Within this new framework, modernized industry flourished, along with mass cultural entertainments and new spaces of consumption. It was no coincidence that the broad new roads meanwhile allowed for fast troop movement and crowd control. Haussmann had torn through the medieval urban fabric and carved up the city, peripheralizing the working class while offering vast opportunities to speculators.

The result was a powerful visual sense of modernity. As Guy Julier observes, the rebuilding of Paris:

. . . provided sweeping vistas of the cityscape so that each walk included dramatic visual effects. The boulevards became stage sets for an audience of the street-side cafés. The street provided a scenery for the middle-class stroller to see and be seen—the deprived and the destitute having been removed from the action altogether. Here, the anonymity of the crowd gave both the security of private life and the stimulation of public action.<sup>59</sup>

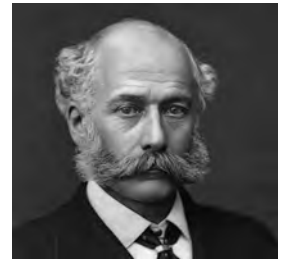
It was a city designed for looking, and for being looked at. The dominant architectural style for new buildings was the Beaux Arts style. The idea was that the new buildings in the style would blend artfully with older palaces, cathedrals, and civic buildings.



5.19. Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809-1891). Credited with leading the first significant case of state-led urban redevelopment, Haussmann was also the first to encounter organized opposition from property owners.

Amid the turmoil of modernization Paris developed, as David Harvey put it, “a culture of governance and pacification by spectacle,”<sup>60</sup> and hosted a series of world expositions (1855, 1867, 1889, and 1900). Amid the revolutionary ferment of ideas, Paris attracted and developed an unrivalled artistic and cultural scene that included, at various times, the artists Jean-Baptiste Corot, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Gustave Courbet, Camille Pissarro, Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse; the sculptor Auguste Rodin; philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon; and writers Victor Hugo, Charles Baudelaire, Honoré de Balzac, and Émile Zola. The abolition of restrictions on compulsory purchase and a radically reformed system of finance helped the government to put in place a modernized infrastructure, while new building technologies and new materials allowed for a spectacular increase in the scale of public and commercial buildings, none more so than the Palais de l’Industrie, built for the Universal Exposition of 1855.

Modernization efforts in other cities were more modest in comparison. In Britain, Parliament was finally prompted to act on a citywide scale after the “Great Stink” of 1858, when an unusually hot summer coincided with the Thames being overloaded with raw sewage. Improving the sewage system was the responsibility of the newly formed Metropolitan Board of Works and its chief engineer, Joseph Bazalgette (fig. 5.20). The board was also responsible for street improvement, and Bazalgette came up with a bold plan that merged a series of major infrastructural improvements, including the implementation of a sewerage system and the construction of new roads through demolished slums—the first set of new thoroughfares in London (with the exception of Nash’s Regent Street, completed in 1825) since the Middle Ages. Altogether, the project was a marvel of Victorian engineering. The plan was approved in 1860, and by 1870 the first 1.25 miles of the Victoria Embankment, between Westminster and Blackfriars, had been completed, dramatically changing the city’s relationship to the river. The embankment narrowed the river and reclaimed more than 3,700 acres of land for new buildings, public gardens, and a riverside boulevard furnished with distinctive benches, lamp posts, and decorative mooring rings. Beneath were massive sewer, gas and water pipes, electricity conduits, and a tunnel for the new Metropolitan District Railway.



**5.20. Joseph Bazalgette** (1819-1891). As chief engineer of London’s Metropolitan Board of Works, he oversaw the momentous state interventions of the installation of a citywide sewage system.

# 6

## The First Modernity: Paths Taken

The last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decade and a half of the twentieth reset the context for the design fields, shaping the paths taken in their responses to the changing dynamics and exigencies of urbanization. Practitioners found themselves facing new challenges and opportunities associated with the need for new kinds of buildings and infrastructure, the erasure of much of the historic fabric of cities, the realignment of urban systems, the emergence of specialized industrial cities and large metropolitan areas, the intensification of residential socioeconomic segregation, and the spread of suburbia. The professional paths chosen by architects, planners, and policymakers, individually and collectively, were interdependent with trajectories of economic, social, and political change. Design professionals made history, in other words, but—to paraphrase Marx—not in circumstances of their own choosing.

### **The First Modernity, and Organized Capitalism**

A second Industrial Revolution, with a technology system based on machine tools, coal-powered steam engines, electricity, steel, railways, transoceanic shipping, and the first internal combustion engines facilitated—and required—large-scale production, large markets, and urban systems geared to regional specialization and world trade. It resulted in global networks of communication, a standardized system of global time, the creation of universal legal norms and international standards, changing class structures, and the emergence of parapolitical institutions such as professional organizations and labor unions. Framed primarily within nation-states, these changes amounted to what sociologist Ulrich Beck has described as the First Modernity.<sup>1</sup> It produced societies based on the principle of technical rationality and the presumption that the second- and third-order effects of industrialization and structural economic change are predictable and controllable, or at least manageable.

The business sector was heavily influenced by “scientific management”: what came to be known as Taylorism.<sup>2</sup> Scientific management was key to the new regime of capital accumulation but it was also actively promoted by the growing service class of managers and professionals struggling to secure roles for themselves. The logic of large-scale industrialization was based on economies of scale, agglomeration economies, and the division of labor. Labor meanwhile began to organize around trades unions; and proto-professions developed into trade societies and professional associations.



National states took on an increasing role as facilitators of growth and promoters of technological change, creating new institutions and regulatory frameworks managed by professionalized bureaucracies. Experts, administrators, and bureaucrats assumed new levels of power and influence. It was the period that Hilferding dubbed “organized capitalism.”<sup>3</sup> In the United States the “Gilded Age” was shorthand for the conspicuous consumption and corruption of the era, while the subsequent “Progressive Era” was shorthand for reformist reaction to the economic and social problems of the unfettered capitalism and rapid urbanization of the period. As Daniel Rodgers notes in *Atlantic Crossings*, the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries was also an “Atlantic Era” during which the international roots of progressive reforms in urban planning, housing, and social services were established among a network of cosmopolitan progressives concerned with the problems and miseries of the “great city.”<sup>4</sup>

### Urban Change

Organized capitalism also required urban settings to be reframed and managed. Municipalities acquired increased powers to tax, spend, and annex neighboring communities. Local politics, meanwhile, played out quite differently in cities on either side of the Atlantic. In Britain, political energy developed from radicalized working-class voters, organized around institutions such as the Social Democratic Foundation, the Fabian Society, and the Independent Labour Party and the intellectual driving force of reformers like Sidney and Beatrice Webb. They were “gas and water socialists,” standing for progressive taxation, housing and land reform, the provision of municipal housing, and the expansion of municipal enterprise along the lines of progressive cities like Birmingham and Manchester.

The need for a numerate and literate workforce meanwhile had significant implications for mass culture and national politics. Public education became a priority of national governments, and increased literacy and communications led to pressure for a more democratic political environment. Some states in the United States allowed women to vote, and Northern states allowed black males to vote. In Britain, the Representation of the People Act 1867 enfranchised part of the urban male working class for the first time. Some observers expected the newly enfranchised proletariat to exert a radically progressive shift in national politics, but the working class promptly voted the patrician elite back into office, an event that prompted a bitter exchange of correspondence between Marx and Engels, with the comment from Engels, “Once again the working class has disgraced itself terribly.” It would be left to upper-middle-class reformers and protoprofessionals to advance any kind of radical agenda of urban reform.

Cities in the United States were dominated by immigrant-based political “machines” until the path-shaping economic recessions of the 1870s and 1890s stirred the urban elite to form alliances to install representatives who would improve the business climate. The leadership of every town and city



came to realize that, under the dramatic spatial reorganization involved in forging an industrial economy, their economic future depended on outdoing their competitors in attracting investors in manufacturing and business through public investment in infrastructure and amenities. As a result, the public interest came to be defined and accepted as much in terms of aggregate economic benefits as in issues of social justice and community well-being. The moral reform crusaders of the Progressive Era meanwhile stressed civics and “positive environmentalism”—improving the physical condition of the slums—as a means of making the city a “moral habitat.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Sermons in Brick**

This changing sociopolitical milieu was enmeshed with—and became socially meaningful through—various aspects of culture, including general discourses around taste and design and the specific products of artists and designers. The late nineteenth century provided some graphic examples. In Britain, for example, public elementary schools, public libraries, settlement houses, art galleries, and museums were widely understood as signs of change within a climate of social reform. The architecture of these institutions required a readable, indeed didactic, vocabulary “which was intended to be comprehensible to both ratepaying public and the public which daily used the buildings.”<sup>6</sup>

Edward Robert Robson, the London School Board’s chief architect, referred to his buildings as “sermons in brick.” Robson’s schools became a common denominator among London’s districts: distinctive three-story edifices in pared-down Domestic Revival style, standing out in high relief against a general background of cramped Victorian and Edwardian stock-brick terraced housing. They were described by Arthur Conan Doyle as “beacons of the future” (fig. 6.1a). Gothic Revival architecture, meanwhile, was seen by many as an expression of “Britishness,” part of a nationalized discourse of history and imperial power alongside other important signifiers such as art, flags, and the national anthem, all of them mobilized to give tangible form to abstract “national” values.<sup>7</sup> In short, “Gothic was the style of English patriotism,”<sup>8</sup> and it was duly deployed for Establishment churches and government buildings.

More subtle, but equally important in terms of the interdependence of the built environment, its symbolism, and trajectories of economic, social, and political change was the “urban dowry” of technological and commercial landmarks associated with the new infrastructure networks of late nineteenth century cities. The attraction of gasometers, water towers, pumping stations, power plants, and streetcar and railway networks on the one hand, and of luxury hotels and restaurants, shopping arcades and department stores (“cathedrals of consumption”) on the other, lay in the promise they were carrying for a more equal society and a better future. “The phantasmagoria of and fascination with technological networks and cathedrals in the urban experience, and their combined role as ideology supporters and

*The architecture of these institutions required a readable, didactic vocabulary*



6.1. New institutions and new infrastructure. New landscape elements that promised better cities for all. Clockwise from top left: (6.1a) Tabard Street School, Southwark, London; (6.1b) New End Institution for the Poor, Hampstead; (6.1c) Abbey Mills sewage pumping station, Stratford, "the Cathedral of Sewage," opened in 1868 as part of Bazalgette's new system; (6.1d) Southwark and Vauxhall Water Company's Hampton Water Treatment Works, reservoirs and filtration system, established in 1855; (6.1e) Barnardo's Homes for Orphan and Destitute Girls, Barking, established in 1866.

objects of admiration and worship, suggests that they became fetishized products in a double sense”: signs and wish-images of a better society that was yet to arrive.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Design Fields and the First Modernity**

Economic specialization and social differentiation were reflected in a proliferation of specialized societies, councils, associations, and institutes. The design fields themselves were increasingly organized, differentiating themselves from one another, focusing their vocations, formalizing their membership, and defending their respective roles.

The emergence of town planning was the most striking development of the era. It was a field whose time had come, emerging from the many incremental, intertwined reform movements whose origins can be traced to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But the reformism that spawned the town planning movement embodied a deep paradox that has persisted in the make-up of the field from the beginning. The paradox was this: Although urbanization was the vehicle capitalism needed in order to marshal goods and labor efficiently, it created dangerous conditions under which the disadvantaged and the exploited could organize themselves and consolidate. Planning, as a response to this paradox, was born a hybrid creature, dedicated on the one hand to humanistic reform, but charged on the other with the management of urban land and services according to the imperatives of a particular mode of production. Its task was to create conditions in which workers could flourish and enjoy good health, without flourishing to such a degree that they would rise above their allotted station to challenge the established social and political order.

It would, however, be naive to seek to trace a one-way relationship between the growth of organized capitalism, the emergence of the town planning movement, and the design and management of settings conducive to the preservation of the status quo:

Indeed, one would expect to find complex and ambiguous relationships in a movement that originally sprang up as a counter to the unfettered forces of capitalism only to find itself taken over in the long-term defence of the capitalist social formation. Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that the transition from its opposing to its supporting role took place at the turn of the century. Late Victorian society was a transitional society, not merely because of the emergence of new social structures and forms of economic organisation associated with industrial capitalism, but also because the whole outlook which gave man his sense of place in the universe was tending more and more to abstract him from the order to which he had become accustomed.<sup>10</sup>

Expectations for the field thus became seeded with a burdensome combination: champion of both economic efficiency and social well-being. Claims framed in terms economic efficiency resonated with contemporary enthusiasm for scientific management, especially among industrialists and conservative politicians, even though such claims implied notions of an extension

of public control over private interests in land and property. Claims framed in terms of social well-being resonated with mounting concern over the physical and moral condition of cities, especially among reformers and liberal politicians.

Every field needs an origin story with seminal works, key people, and a canon of accepted knowledge. In the Anglo American planning tradition, the key people were Patrick Geddes, Frederick Law Olmsted, Daniel Burnham, Ebenezer Howard, and Raymond Unwin. Geddes (fig. 6.2), professor of biology at the University of Dundee, Scotland, between 1888 and 1919, was the most influential early advocate of town planning. His ideas encompassed both sets of claims, and his approaches to the problems of urbanization were to become foundational to the emergent disciplines of both town planning and, later, urban design. Geddes was fascinated by cities but appalled by what he saw. He likened them to “ink-stains and grease-spots” expanding over the natural environment, creating nothing but “slum, semislum and super-slum” with social environments that “stunt the mind.” He was an active campaigner for housing reform and had good connections in all the relevant scientific societies and progressive associations. As a scientist, he commanded considerable respect, and was able to speak out on social issues without being dismissed as a liberal do-gooder. More than anything, he believed that cities needed to be managed, just as a farmer might manage fields of crops or herds of animals. The bad had to be eradicated in order for the good to prosper. There had to be a plan for growth and development, which in turn implied an inventory of present resources.

It was this idea of an inventory, or survey, that was Geddes’s first major contribution to his amateur interest. He had his own model for undertaking such surveys in his Outlook Tower in Edinburgh, which contained a camera obscura and a collection of photographs of urban life. Influenced by the writings of French sociologist Frederic Le Play, Geddes believed that the information gathered from urban surveys should clarify the availability of resources and reveal people’s responses to their physical environment. Following the writings of French geographer Vidal de la Blache, Geddes believed that this inventory should be undertaken within the context of a city’s regional framework. This idea was a second major contribution to the field. The region, he argued in his 1915 book *Cities in Evolution*, had to be the basis for the reconstruction of economic, social, and political life. Cities and regions needed one another; they had to be planned and managed together, particularly, as he astutely observed, in view of the decentralizing forces of the new “neotechnic” technologies of electrical power and the internal combustion engine.

Geddes became a leading figure behind Britain’s first town planning legislation—the Housing, Town Planning Etc. Act, 1909. This was important, in retrospect, not for any actual legislative outcome but for the tenor of the debate that it framed. The act reverberated with the paternalism, environmental determinism, and bourgeois aesthetics that had been slowly



**6.2. Patrick Geddes** (1854-1932). A towering influence on city planning and urban design through his writing on the relationship between social processes and spatial form.

developing for fifty years or more and that would continue to shape planning ideology for another one hundred years. In the words of the bill introducing the act:

The object of the Bill is to provide a domestic condition for the people in which their physical health, their morals, their character and their whole social condition can be improved by what we hope to secure in this Bill. The Bill aims in broad outline at . . . the home healthy, the house, beautiful, the town pleasant, the city dignified and the suburb salubrious.

As John Gold notes, there was no specification about precisely who would assume responsibility for these ambitious goals.<sup>11</sup> In 1910 the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) organized an international Town Planning Conference, reflecting and expressing architects' expectation of assuming leadership of the planning movement. The same year, the Local Government Board appointed Thomas Adams, a qualified surveyor, as its first Town Planning inspector. In 1913 Adams convened a meeting of interested specialists to establish a new Institute of Town Planning, and Adams found himself duly elected as the founding president. The following year a royal charter was granted to the Institute "to advance the science and art of town planning in all aspects, including local, regional and national planning, for the benefit of the public."

Like Geddes, Adams saw planning as a question of management that, if approached properly, could meet the claims of both efficiency and social well-being. The aim was to tidy up and modernize cities, clearing out the legacy of unregulated development and making them more efficient for business as well as more equitable and amenable for residents. Tactically, enormous emphasis was placed on the separation of land uses as a rational basis for development: keeping like with like, keeping industry away from residential and recreational areas, and keeping suburban development from creeping into farmland.

Adams moved to North America and became one of the founding members of the American City Planning Institute in 1917. The organization, with Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. as its first president, served to formalize a group of assorted practitioners who had organized the first National Conference on City Planning in Washington, DC in 1909. In 1919 Adams went on to found the Town Planning Institute of Canada. As with the Institute of Town Planning in Britain and the American City Planning Institute in the United States, interested persons from any profession were admitted as members. Initially, they were mostly civil engineers or surveyors, along with some municipal officials.

Practitioners of landscape architecture meanwhile had also begun to organize. The American Society of Landscape Architects was founded in 1899 with eleven members including John Olmsted (nephew of Frederick Law Olmsted and adopted brother of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.) as president; and the first academic landscape architecture program was founded at Harvard the following year. In 1917 Theodora and Henry Hubbard published *Introduction*



to Landscape Design, the first comprehensive textbook in the field. Thomas Adams had a hand in this network too. Having associated with the Olmsteds and others during his planning consultancies in North America, he became involved with the emerging field and on returning to Britain in the late 1920s became one of the early presidents of the Institute of Landscape Architects.

The field of architecture, having begun to organize earlier and with deep historical roots, had reached a different stage in the pathway to professionalization. Architectural offices reinvented themselves as large private practices with specialized, integrated services that businessmen and public officials, used to dealing with large bureaucracies, found reassuring. In the United States the American Institute of Architects pressed Congress for legislation that would set up competitions for new government buildings—with the terms somewhat tilted in favor of AIA members. Passed in 1893, the Tarsney Act “produced a large body of excellent federal buildings, including courthouses, post offices, and other structures, prompting many states and cities to organize similar competitions for their own buildings.”<sup>12</sup>

In the next two decades the field began to organize itself along increasingly professional lines. In 1897 Illinois became the first state to require licensure for architects; in 1902 the AIA required new candidates for membership to have graduated from an approved school or to have passed a special institute examination; and in 1909 the first formal code of ethics was adopted. By 1900 there were nine universities offering full courses in architecture, and in 1912 the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture was founded to encourage the exchange of information and the setting of high, uniform standards. The goal of American colleges was to produce, as the AIA’s Committee on Education put it, the “gentleman of general culture with special architectural ability.”<sup>13</sup>

The situation in Britain was broadly similar. The first full-time three-year course in architecture was established in King’s College, London, in 1892. RIBA membership had reached more than 1,500 by 1900 and, as in the United States, formalized education was increasingly important as a professional qualification. In 1887 the RIBA had organized its examination into three parts—preliminary, intermediate, and final—the first two being voluntary and the third an obligatory qualification for associateship.

Yet the field’s emphasis on aesthetics and its determination to cling to the path of design-as-fine-art did not sit well with the idea of formal coursework and compulsory examinations. A significant number of leading practitioners in Britain refused to join the RIBA, asserting that a candidate’s artistic qualifications could not be “brought to the test of examination, and that a diploma of architecture obtained by such means would be a fallacious distinction, equally useless as a guide to the public and misleading as an object for the efforts of the student.”<sup>14</sup> One of Britain’s leading practitioners, Richard Norman Shaw, published a collection of essays on *Architecture: A Profession or An Art* (1892), arguing in favor of the Romantic ideal of artistic autonomy.<sup>15</sup>

*Architectural  
offices reinvented  
themselves as large  
private practices  
with specialized,  
integrated services*

For the moment, the field had to rely on its Great Men—charismatic designers such as Daniel Burnham, Richard Morris Hunt, George Gilbert Scott, Richard Norman Shaw, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright—as warrants for the routine practice of the field as a whole. The inherent subjectivity of design-as-fine-art required vigorous assertiveness, which in turn encouraged the leading practitioners to carefully curate their own image. Frank Lloyd Wright, with his trademark porkpie hat, cane, flowing capes and scarves, and his outrageous pronouncements on his own genius, provided an influential model of the genre.

### **Spatial Organization and Social Disorder**

The enabling technologies of railway and streetcar networks were key to urban spatial organization. Specialized business districts and civic centers were drawn to the areas around main railway stations and factory and warehouse districts gravitated to marshalling yards. The established bourgeoisie and the newly rich of the Gilded Age either consolidated their dominance of mansion districts or moved out altogether to exurban estates. Other households, if they could afford it, moved out to new suburban developments served by streetcars and suburban railways. By channeling the flow of people toward suburbia, railways and streetcar lines relieved the pressure of numbers in inner cities and so lanced the boil that threatened to fester into an open wound of rebellion.

The political elite were well aware of this. In London, the Great Eastern Railway's extension to its terminus at Liverpool Street was granted by Parliament in 1864 on condition that the company offer a minimum number of suburban trains with cheap workmen's fares. Working-class suburbs subsequently developed around Tottenham and Edmonton, and soon the Great Eastern was offering more workmen's trains than required by Parliament. It has been suggested that this was a deliberate strategy to give a geographical focus to the working-class suburban neighborhoods and so "save" other districts for the middle classes.<sup>16</sup> Even so, the effectiveness of cheap fares in promoting affordable suburban housing had been clearly established, and in 1883 Parliament passed the Cheap Trains Act that obliged railway companies to operate a larger number of early morning and evening trains with a proportion of their tickets at reduced prices. As a result, the pace of suburbanization increased dramatically on sites that speculative developers did not feel were sufficiently attractive for middle-class housing.

For many, these changes to urban geography brought a sense of progress and optimism: a growing realization of the good city. Cities had become "electropolises." New suburbs, civic spaces, streetcar networks, telephone networks, and gas and water infrastructures were emblematic of the period's sense of progressive modernization. Lighting was just one of a series of striking changes to urban life. By the end of the nineteenth century, electrically lit department stores and shopping arcades had become the "dream spaces" of the modern city, icons of progress and cultural transformation.

Yet for all this reorganization and sense of progress there remained the very poor, who typically constituted 40 percent or more of urban populations. Competition for space and the dismal arithmetic of wages and rent left them to crowd into the dim rookeries of insanitary housing left over from previous phases of urbanization; or into the instant slums created by the same harsh logic of real estate prices and wage levels. The most notorious example of the latter was the New York “dumbbell” tenement, the product of a *Plumber and Sanitary Engineer* magazine competition in the wake of a revised housing law that had set new minimum standards for lighting and ventilation in 1879. The brief was to create higher densities on the standard Manhattan lot size of twenty-five by one hundred feet. The winning entry was James Ware’s dumbbell design (fig. 6.3), a six-story front-and-rear tenement connected by a long hall, with narrow airshafts running up the middle of the building on each side. Each dumbbell housed three hundred people in its eighty-four rooms, with ten of the fourteen rooms on each floor having access only to the almost lightless airshaft. Thousands of dumbbell tenements were built in Manhattan between 1880 and 1900, filled with impoverished migrants and immigrants who crowded into the tiny apartments.

For the better-off it was a situation that engendered, variously, fear, loathing, or sympathy: one way or another fostering a sense of crisis that increasingly overshadowed their individual and collective well-being. Resolving the plight of the slums would be crucial to any holistic realization of a good city.

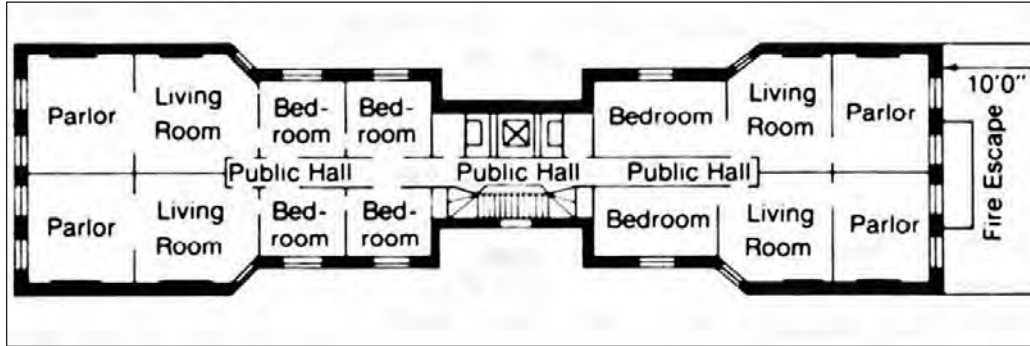
### **Fear and Loathing**

There was no shortage of evidence regarding the plight of the poor and the threat they posed to the physical, social, and moral well-being of the rest of the city. Throughout the nineteenth century there had been bursts of hand wringing and pamphleteering by liberal reformers and do-gooders, but in the 1880s and 1890s, at a time of increasing literacy, investigative journalism came into its own with lurid details of the lives of the poor. The popular British magazine *Pictorial World* carried articles by George Sims on “How the Poor Live,” while the American periodical *Wilshire’s Magazine* carried Jack London’s accounts of his experiences living in the slums of East London, subsequently published as a book, *The People of the Abyss* (1903).

Moralists were quick to join in. The Reverend Andrew Mearns’ sensational thirty-page pamphlet, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, published in 1883, was an instant bestseller. “We must face the facts” he wrote, “and these compel the conviction that THIS TERRIBLE FLOOD OF SIN AND MISERY IS GAINING UPON US.” Tellingly, Mearns’ first paragraphs noted the slum-dwellers’ non-attendance at church: “It is perhaps scarcely necessary to say of the hundreds of thousands who compose the class referred to, that very few attend any place of worship.”<sup>17</sup>

A few years later, William Booth, who had founded the Salvation Army on the streets of London’s East End, produced the jeremiad *In Darkest England*.

*Resolving the plight  
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holistic realization  
of a good city*



6.3. The tenement problem. The Dumbbell plan (6.3a, top) resulted in dingy, narrow airshafts (6.3b and 6.3.c, above) that were almost lightless and airless, though they were an improvement on older tenements.

6.4. "Bandits' Roost," Mulberry Street, New York City. Photograph taken in 1890 by Jacob Riis (1849–1914), Danish-American social reformer and journalist.

When 35 percent of all men examined for enlistment to fight the Boer Wars (between 1893 and 1902) were rejected as medically unfit, the popular conclusion was that the puny and degenerate progeny of the slums had become a threat to national security.

Statisticians and local health officers provided less sensational accounts, though they were not immune to the moralism, environmental determinism, and prejudice that had become the conventional wisdom of the professional classes. Charles Booth, who sought to bring detached statistical rigor to his seventeen volumes of *The Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889), labeled the lowest category of inhabitants as ‘Vicious, semi-criminal.’ Adna Weber, an American statistician and economist, summarizing the literature on urbanization in 1899, wrote in terms of a “theory of city degeneracy,” pointing to what he saw as incontrovertible evidence that cities were the site, and city life the cause, of the deplorable behavior of people. Among the evidence available to Weber was the conclusion of British statistician G.B. Longstaff:

That the town life is not as healthy as the country is a proposition that cannot be contradicted. ... The narrow chest, the pale face, the weak eyes, the bad teeth, of the town-bred child are but too often apparent. It is easy to take an exaggerated view either way, but the broad facts are evident enough; long life in towns is accompanied by ... degeneration.<sup>18</sup>

Another of Weber’s sources went further, emphasizing mental “degeneration”:

The inhabitant of a large town, even the richest who is surrounded with the greatest luxury, is continually exposed to the unfavorable influences which diminish his vital powers. ... He breathes an atmosphere charged with organic detritus; he eats stale, contaminated, adulterated food; he feels himself in a state of constant nervous excitement, and one can compare him without exaggeration to the inhabitant of a marshy district. The children of large towns who are not carried off at an early age ... develop more or less normally until they are 14 or 15 years of age, are up to that time alert, sometimes brilliantly endowed, and give highest promise. Then suddenly there is a standstill. The mind loses its facility of comprehension and the boy, who only yesterday was a model scholar, becomes an obtuse, clumsy dunce, who can only be steered with the greatest difficulty through his examinations. With these mental changes, bodily modifications go hand in hand.<sup>19</sup>

Many descriptions of American cities pointed to immigrant communities as corrupters of social harmony. In “How the Other Half Lives,” an article published in *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1889, Jacob Riis famously described immigrants as “beaten men from beaten races.” The slum problem had become the ghetto problem. Immigrants, previously seen as the backbone of the country, were recast in the role of public menace. With a lively writing style and powerful photographs Riis vividly portrayed the clannish ethnic



groups of the slums and their brutal living conditions (fig. 6.4). Instead of city life in general and the slums in particular being perceived as “breeding” depravity, drunkenness, poverty, gang violence, prostitution, and irreligion, it was now concentrations of immigrants that represented the root of the urban problem.

One way or another, informed opinion had reached a critical point. The slums were a fearsome danger to everyone; and free markets, left to themselves, were not going to achieve any kind of solution. Neither central nor municipal governments seemed able to address the problem of the slums, even where city leaders and political machines owed their position to the support of immigrants and low-income voters. It was consequently left to intellectuals, philanthropists, and visionaries to address the fundamental problems of poverty, ignorance, and neighborhood decline, and to propose pathways of change.

### **Thought Leaders and New Urban Imaginaries**

The emergence of organized capitalism stimulated a great deal of intellectual ferment. The economist Alfred Marshall took the dominant elements of the contemporary political economy and framed them in terms of the principles of what would become known as “neoclassical economics.” His expositions of concepts of supply and demand, marginal utility, and the costs of production in *The Principles of Economics* (1890) resonated well with business, political, and conservative intellectual communities. Max Weber took a broader view, from the perspective of economic and social history. He saw the city as the intersection of social and economic relations in capitalist society, emphasizing the rationalization, bureaucratization, and secularization associated with the emerging political economy—processes that he interpreted as inducing widespread “disenchantment.” Torstein Veblen sought to interpret the dynamics of organized capitalism in terms of the survival of the fittest. The industrial system, he observed, required those who ruled the business world to be predatory in order to survive. The principal metric of business success was now money (not land or power), and Veblen drew attention to the way that this translated into the consumption habits, tastes, and pastimes of the ruling class and *nouveau riche* of the Gilded Age.<sup>20</sup>

Others had more radical perspectives that sprang from concerns about the social and economic disparities inherent to organized capitalism. These would prove to be especially influential among planners, along with the few architects interested in the broader implications of urbanization. Henry George brought into focus the apparent paradox of escalating national wealth accompanied by increasing income inequality. He argued that the economic value derived from the development of land should be shared equally across society, and that people should keep the marginal value of their own productivity. Piotr Kropotkin, a Russian geographer and philosopher, advocated anarcho-communism in which decentralized cooperative organizations would take over the functions normally performed by governments. Citizens

*One way or another,  
informed opinion  
had reached a  
critical point*

would become familiar with both nature and technology, moving back and forth from urban to rural settings in a variety of jobs over the course of their lives, resulting in the sort of integrated, egalitarian lifestyles that had prevailed—he argued—in premodern towns and cities.<sup>21</sup>

In Britain, a good deal of intellectual effort meanwhile centered around the exploration of principles of democratic socialism by members of the Fabian Society, the preeminent political-intellectual circle of the era. Beatrice and Sidney Webb, social historians and cofounders of the London School of Economics, were key members, along with George Bernard Shaw. They rejected revolutionary ideals, promoting instead a gradual transition to a socialist society through state-mandated and facilitated egalitarianism, along with elements of the cooperative collectivism favored by anarchists.

Attempts to understand the social and psychological implications of the changes associated with organized capitalism were led by social philosophers such as Ferdinand Tönnies (fig. 6.5), Émile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel. At the heart of their analyses was an association between the scale of urban society and the nature of social organization. Their interpretations would contribute to the determinism and antiurbanism of many reformers and design professionals. One of the central concerns was with the “moral order” of urban populations: the norms of behavior and patterns of social interaction that were clearly different (and, for many, disturbingly different) from the well-worn conventions, rigid social hierarchies, and close-knit groups of rural and small-town life.

It was in this context that Ferdinand Tönnies, one of the founding fathers of sociology, established the framework for subsequent thinking about urban life by conceptualizing patterns of human association in terms of a continuum. At one end was the concept of *Gemeinschaft* (often translated as “community”), in which the basic unit of organization is the family or kin-group. Social relationships are characterized by depth, continuity, cohesion, and fulfillment; and controls over individual behavior are exerted through the informal discipline of family and neighbors. At the other extreme was the concept of *Gesellschaft* (broadly translated as “society”), in which social relationships are founded on the rationality, efficiency, and contractual obligations stemming from patterns of economic organization. Social interaction tends to be short-lived and superficial, with people bound together by formal ties to institutions and organizations; and controls over individual behavior are exerted through impersonal, institutionalized codes.

These observations were elaborated by Émile Durkheim, another of the founding fathers of sociology. He recognized that any breakdown of *Gesellschaft* would lead to anomie and an increase in deviant behavior. Simmel, meanwhile, saw urbanization as both constraining and liberating. The “lonely crowd” created by city life encourages reserve and privacy to flourish, while the plurality of styles accommodated by city life gives full scope to the variety of human creativity and leads to idiosyncratic behavior and the aestheticization of everyday life.



**6.5. Ferdinand Tönnies** (1855-1936). A founding father of sociological inquiry, best known for his ideas on the nature and relative strength of community ties in rural versus urban settings.

## Urban Imaginaries

The scale and intensity of urban problems prompted additional themes in utopian thinking. In his Presidential Address to the Social Science Association in 1875 Benjamin Richardson postulated a model city where disease would be banished.<sup>22</sup> In his city of Hygeia, one hundred thousand people would live at low densities (twenty-five per acre) in an environment of controlled cleanliness. Every house would be brick-built, systematically ventilated, resting on arches of solid brickwork, and connected to sewers. There would be gardens for every house and every public building, set along tree-lined streets. An old nuisance—tenements—would be banned, along with a new one: tramways. Public transport would be tucked away in an underground system, following the example of London's Metropolitan Railway, which had opened in 1863.

The kind of political economy that might deliver Hygeia was beyond Richardson's speculations, but in the last quarter of the nineteenth century a spate of utopian literature appeared, framed in the spirit of democratic socialism. "Almost all the American literary utopias of the 'nineties conceived of the problems of society as economic. Almost all assumed that technicians could provide for society. Almost all assumed that human want could be eradicated through technological innovation and economic organization."<sup>23</sup> But two of the most influential novels—Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1889) and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890)—introduced more radical ideas. Bellamy envisaged the stability and security of a Fabian-style centrally planned economy, with a strong state and nationalized industries run by benevolent technocrats. Morris (fig. 6.6), a disciple of Ruskin, a talented designer and craftsman, and a self-avowed revolutionary (a founder of the Marxist Socialist League) provided a blueprint for a society based on craft-orientated agrarian socialism and local self-determination: "The city is dissolved or reduced to small size. Individuals or small groups control the land, and the local community is relatively self-sufficient."<sup>24</sup> It was an arcadian scenario, emphasizing order, balanced diversity, conviviality, stability, interdependence, and a return to the virtues of the "natural" world: all of which turned out to be resilient themes.



6.6. William Morris (1834-1896). "Have nothing in your home that you do not know to be useful and believe to be beautiful."

Architecture did not feature as an important element in Bellamy or Morris's writing, but it was recognized by Samuel Barnett, Fabian Society member and ardent reformer. In his book on *The Ideal City* he noted the importance of providing inspirational buildings, even for modest building types:

Halls, galleries, libraries, baths, hospitals, colleges, asylums, prisons (many of them brilliant with mosaic) will catch and raise the thoughts of men, as in old days the thoughts of their citizens were caught by the public buildings of Florence or Venice. A visitor to the IDEAL CITY would be charmed by its first aspect: its variety of architecture, its beauty of colour, its freshness and purity.<sup>25</sup>

The ideas in these tracts and novels were among those cleverly synthesized by Ebenezer Howard (fig. 6.7), a social visionary. His 1898 book *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (reissued in 1902 as *Garden Cities of*

Tomorrow) turned out to be profoundly influential. Howard was a communitarian socialist but instead of embracing municipal investment in the older slums and districts of existing cities, as the Fabians advocated, he saw the creation of carefully designed new cities as the key to social and economic reform. One book that influenced Howard was Richardson's *Hygeia: A City of Health*; but as Peter Hall noted, "Every single one of Howard's ideas can ... be found earlier, often several times over: Ledoux, Owen, Pemberton, Buckingham, and Kropotkin all had towns of limited populations with surrounding agricultural green belts; More, Saint-Simon, Fourier all had cities as elements in a regional complex."<sup>26</sup>

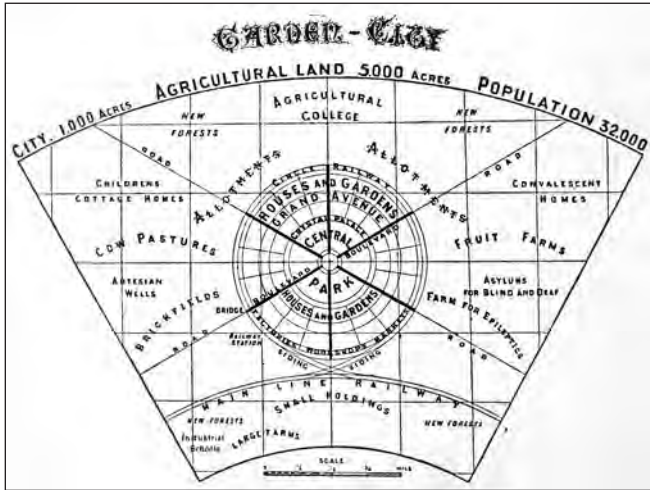
Howard's garden city ideal envisaged a communitarianism embedded in towns with limited populations, balancing the relative merits of town versus country while insisting on the subordination of the individual to the group. Garden cities should be planned and designed, he argued, so as to combine the best of city life (jobs, higher wages, civic amenities, social interaction, and so forth) with the best of life in the countryside (clean air, natural beauty, open space)—while avoiding the downside of both (the squalor and pollution of cities, the limited opportunities, and poor infrastructure of rural areas) (fig. 6.8).

Howard's goal was harmonious, self-governing communities that would grow and merge into cities of manageable size. These new self-contained towns would be located outside the commuting range of existing cities. They would be big enough to provide residents with jobs so that they did not have to commute to other urban centers, but not so big as to have the social and environmental problems of the large industrial cities of the time.

Howard's ideal plan limited each garden city to thirty thousand people on six thousand acres (about nine square miles). The built-up area was to be about one thousand acres (one-and-a-half miles in diameter), at the center of which would be public gardens surrounded by civic buildings—the town hall, courthouse, library, museums, and hospital—easily accessible by radial boulevards (fig. 6.9). This pedestrian friendly core would be surrounded by a zone of housing, with a separate but accessible zone of factories and warehouses connected by a circumferential rail line. The built-up area was to be surrounded by a permanent green belt that restricted urban sprawl and offered recreational opportunities for residents while at the same time protecting agriculture. Future growth would require the construction of new garden cities surrounding a larger Central City to form an integrated Social City.

### **Design for the Machine Age**

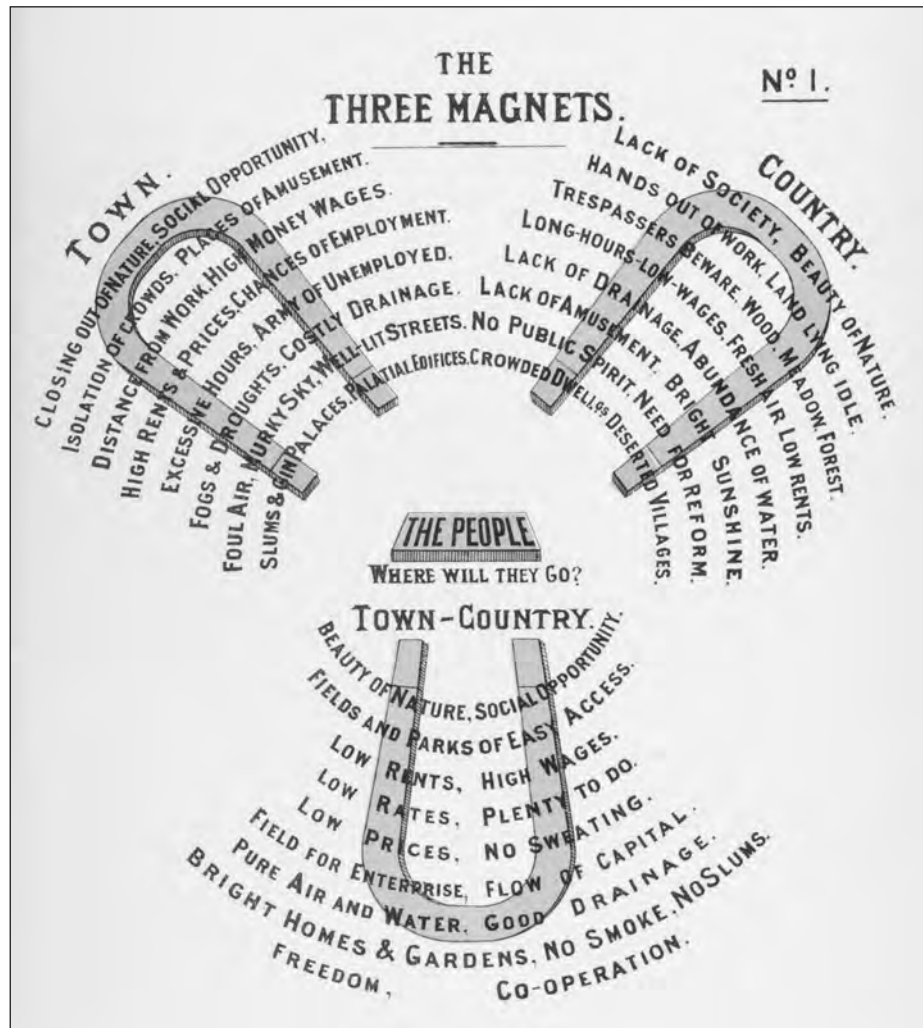
The turn of the century also saw a rash of radical thinking as artists and intellectuals not only struggled to free themselves from the canon of bourgeois taste but also to come to grips with the age of machinery, technology, and unprecedented speed—to design for the First Machine Age.<sup>27</sup> In Spain,



6.8 Howard's Garden City (above). Howard sought to ameliorate the problem of the Victorian city by exporting people and jobs to new, self-contained, towns built in open countryside. The basis of his physical model was the segregation of various land uses while at the same time ensuring that they all are easily accessible, with generous recreational space, and a 'greenbelt' of agricultural land to provide access to Nature, prevent suburban sprawl, and provide food for the inhabitants.

6.9 The Three Magnets (right). Howard's concept of planned new towns combining the advantages of urban life with integrated rural surroundings first gained wider attention in 1901 at a Garden City Conference held in Bournville. The simple, compelling logic of this diagram was subsequently a major factor in the spread of the Garden City movement.

6.7. Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928). A communitarian socialist, Howard hoped to use the rising land values generated by urbanization to benefit the town's inhabitants. Howard proposed purchasing land far enough away from a large city in order for it to be available at cheap prices, and then vesting that land in a trust. The increasing value of the trust's land would be reinvested in the city after the initial borrowings used to build the Garden City had been repaid. Howard initially believed that "It is this arrangement which will be seen to give the Garden City much of its magnetic power."





Arturo Soria y Mata, a great believer in scientific management, reimagined cities in linear form, his *Ciudad Lineal* based on spines of infrastructure to which modular residential and industrial components could be attached as needed. In Vienna, a group of artists and architects formed a group called the Vienna Secession in 1897 and formally “seceded” from the officially recognized Austrian cultural organization, the Künstlerhaus. It was the start of “the great manifesto moment,”<sup>28</sup> a flurry of declarative avant-gardism, including futurism, cubism, Dadaism, De Stijl, surrealism, and vorticism.

These movements and their manifestos were exhilarating to the art and design world and—with their esoteric theories and distinctive aesthetic and moral principles—deliberately baffling and disturbing to the bourgeoisie and established intelligentsia. The Futurist Antonio Sant’Elia sought to provoke social and institutional change through the portrayal of idealized cities that were to be stages for permanent social revolution, with huge and spectacular edifices that were at once monuments to the masses and to technology. His drawings of *La Città Nuova* (1914) featured massive concrete buildings with soaring towers and huge parapets, enormous generating stations and gigantic factories and airfields, the like of which were not to appear in real urban landscapes for another fifty years.

This radicalism was also evident in the outline for an ideal socialist city (*Une cité industrielle*, 1917) drawn up by French architect Tony Garnier. The *cité industrielle* would be built entirely out of reinforced concrete, using a system recently perfected by the French engineer Francois Hennebique. The basic housing unit would be single-family houses (none of them private property), with public open space on all sides. Rather less provocative than Sant’Elia’s *Città Nuova*, it endorsed Thomas Adams’s doctrine of the separation of land uses as a rational basis for development: keeping like with like, keeping residential and recreational areas away from industry and transportation corridors, and keeping suburban development from spreading into farmland.

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### **Regulatory Responses**

In practice, paths taken toward the regulation of spatial organization would prove to be crucial. On both sides of the Atlantic, and at both national and local levels, regulatory standards became the essential tool for solving the problems of health, safety, and morality. “With the prevailing spirit of technology and science, rational planning and utilitarian ethics were summoned to guide public policy.”<sup>29</sup> Building codes proliferated, setting standards for light, ventilation, and plumbing, the numbers of doors and sizes of vents, as well as fireproofing and fire escapes. By the 1910s, local ordinances began to govern not only construction practices but also the kind of buildings that could be erected in certain areas.

The dramatic reorganization of urban space required by the second Industrial Revolution and enabled by new technologies created some serious conflicts and tensions. The civil liberties enshrined in private land ownership meant that it did not take long before some groups mobilized against the

land uses they perceived as threats, hazards, or nuisances. In San Francisco discrimination against the Chinese was focused on the laundries that by the 1880s had spread well beyond Chinatown into other neighborhoods, where they operated as social centers for the many Chinese domestic servants who were scattered around town. The white population, regarding the laundries as havens for “undesirables,” sought to close more than three hundred of them in 1886 by declaring them nuisances and fire hazards. But in the federal courts the case of *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* struck down the statute because of the way it gave arbitrary power of racial discrimination to a board of supervisors. After this decision, the City of Modesto promptly came up with a simple ploy to satisfy the requirements of the Fourteenth Amendment: the division of the city into two zones, one excluding laundries and another permitting them.

Similar nuisance-zone statutes, directed variously against laundries, brothels, pool halls, dance halls, livery stables, and slaughterhouses, were quickly adopted in other cities. Los Angeles was zoned into three districts: residence-only (middle-class), industry-only, and residential uses with a limited range of industries (working class). The landmark New York zoning ordinance of 1916 was based on the premise that restrictions on land use are constitutional because they allow city governments to carry out their duties of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of their citizens.

Existing property owners and speculators alike appreciated the advantages of such an approach. For existing land uses, the law brought security from the threat of intrusive new activities. For speculators, the law brought a welcome degree of stability and predictability to the business of land development. It was a striking case of policy mobility: within ten years of the enactment of the New York law more than five hundred US cities had adopted similar ordinances. It was not until later that the ancestry of zoning began to tell, and it became a major means of discrimination against racial groups perceived for one reason or another as undesirable.

*Practitioners were constrained by the conservatism of clients and their markets*

### **Marketplace Aesthetics**

While avant-garde manifestos held an exciting, transgressive appeal that resonated with architecture’s self-image and its claims on taste and aesthetics, practitioners were constrained by the conservatism of clients and their markets. They also found themselves presented with new project briefs, and with new technologies and new materials with which to respond. New building typologies included corporate headquarters, shopping precincts, upper-middle class apartment buildings, and public schools and universities, for example. Older typologies had to be conceived and executed at unprecedented dimensions: factories, warehouses, theaters, hotels, and hospitals were needed at a scale that matched the demographic and economic magnitude of cities themselves.

The bourgeoisie of the Gilded Age entertained cultural aspirations commensurate with their wealth, while the captains of industry wanted

their corporate and commercial buildings designed as monuments to their achievements and as advertisements for their companies. But the aesthetic confusion carried over from the mid-nineteenth century became a source of vulnerability for both clients and practitioners:

The “good taste” industry was relatively new, and no hierarchical ranking of “schools of good taste” or “morally correct” style was available. Merchant kings and entrepreneurs, industrialists and inventors, employed architects or designers whom they believed respectable, only to find photographs of their new corporate headquarters illustrating “Architectural Aberrations,” a regular feature in the professional journal, *The Architectural Record*.<sup>30</sup>

Gradually, more coherent aesthetic responses began to evolve. In North America, a particular sequencing of historical events transformed cultural understandings of architecture.<sup>31</sup> There were two very different sets of outcomes, one drawing on distinctively American circumstances, the other on European precedents. The former produced the skyscrapers that were to become emblematic not only of American urbanization but also of capitalism itself. Chicago became the seedbed for skyscraper development because the technical preconditions for their construction had coincided with the need to rebuild the center of the city after the fire of 1871. The fire razed one-third of the city’s fabric and allowed the city to dramatically revise its building landscape while its population doubled (including thousands of newly arrived European immigrant metalworkers and builders) and its real estate values increased by more than 600 percent between 1880 and 1890. By the mid-1880s the price per ton of structural steel was low enough to make tall buildings with steel framing feasible, while innovations in using caissons for digging foundations were also an important enabling factor. Even so, it took another technological innovation—the telephone—to make skyscrapers practicable settings for businesses. The telephone allowed businesses to dispense with human messengers who would have clogged the elevators of tall buildings.

The first true skyscraper was the Home Insurance building, designed by William Le Baron Jenney in 1895. His work, along with that of Louis Sullivan (another Chicago architect who had trained as an engineer) and the Chicago practices of Burnham and Root and Holabird and Roche, was part of what became known as the Chicago Commercial School. The Commercial School recognized the importance of buildings as an investment tool, minimizing ornamentation because it was costly. Sullivan’s slogan, “form follows function,” provided a suitably enigmatic rationale that hinted at aesthetics and efficiency rather than naked finance. As the central business districts of American cities began to fill with buildings, the market value of (and taxes on) downtown real estate soared: skyscrapers were an obvious solution. Mona Domosh pointed to a second commercial rationale: tall buildings as forms of recognition and display for their corporate owners.<sup>32</sup> Carol Willis emphasized that “form follows finance,” pointing to “vernaculars of capitalism, “

*“Form follows function” provided a suitably enigmatic rationale that hinted at aesthetics and efficiency rather than finance*

with differences between skyscrapers in Chicago (larger lots, smaller towers) and New York (smaller lots, taller towers) that can be explained in terms of historical cadasters and municipal regulations and zoning strategies.<sup>33</sup>

The other, parallel development in North America was the adoption of Beaux-Arts styles as a way of resolving aesthetic confusion. The Beaux-Arts tradition continued to dominate the American academy, especially with regard to its painterly sensibilities and stress on composition and technique. For practicing architects the Beaux-Arts approach provided a convenient packaging of high culture that promised to eliminate confusion and uncertainty about how to build better cities. The decisive episode was the success of the neoclassical architecture commissioned by Daniel Burnham for the “White City” at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 (fig. 6.10). The temporary structures of the exposition showed what might be done, and seeded the City Beautiful movement. The central concern of the movement was the role of the built environment as an uplifting and civilizing influence on people, and the preferred architectural style was Beaux-Arts, accompanied by matching statuary, monuments, and triumphal arches—all, if possible, laid out like Burnham’s White City at the Chicago Exposition, with uniform building heights and imposing avenues with dramatic perspectives.

The symbols and motifs of Beaux-Arts architecture and monuments not only suggested a link with the great European cities of the past but also helped to legitimize America’s Anglo Saxon ruling classes and institutions at a time of massive immigration and profound socioeconomic change. At the same time, the broad boulevards and malls and radiating road networks that framed City Beautiful projects were welcomed by civic boosters as providing an orderly physical framework for economic development; and by landowners whose property values escalated in anticipation of the implied redevelopment of large tracts of central city land. The City Beautiful movement therefore flourished—albeit briefly—because it allowed private enterprise to function more efficiently while symbolizing a noble idealism that was endorsed by the pedigree of Beaux-Arts neoclassicism. Above and beyond the good intentions of its leading figures and technicians, “the City Beautiful Movement perfectly fulfilled its true function of matching maximum planning with maximum speculation.”<sup>34</sup>

In 1901, Burnham collaborated with several others (including Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.) on the McMillan Plan for Washington, DC. The purpose of the McMillan Plan was to rescue the Mall area from the neglected and unfinished framework derived from L’Enfant’s original plan of 1791. The centerpiece of the new plan was the redeveloped Mall and Federal Triangle, with neoclassical buildings along the Mall, a terminal memorial (the Lincoln Memorial), a pantheon (the Jefferson Monument), the Memorial Bridge, and a water basin. The plans and sketches drew enough publicity to ensure the immediate future of the City Beautiful movement, and Burnham went on to draw up grandiose plans for Cleveland (in 1902), San Francisco (1905), and Chicago (1909, fig. 6.11) before his death in 1912.



**6.10. The White City, Chicago.** Built in Beaux-Arts neoclassical style under the supervision of Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmsted, the "White City" was created for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, in 1893. Nineteenth-century World Expositions were "spaces of triumph," celebrating the technologies and consumerism of an incipient Modernity. The Chicago World's Fair was explicitly intended to set a standard for architectural and urban design, and Olmsted's overall plan of axes, basins, ponds and park-like landscaping helped to establish landscape itself as yet another commodity.



**6.11. Burnham's Chicago Plan.** Daniel Burnham famously advised cities to "Make no little plans." His own plan for Chicago, published in 1909, was a splashily illustrated volume that was a blueprint for expansion, a framework for speculation, and a design to embellish the city, to flatter its leaders, and impress its inhabitants. It did nothing, however, to address the city's fundamental problems of slum housing and social malaise.

COPYRIGHT, 1909, BY COMMERCIAL CLUB OF CHICAGO  
CXXXII. CHICAGO. VIEW, LOOKING WEST, OF THE PROPOSED CIVIC CENTER PLAZA AND BUILDINGS, SHOWING IT AS THE CENTER OF THE SYSTEM OF ARTERIES OF CIRCULATION AND OF THE SURROUNDING COUNTRY.  
Painted for the Commercial Club by Jules Guerin.



In Germany there was an important dissenting voice, though the English-speaking world was largely unaware of it until later. Camillo Sitte's *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* ("Town Planning According to Its Artistic Principles," 1889) made the case for the aesthetic superiority of picturesque old towns over grand vistas with huge squares and monuments. Sitte was in favor of narrow and curvilinear streets with irregular clusters of buildings around small piazzas, and claimed that such settings were not only aesthetically more pleasing but also more conducive to sociality. He believed that grid layouts doomed America to permanent cultural mediocrity. But his book was not translated into English until 1945 and his influence in Britain and America was limited.

The City Beautiful movement meanwhile spurred the development of business-oriented city planning commissions and created an awareness of the need for technical experts to prepare plans. Burnham himself famously advised cities to "Make no little plans." His own plan for Chicago was a generously illustrated volume that was truly metropolitan in scope, with proposals for a system of regional ring roads connected to downtown Chicago by a series of radial highways and parkways, and a series of parks, marinas, and developments along the lakeshore. It was a scheme for expansion, a framework for speculation, a design to embellish the city, to flatter its leaders, and to impress its inhabitants. It was a long way short of a plan to achieve the good city; however, it did nothing to address the fundamental problems of slum housing and social malaise, and had no concern for the neighborhood as a cohesive unit.

The City Beautiful movement was an implicitly rather authoritarian attempt to create moral and social order in the face of urbanization processes that seemed to threaten disorder and instability. Its success did not last long, however, because, as in Europe, the dynamics of urbanization were changing. Streetcars and suburban railways had begun to turn cities inside out and, by the time of Burnham's death in 1912, automobiles were beginning to make their mark. In this new context, monumentality was seen as impractical, while the movement's total lack of concern for housing was already understood as a major shortcoming.

Beaux-Arts architectural styles, on the other hand, had more staying power. "Adopting the Beaux-Arts stylistic system enabled the profession as a whole to justify itself by the nature of how it did what it did."<sup>35</sup> It provided a rational design method that could be formally taught in schools, a practical foundation for its routinization in large offices, and a coherent disciplinary framework with which professionalization could be pursued.<sup>36</sup> The Beaux-Arts approach was institutionalized through its adoption by one of the largest and most prestigious practices, McKim, Mead, and White, and by the establishment of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects (in 1893) and the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design (in 1916). Enthusiasm for the approach led to large numbers of American students traveling to Paris between 1890 and 1910, hoping to be admitted to the *École des Beaux-Arts* itself, while American

*The City Beautiful movement was an implicitly rather authoritarian attempt to create moral and social order*

colleges intensified their commitment to the standardization of architectural curricula along *École* lines, organized around studio projects, competitions, and design juries—another important case of path dependence.

Aversion to all things French meant that *Beaux-Arts* styles found little favor among British architects and their clients. Good taste continued to be defined through historical revivalism, the latest versions being dominated by Domestic Revival (often loosely labeled as Queen Anne) styles. Domestic Revival designs were especially popular among the expanded class of *nouveau riche* during the great phase of building from the 1870s to the 1920s, when large fortunes were being made in the City. Richard Norman Shaw, the leading architect of the day, was a leading exponent of the style, which was really just another retrogressive impulse, based on English and Flemish houses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and featuring steeply pitched roofs, shaped gables, bay and oriel windows, massive brick chimney-stacks, and stone dressings. Shaw was the architect for the west London railway suburb of Bedford Park, which became a model for low-density development and an important influence on the style of speculative domestic building in Britain. The poet and commentator John Betjeman, writing in 1998, famously described Bedford Park as “the most significant suburb built in the last century, probably in the western world.”<sup>37</sup>

The most original response to the political economy of organized capitalism in Britain was the Arts and Crafts movement, which flourished between 1880 and 1910. Inspired by a romantic idealization of craftspersons taking pride in their personal handiwork, it was intended as antidote and antithesis to industrialization and its alienation of labor. The movement was led by William Morris, who made design a kind of moral crusade, and is famous for a phrase in his 1870 book, *The Beauty of Life*: “Have nothing in your home that you do not know to be useful and believe to be beautiful.”

Natural materials were preferred, and dominant design motifs included stylized flowers, upside-down hearts, Celtic patterns, and the minimalism of Japanese art. Advocates of the movement sought to copy the medieval system of trades and guilds, setting up their own companies to sell their goods. Unfortunately, their products could not be priced within reach of the great mass of households. Staying true to craft techniques meant that the products of Arts and Crafts designers were well beyond the reach of the working classes whose interests and well-being they championed. Arts and Crafts designers rejected the mass production methods that could produce cheap, affordable products because they did not want to turn independent craftspersons into “wage slaves.” This dilemma was not lost on Morris, who asked “who will free me from pandering to the luxury of the swinish rich?”<sup>38</sup>

The emphasis of the Arts and Crafts movement on craft and Nature carried over directly to art nouveau. Its use of sinuous organic themes and emphasis on the synthesis of ornament and structure was a deliberate attempt to be free of imitative historicism, and the aesthetic soon spread to the United States and to the European continent, where it was called

*“Who will free me  
from pandering to  
the luxury of the  
swinish rich?”*

Sezessionstil in Austria, Jugendstil in Germany, Stile Floreale in Italy, and Modernismo in Spain. Meanwhile the Arts and Crafts movement itself spread to North America through local utopian production communities, workshops, and Arts and Crafts societies. Gustav Stickley, a furniture designer, brought the Arts and Craft aesthetic to the mainstream by eschewing the strict ideology of craftsmanship and embracing key principles of organized capitalism: mechanized production, scientific management, and economies of scale. He made Arts and Crafts houses that were designed as a unified whole, including furniture and fittings, available to households of moderate means through his magazine, *The Craftsman*. For a small membership fee, readers could join the Craftsman Homebuilders Club and receive full working drawings of such houses. Similar pattern-book designs were promoted by periodicals such as *House Beautiful* and the *Ladies Home Journal*. The Arts and Crafts aesthetic was meanwhile refined by Frank Lloyd Wright and others as “Prairie style” suburban residences for wealthy clients.

### **Reform: Innovation and Implementation**

In parallel with the struggles to resolve aesthetic confusion there were continuing—though limited—efforts to improve the conditions of the poor. Much of this drew on earlier precedents, with new communications technologies, media, and professional conferences accelerating policy mobilities and the adaptation and diffusion of best practices. As before, the principal direction of transmission was from Britain and Continental Europe to North America. But by the end of the nineteenth century the political economy of Britain and the United States had begun to diverge significantly with regard to attitudes to key aspects of urban policy and planning.

### **The Momentum of Reform**

The incremental reforms of the late nineteenth century extended regulatory frameworks, building codes, and zoning ordinances, added to the stock of philanthropic housing, and expanded public utilities. In the emerging political economy, cities came to be regarded increasingly as complex “machines” that might be rationally organized as a single system. Engineers and reformers drew on this notion in campaigning for improved networks of infrastructure to bring order, efficiency, and sanitation to cities. By the end of the nineteenth century, citywide sewage and water systems, gas and electricity grids, street lighting, and transport networks were commonplace.

The provision of sound and affordable housing for poor and low-income households was a more challenging proposition. In Britain, philanthropists and voluntary associations persisted with efforts to demonstrate that it could be done. By the time of the 1885 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, twenty-eight model housing societies of one sort or another were paying between 4 and 5 percent dividends, showing that improved dwellings for low-income households—if not the very poor—could be reasonably remunerative. It was estimated that in London almost

thirty thousand families had been housed on 254 sites.<sup>39</sup> By this time model housing associations had also sprung up in the United States. The Boston Cooperative Building Company, founded in 1871 by a group of socially prominent civic leaders, adopted British design and financial ideas, as did the Improved Dwellings Association in Brooklyn, led by Alfred T. White, who “straightforwardly borrowed the arrangements of the Peabody and Waterlow estates” in London.<sup>40</sup> Other notable limited-dividend companies included the City and Suburban Homes Company in New York and the Washington Sanitary Improvement Company and the Washington Sanitary Homes Company in Washington, DC.

These efforts did not substantially affect the overall magnitude of the housing problem, and the rents needed to ensure a return of 4 to 7 percent meant that the poor were consigned to continue to live in slums. Reformers consequently resorted to settlement houses in an effort to at least influence behavior. Settlement houses had their origin in Octavia Hill’s management style, described in her book *Homes of the London Poor* (1883). Hill purchased a group of slum houses known as Paradise Place in London and set about personal involvement with the tenantry: frequent visits, insistence on prompt payment of rents, and stern encouragement of cleanliness in common areas such as stairs and landings. With evidence of self-help, Hill promised improvements to the dwellings, as far as the rents allowed. Hill’s approach appealed to reformers’ attachment to the virtues of social mix, and it led to volunteer “friendly visitor” movements in many cities.

The flaw was that visitors, by definition, did not hang around for long. This is what the settlement movement sought to rectify. In 1884 Samuel Barnett and his wife, Henrietta, founded Toynbee Hall, named in honor of their friend and fellow reformer Arnold Toynbee. The basic idea was to get the poor to learn from their social superiors by locating settlement houses in low-income neighborhoods. Middle-class volunteers would live in the settlement house. Working at their usual occupations by day, their spare time would be spent among local residents, who were encouraged to join the settlement and use its facilities as a sort of social club. In short, middle-class individuals would be able to demonstrate their comportment and spread their values and clean habits by way of daily interaction with local residents, eventually socializing the poor into middle-class standards of family life and educational achievement. The appearance and placement of settlement houses were critical in setting the terms of the rituals to be enacted:

Whether purpose-built or an existing accommodation taken over and made into a Settlement, the site was separate and distinct from the rest of the community, affording the local poor visitor to the Settlement a “glimpse of a new, fresh, and pleasant way of looking at the world.”<sup>41</sup>

The architecture also had a didactic function: “The Settlement movement developed a self-consciously paternalistic architecture which tallied with the movement’s nostalgic view of history.”<sup>42</sup> Toynbee Hall was designed

in Vicarage Gothic style by Elijah Hoole, the architect of many of Octavia Hill's philanthropic housing schemes. Toynbee Hall also served a very different didactic function. As a university settlement house it was established as a place for future leaders to live and work in London's East End, bringing them face to face with poverty while undertaking voluntary work, offering free legal advice and organizing extension classes. The men and women who spent time at Toynbee Hall included many of those who were to lay the foundations of social reform that culminated in the establishment of the British Welfare State. Not least among these were William Beveridge, author of the seminal *Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services* (the Beveridge Report, 1942), and Clement Atlee, prime minister 1945–51.



**6.12. Jane Addams** (1860-1935). An activist reformer, social worker, sociologist, public administrator and author, Addams cofounded the Hull House settlement house in Chicago in 1889 to serve recently arrived European immigrants.

One of the first settlement houses in the United States was the Neighborhood Guild (later renamed the University Settlement), established in a New York slum tenement by Stanton Coit in 1886; another well-known early example was Hull House in Chicago, established by Jane Addams (fig. 6.12). Peter Hall saw the outcome as “distinctly American”: “a voluntary movement dedicated to saving the immigrant from his (and, especially, her) own errors and excesses, socializing him into American folkways, and adjusting him to city life.”<sup>43</sup> The settlement house proved to be just what eager volunteers—mainly women—were looking for. They organized continuing education for school dropouts, summer camps, and neighborhood playgrounds to expose children to the virtues of Nature, day nurseries for working women, educational programs to save “fallen” women, and social clubs for the elderly. Volunteers also undertook social surveys in order to strengthen their arguments for reform and they campaigned for the prohibition of alcohol. In 1891 there were six settlement houses in the United States; by the turn of the century there were more than one hundred; and by 1910 there were more than four hundred.

### Industrial Communities

Following the early examples of New Lanark, Ackroydon, Saltaire, and Lowell, industrial communities multiplied in number in both Britain and the United States. Many were small and specialized, such as Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, planned for the Apollo Steel Company by Frederick Law Olmsted; Tyrone, New Mexico, a copper-mining community; Indian Hill, Massachusetts, for employees of the Norton Grinding Company; the British Aluminium Company's Foyers Estate on Loch Ness; and the Woodlands Colliery Village near Doncaster. George Pullman, inventor of the railway sleeping car, established a company town—Pullman—in 1880 just south of Chicago with its own housing, shops, churches, theaters, parks, hotel, and library for his employees. Pullman, however, was overbearingly paternalistic: he would not allow independent newspapers, public speeches, town meetings, or open discussion. His inspectors regularly entered workers' homes to check for cleanliness and could terminate leases on ten-days' notice. When the railroad business fell off in 1894, Pullman cut jobs, wages, and working hours, but not



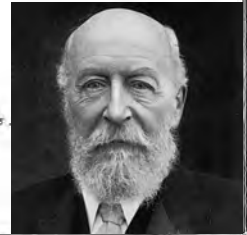
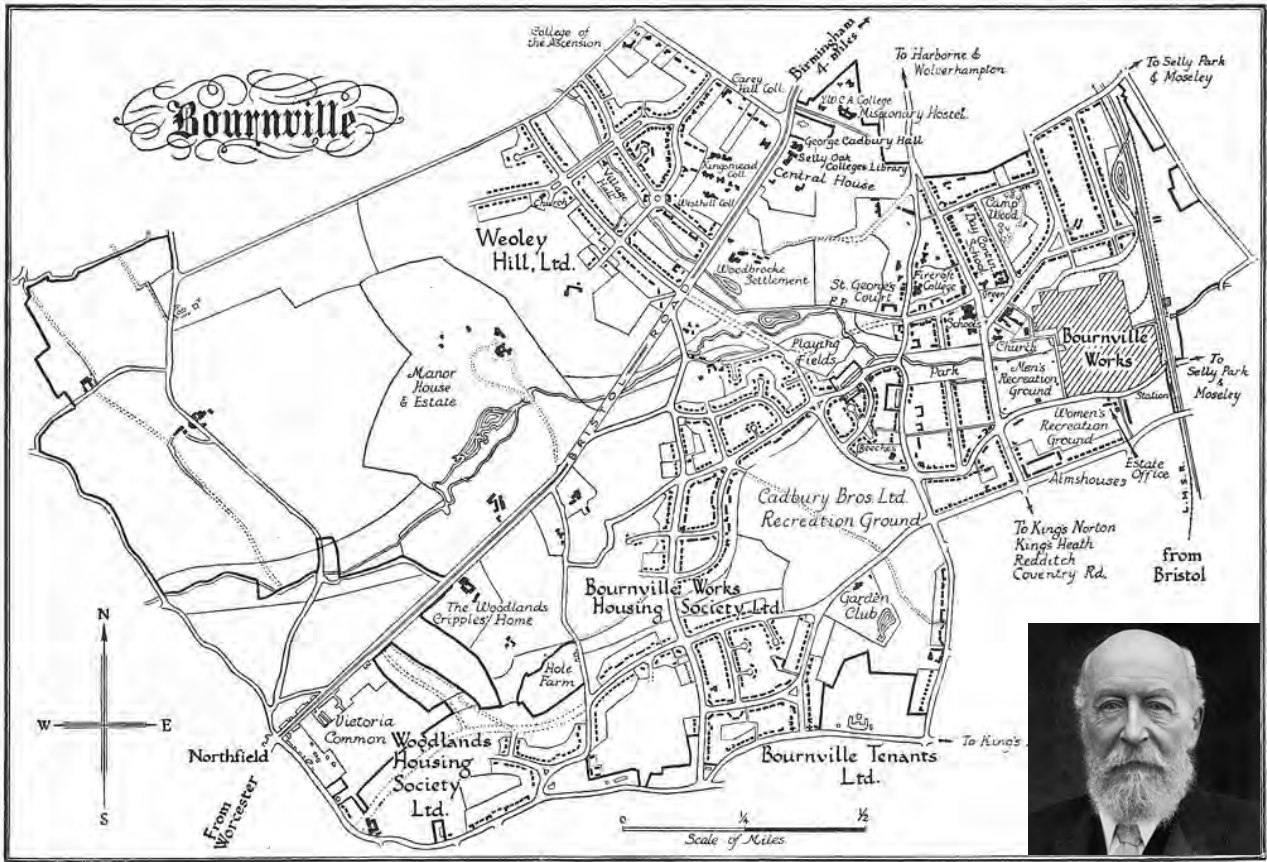
rents or prices in his town. The workers rebelled, their violent strike prompting a national commission that concluded that Pullman's paternalism was partly to blame and that the idea of a company town was "un-American."

In Britain, William Lever built Port Sunlight on the Wirral Peninsula across from Liverpool in the 1890s as a pioneer exercise in labor management. Lever was greatly interested in profit-sharing—"prosperity-sharing," as he called it—and his workers were provided with homes at rents that covered only local taxes plus a repair and maintenance fee. Port Sunlight consisted of small groups of picturesque cottages laid out at a low density, giving an arcadian feel. Architecturally, it was a great success, but its profit-sharing basis meant that it was not widely emulated. In contrast, George Cadbury, having moved his cocoa factory from Birmingham to a greenfield site at nearby Bournville, wanted to build a model community that was financially sound to the point where, after repairs and maintenance costs had been deducted, there should still be a return of 4 percent. In so doing, Cadbury hoped that he would be able to demonstrate to speculative builders that the construction of low-density workers' housing could be a profitable activity. For this reason Bournville (fig. 6.13) was never intended simply to house Cadbury's own workers. Rather, tenants were sought from the emerging middle class of "honest, sober, thrifty" families, and Cadbury employees were always a minority of the district's residents.

### **A Path Taken; Lessons Learned**

The efforts of Lever, Cadbury, and others did not escape the attention of political leaders. The leader of the Tory Party, Lord Salisbury, published an article in the November 1883 issue of the *National Review*, expressing the concerns of the elite over working-class housing conditions and suggesting that factory owners might provide housing for their workers. Salisbury also floated the idea of increased government loans to model dwellings companies and tighter regulation of speculative building.<sup>44</sup> Salisbury's article was credited with prompting a Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, convened in 1884. It was to precipitate a crucial sequence of pathbreaking events.

The commission's report, in three volumes, was comprehensive, with a vast amount of documentary evidence, much of it concerned with overcrowding and its consequences. Salisbury was a member of the commission, and by the time the report was published in 1885, he had become prime minister. Widely criticized in the press and Parliament for entertaining the prospect of state socialism, Salisbury responded "Do not imagine that by merely affixing to it the reproach of Socialism you can seriously affect the progress of any great legislative movement, or destroy those high arguments which are derived from the noblest principles of philanthropy and religion."<sup>45</sup> Under his administration the Local Government Act, 1888, created county boroughs in England and Wales, giving municipalities much greater powers of taxation and spending. In addition, London County Council (LCC) was created as a metropolitan-wide authority. In 1890 the Housing of the Working Classes Act empowered the new LCC to demolish the worst slums and build new tenements and blocks of flats.



From its foundations in 1889 until 1907 the LCC was dominated by Sidney Webb's Progressive Party, an alliance of radical Liberals with some Fabians and socialists. They promptly took full advantage of the 1890 act, targeting the Old Nichol Rookery in Bethnal Green, which had become a byword for poverty, crime, and disease. The Housing of the Working Classes Act allowed the LCC to announce a clearance scheme for the district on grounds of public health. This prompted fierce opposition from the district's major landlords, including Baroness Kinloss and the Church of England's Ecclesiastical Commission, who claimed to support the scheme in principle but, surprise, wanted their own property exempted. Another obstacle was that the LCC could not find developers who would pay the market price for the land and take on redevelopment of the cleared site. Reluctantly, the LCC decided to accept responsibility for redevelopment, creating one of the world's first public housing projects.

The Boundary Street Estate was a landmark in terms of both urban policy and urban design, revolutionary in its provision of facilities for residents.<sup>46</sup> The master plan by Owen Fleming, the LCC's architect in charge, was a significant departure from the barrack-like dwellings on grid layouts that were typical of the philanthropic housing of the period. Fleming was influenced by Richard Norman Shaw's expensive mansion flats in upper-middle-class South Kensington, and his plan envisaged a picturesque urban village featuring a central open space laid out as an ornamental garden, with seven tree-lined streets radiating from it (fig. 6.14). Open areas between the housing blocks were designed to ensure "every living room received sunlight at some point of the day" and provided sequestered play areas for children. The Arts and Crafts style was adopted for the buildings, with decorative brick- and tile-work and a variety of roof styles, including dormer, pitched, mansard, and "Dutch" gabling. The estate also accommodated a live/work community, with small workshops included in the design to promote local business and employment, and a new school was located in the heart of the estate.

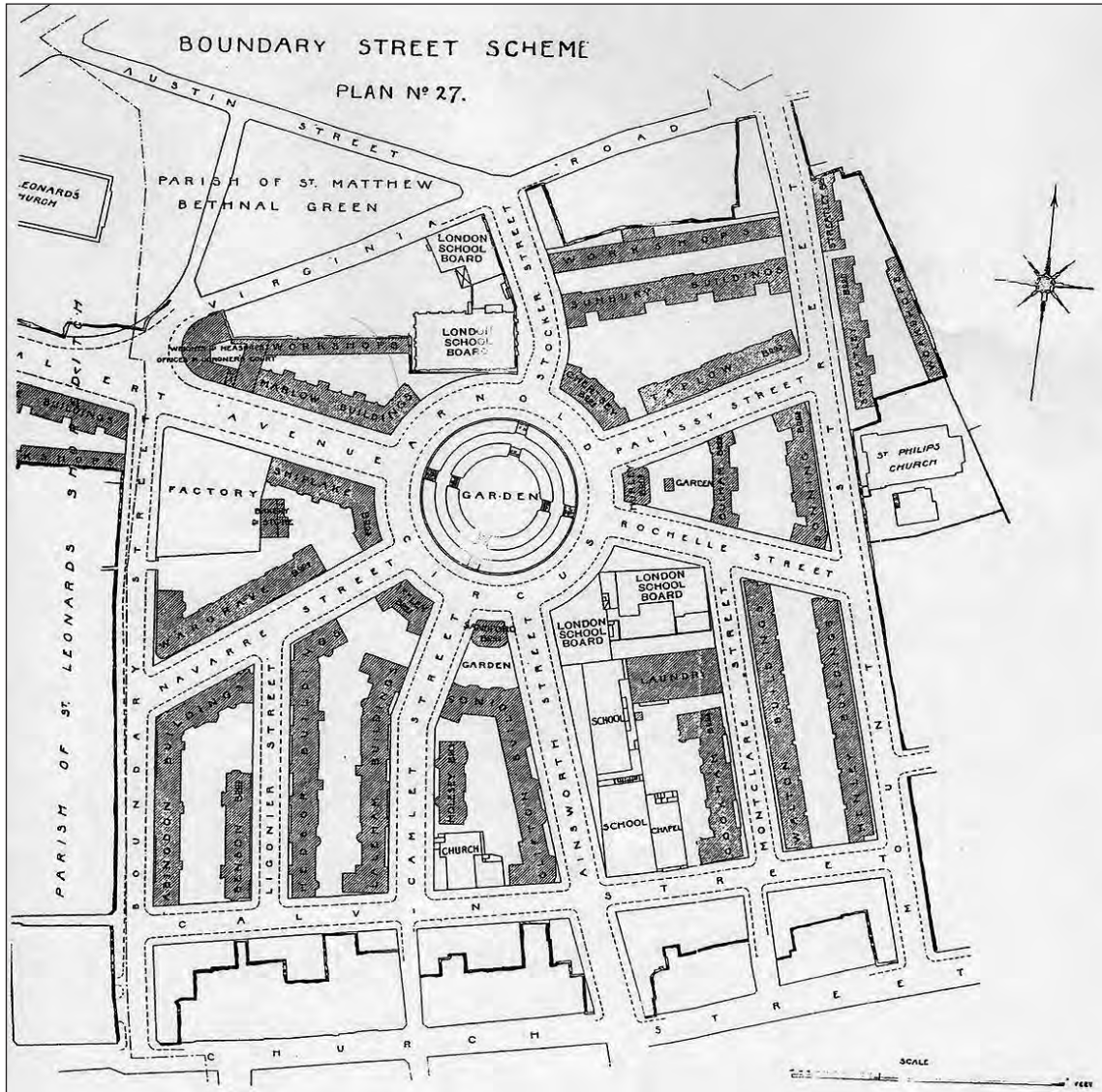
Altogether, the Boundary Street Improvement Scheme consisted of 1,069 tenements housing 4,566 residents. They had the use of a central laundry with twelve baths, and most of the tenements had their own toilet facilities. The cost of improvement, combined with the LCC's constraints

*The Boundary Street Estate was a landmark in terms of both urban policy and urban design*

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**6.13 Bournville, Birmingham, England** (opposite). A landmark district in the context of city planning, Bournville (6.13a, top) is widely reckoned to have been the first attempt to demonstrate to speculative builders that the construction of high-quality, low-density housing could be a profitable activity. It is also credited with having played an important part in the development of the Garden City movement. It was, however, founded by George Cadbury (1839–1922; 6.13b, inset) in response to more pragmatic impulses. Bournville, never intended as a model community, was established as an arcadian middle-class subdivision and then transformed—rather opportunistically—as a putative model community that matured into a garden suburb (6.13c and 6.13d, bottom).





on subsidizing rents, meant that the new tenants were the “quiet poor,” as Charles Booth called them: cigarmakers, clerks, cabinetmakers, tailors, shoemakers, nurses, and post-office sorters who could afford the rents the LCC was obliged to charge. The laborers, matchbox makers, hawkers, and dealers who had occupied the Old Nichol before clearance were meanwhile displaced into other crowded districts: an early illustration of an enduring strategic dilemma for planners in the struggle to eliminate slums.<sup>47</sup>

Other early LCC projects included the Bourne Estate, Clerkenwell; Millbank Estate, Westminster; and Goldington Buildings, Camden (all of them, like the Boundary Street Estate, still in use). In 1898 the LCC decided that in all future schemes it would provide housing equivalent to that displaced, though not necessarily in the same area. This marked the beginning of suburban “cottage estates” on peripheral sites, some even beyond the LCC boundary: so-called out-county estates. It effectively constituted the first-ever metropolitan-scale planning strategy. The strategy was supported by the electrification of London’s tramway system, which had been acquired by the LCC in 1899, and it represented the first example of what was to become fashionable among twenty-first-century planners: a satellite settlement designed around a transit line from the city center.

By 1914 the LCC had housed twenty-five thousand people in a variety of estates that featured some of the most progressive design features. The first peripheral estate to be developed was Totterdown Fields in Tooting, south London, built between 1903 and 1911 with 1,299 houses and four shops. Other LCC estates established before the First World War include White Hart Lane, Tottenham; Old Oak, Hammersmith; and East Acton. The first “out-county” estate was built at Norbury, also in south London, between 1906 and 1910. Again, a small group of shops was provided, and the dwellings were Arts and Crafts-influenced, two-story cottages. But although the intention was to foster community, the moralistic paternalism of the planners and their paymasters meant that there were no pubs or other amenities.<sup>48</sup>

When, in 1900, the Housing of the Working Classes Act extended to provincial boroughs the powers that had been given to London, the path-breaking importance of the Salisbury administration’s reforms became apparent. Although most city councils were reluctant to enter the field of property-owning when the whole expense had to be borne from local taxes, there was sufficient municipal housebuilding in provincial cities like Liverpool, Manchester, and Portsmouth—together about 5 percent of total national housebuilding between 1890 and 1914<sup>49</sup>—to establish a clear and enduring precedent.

*It effectively constituted the first-ever metropolitan-scale planning strategy*

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**6.14. The Boundary Street Estate, Shoreditch, London. (6.14a, opposite, top)** A landmark district in terms of both urban policy and urban design, it was one of the earliest social housing schemes, revolutionary in its provision of facilities for residents. The Master Plan presented to the LCC’s Public Health and Housing Committee in 1893 by Owen Fleming, the architect-in-charge, was a significant advance in urban design. With a layout based on a new road pattern, the buildings were able to be conceived as street architecture, relating to each other as well as to the larger conception of the estate (6.14b and 6.14c, opposite, bottom).



It was a path not chosen in the United States. Two successive Tenement House Commissions confirmed what people already understood: slums were haunts of vice, the root of urban degeneracy, and a threat to moral order. The first commission's recommendations in 1894—for the introduction of by-laws that would prevent overbuilding—were quickly derailed by speculative developers and their lobbyists. The response of the second commission was a defining moment for US city policymaking and planning, even though it is not usually celebrated as such in the history of planning. In contrast to parallel commissions in Europe, the 1900 commission came down decisively against direct public intervention in the housing market, arguing that it would bring about an expensive bureaucracy, intensified political patronage, and the discouragement of private capital, all merely to “better the living conditions of a favored few.” The best answer, the commission asserted, was tighter physical regulation of private developers through codified building standards.

### Back to Nature: Garden Cities and Garden Suburbs

Meanwhile, speedy new transportation technologies—the streetcar and the automobile—provided a catalyst for two centuries of antiurbanism and philosophizing about the restorative powers of Nature to be translated into practical applications. Ebenezer Howard, having synthesized the long history of utopian claims and aspirations, invested his own funds in the concept, cofounding the Garden City Pioneer Co. Ltd., which developed Letchworth, forty miles north of central London. The scheme was supported by liberal reformers because it involved utopian ideals that invoked pastoralism and social order, by supporters of city planning because it involved land-use control and centralized direction, and by conservatives because it gave private business more scope to develop real estate. Using Howard's schematic plans, the company laid out roads, parks, and factory sites and invited private developers to build housing on prepared sites. As a commercial venture, Letchworth could not incorporate the more radical communitarian elements of Howard's idealized garden city concept. On its own terms it was a commercial success, attracting some industry and a mostly middle-class population that acquired a reputation for having large numbers of “zealous, teetotal, smock-wearing Arts and Crafts” types: “weavers, potters, feminists, yoga fetishists and birth control fanatics.”<sup>50</sup>

Raymond Unwin (fig. 6.15) and Barry Parker, cousins who grew up near the industrial city of Sheffield, were the designers for Letchworth. Neither was formally trained as an architect, but both saw their mission as promoting beauty and amenity. Like Howard, they were heavily influenced by William Morris.

They believed that creativity came from an imaginative understanding of the past; that the Middle Ages provided an historic standard; that old buildings grew out of the ground they stood on; that the village was an organic embodiment of the small, personally related



**6.15. Raymond Unwin** (1863-1940). Highly influential over several decades, his approach was shaped by socialist ideals, by William Morris, the Arts and Crafts movement, and by Ebenezer Howard's concept of Garden Cities.

community; that the architect and planner were guardians of social and aesthetic life, maintaining and enhancing the traditional values of the community for future generations.<sup>51</sup>

The garden city idea was to be the inspiration for a great deal of development in the interwar period and beyond. In the 1920s, John Nolen based his innovative plan for St Petersburg, Florida, on garden city design principles, featuring a green belt, pedestrian-scaled neighborhoods, protected farmland, a transit system, and urban centers focused on the civic realm.<sup>52</sup> As in Letchworth—and all subsequent iterations of the garden city idea—Nolen’s plan simply ignored Ebenezer Howard’s foundational presumption of communitarianism as the societal framework for the garden city. Shorn of its radical political ideology, the garden city concept now had wide appeal, capable of serving as a platform for a variety of design movements and political-economic circumstances. More than a century after Letchworth’s founding, the prestigious Wolfson Economics Prize for 2014 was awarded for the design of a twenty-first century garden city, while the UK government announced plans for a series of new towns badged as Garden Cities.

First, though, the garden city ideal was translated into suburban format. Ironically—but not surprisingly, perhaps—the garden suburb movement was born from an exclusionary impulse. Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, the prominent reformers and founders of the Toynbee Hall settlement house, had bought a weekend retreat at Spaniard’s End, just north of London’s Hampstead Heath, in 1889. But when the Underground was extended to nearby Golders Green in 1906 it threatened the tranquility of the area. Fearful that Golders Green might spread up on to Hampstead Heath, Henrietta became a prime mover behind a trust—the Hampstead Heath Extension Council—that purchased a tract of land to be preserved as public open space. Having succeeded in creating a buffer between the Heath and “rows of ugly villas such as disfigure Willesden and most of the suburbs of London,” she decided to lead by example and develop a model suburb. Hampstead Garden Suburb (fig. 6.16) was to be a cooperative endeavor by a group of like-minded citizens. Henrietta recruited Letchworth’s architects, Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, as designers, and the influence of her patrician committee secured a private Act of Parliament to get around London’s ancient codes and allow the trust to design narrow roads, wide verges, culs-de-sac, short terraces with set-back frontages, and boundary hedges rather than walls. Hampstead Garden Suburb was given a Central Square, with an Anglican church, a Free Church, a civic institute, and a school, all designed by Edwin Lutyens. Different types of house for different classes of household were arranged sequentially within the Suburb, from mansions in the south to artisan cottages in the north, a gradation that succeeded in keeping the classes just sufficiently apart from one another to allow the larger houses to be commercially viable.

Although it was intended as a mixed-class development, it did not take long for Hampstead Garden Suburb to become thoroughly gentrified: a select and rather self-regarding upper-middle-class enclave. The lack of

*Shorn of its radical political ideology, the garden city concept now had wide appeal*

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pub, billiard hall, or cinema did not attract many households of more modest means; and those who did arrive were soon ousted from their small cottages by more affluent households. As with so many utopias, once materialized this one was absorbed into the prevailing order of things. Even by the time Unwin and Parker wrote their text *Town Planning and Modern Architecture* (1909), it was clear that Howard's vision of cooperative communities had fallen by the wayside. The book began by assuming an "average family" with "one or more servants."

Nevertheless, the planned garden suburb now had an established precedent, and the passage of the 1909 Housing and Town Planning Act, permissive but vague, meant that strategic planning concepts were going to be needed. Timing is everything. Unwin's 1912 book *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding!* made the case for garden suburbs. "Many towns are beginning to regulate their growth by means of the Town Planning Act. Now, therefore, is the opportunity to press upon the notice of the public this aspect of the Garden City movement and to secure if possible some recognition of the principle."<sup>53</sup> As the title of his book implied, it was just as much an argument against the LCC's inner-city estates and the Fabians' strategy of municipal investment in working-class neighborhoods as it was in favor of garden suburbs. It seemed to offer novel and more readily achievable outcomes than housing reform and was therefore attractive to the emerging planning community, and it became a common point of reference for advocates of urban decentralization. Crucially, it was to prove a lucrative development model.

In the United States the Russell Sage Foundation, inspired by the examples of Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb, developed Forest Hills Gardens (fig. 6.17), in Queens, nine miles from Manhattan, as an experiment in applying the new "science" of city planning to a suburban setting. Designed in 1911 by Grosvenor Atterbury and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., Forest Hills Gardens contained a kitschy mix of housing laid out with a distinctive neighborhood structure that convinced one of its residents, Clarence Perry, that the correct layout of a project could foster community spirit. Perry developed the concept of the "neighborhood unit," defined by the catchment area of an elementary school and focused on the school itself, local stores, and a central community space, all bounded by arterial streets wide enough to

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**6.16. Hampstead Garden Suburb.** Preliminary sketch Plan, showing the proposed development of land at Hampstead Garden Suburb; Barry Parker, and Raymond Unwin, architects. Throughout the Suburb, houses were arranged to provide a variety of groupings, setbacks and vistas, while the central square and its public buildings were set on the highest ground. The commercial buildings of the Suburb echoed medieval Rothenberg and Nuremberg, Germany, admired by Parker and Unwin for their distinctive sense of identity. Construction was interrupted by the First World War, and when the Suburb was completed under the direction of J.C.S. Soutar the inflation of building costs resulted in a significant dilution of the original social and environmental ideals.





6.17. Forest Hills Gardens, Queens, New York. Clockwise (a-d): A pioneering commuter suburb twenty minutes from downtown Manhattan by rail, the district was designed in 1909 by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and architect Grosvenor Atterbury, inspired by English garden cities and conducted as an experiment in applying the new “science” of city planning to a suburban setting. Like Hampstead Garden suburb, parts of the development echo the architecture of medieval German towns.



handle through traffic. Perry saw the neighborhood unit as an opportunity for social engineering that would assist in the assimilation of immigrants, but the idea also went down well with communitarians; and the idea of handling traffic went down well with planners who were beginning to grapple with the implications of the spread of automobile ownership. Along with the development of garden suburbs, the neighborhood unit was to become a blueprint for city planning and urban design.



## Windows of Change

The brief period between the two world wars, with its extraordinary juxtapositions of boom and bust, optimism and despair, was pivotal in the development of approaches to the ideal of the good city. The “policy windows” created in the aftermath of two major socioeconomic disruptions—the Great War and the Great Depression—saw the emergence of welfare capitalism. A significantly increased commitment on the part of central governments for responsibility for economic stability and social well-being, together with an acknowledgement on the part of the business sector that this was beneficial to its long-term interests, established an unwritten social contract on behalf of the working class. Corporations themselves began to assume responsibility for the well-being of their employees, offering fringe benefits, insurance, retirement plans, and health benefits. Henry Ford led the way with a reduced working week, a five-dollar-a-day wage, and a Sociological Department to oversee the welfare of his workers. In 1923 Corning Glass Works established another precedent by providing health insurance, while US Steel slashed its workday from twelve hours to eight. In 1927, International Harvester began offering two-week paid vacations. In Europe, governments developed state-run systems of unemployment insurance, health care, and pensions.

### **Interwar Urbanization**

Amid the disruptions of war and economic depression, urbanization meanwhile continued at pace. By 1920, the urban population of the United States had exceeded 50 percent; and by 1940 central cities had begun losing population to their new suburbs. Automobiles had made much more real estate accessible to commuters, tripling the areal extent of large cities. In Britain, with more than 75 percent of the population living in towns and cities, the extent of urban land increased by 50 percent between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second.<sup>1</sup>

Over the same period a succession of innovations and improved technologies—high-speed trains, passenger aircraft, telecommunications, radiography, broadcast radio, “talkie” movies, the magnetic recording of sound, synthetic fibers, and mass-produced consumer goods—expanded and consolidated the nineteenth-century foundations of the First Modernity. Cities on both sides of the Atlantic became seedbeds for social change: increasing

levels of owner-occupation and social mobility and the development of consumerism. The flux of modernization and socioeconomic disruption presented a renewed intellectual challenge: how to understand the fast-changing world and how to represent it to ourselves. The avant-garde produced ever more manifestos and declarations, testing boundaries and challenging the status quo, often in the cause of social, political, and economic reform. By the early twentieth century, avant-garde energies had coalesced around modernism, a broadly unified system of ideology, technology, and aesthetics that was seen by its practitioners as a revolutionary alternative to the elitism of nineteenth-century bourgeois taste. It was significant as the first broad movement in the design fields to explicitly frame ideas about the good city around the well-being of the working class rather than the wealthy, the bourgeoisie, or the deserving poor.

### **Precedents in the Aftermath of War**

The exigencies of war prompted a certain amount of direct government intervention in the housing market. Rent control and security of tenure were introduced in Britain in 1915 as temporary measures to prevent exploitation while the war effort drew labor and resources from residential construction. The late entry of the United States to the conflict did not create the same pressures on the domestic housing market, but the governments of both countries were impelled to step in and build housing for key armaments workers. In the United Kingdom, ten thousand permanent houses were built in connection with munitions factories on thirty-eight different sites. Picturesque cottage estates at twelve dwellings to the acre were built on “garden city” lines for aircraft and munitions workers at Roe Green in Kingsbury, Well Hall in Eltham, and Gretna in Scotland.

In the United States, Congress passed legislation authorizing the first federal intervention in the area of housing through the creation of the United States Housing Corporation (USHC) with funds channeled through the Ordnance Department and the Emergency Fleet Corporation. The USHC prepared drawings for almost fifty towns across the country and work actually began on just over twenty-five of them before the end of the war, including Buchman Village in Chester, Pennsylvania; Dundalk, Maryland; Seaview near Bridgeport, Connecticut; and Yorkship Village in Camden, New Jersey. The Fleet Corporation’s architect/planner was Frederick Ackerman, who based his designs explicitly on garden suburb ideals. Lewis Mumford wrote that the development of these communities “gave a fresh incentive to the housing movement and pushed it along paths that the older housing reformers never envisaged.”<sup>2</sup> But when the war ended many in Congress strongly objected to the high quality of design and workmanship evident in these communities “because, they said, it made the housing effort of the private sector look rather shabby and miserly by comparison.”<sup>3</sup> The government promptly canceled the program and sold off the properties that had been built.

At this point the trajectories of the United Kingdom and the United States were very different. No longer was the United States playing catch-up in terms of industrialization; nor did Americans feel quite so obliged to follow European social conventions or cultural trends. The war had changed the economic balance of the world. The United States had been in a recession, but the war rebooted its economy. Britain meanwhile had to borrow heavily from the United States in order to finance the war effort. The UK national debt increased from £650 million in 1914 to £7.4 billion in 1919. Equally important were the political repercussions of the carnage of the war. Whereas American losses were relatively modest, with more personnel lost to disease (63,114) than to combat (53,402), British battlefield casualties exceeded three million. The widely held disdain for political and military leadership during the war (“donkeys leading lions”) quickly spread to peacetime politics as demobilized personnel returned home in search of work and accommodation.

The shortage of houses in Britain at the time of the Armistice was estimated at nearly seven hundred thousand. Many soldiers and sailors found themselves returning to housing conditions worse than those they had left. Prime Minister Lloyd George (fig. 7.1a), facing a potential crisis in the face of sustained working-class agitation, a much broader electorate (newly enfranchised by the Representation of the People Act), the emergence of the Labour Party as the official opposition, and no doubt with the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia at the back of his mind, announced what came to be known as the Khaki Election, famously promising “habitations fit for the heroes who have won the war.” The ramifications of this commitment would spool out to alter the praxis of the design professions, the system of building provision, and the quality of urban life.

*The “Homes for Heroes” campaign was conceived as a counter-revolutionary strategy*

### **Homes for Heroes**

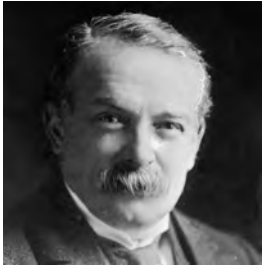
The “Homes for Heroes” campaign was conceived by the government as a counter-revolutionary strategy.<sup>4</sup> There was also a reluctant recognition that private enterprise would not be able to supply houses of the quantity and quality now required at rents that the bulk of the working classes could afford. A looming sense of crisis was underscored less than three months after the end of the war, when thousands of striking workers were baton-charged by police in Glasgow’s George Square after a public recitation of the Riot Act. The city ended up under military control for a few days, with machine gun nests in George Square, tanks stationed in the Cattle Market, and soldiers deployed to protect power stations. Six months later, Parliament passed the Housing and Town Planning Act 1919, initiating a large-scale program of public housing through generous Exchequer subsidies. The act also required local authorities to determine local housing needs and to take action to address them. More than a million new council homes were built in the following twenty years, transforming the face of British cities and significantly improving the lives of the working class.

Most of this public housing was designed and built in the spirit of garden suburb ideals. A special study of housing needs for working people had been commissioned in 1917 from the Liberal Member of Parliament, Tudor Walters, and his committee's report was published just as the war ended. It led to the democratization of the garden suburb idea, thanks largely to the committee's most influential member, Raymond Unwin, who by this time had been appointed as the Ministry of Health's senior architect-planner. He had in fact been the principal author of the Tudor Walters Report, in which he drew heavily from his earlier pamphlets *Cottage Plans and Common Sense* (1902) and "Nothing Gained by Overcrowding!" (1912). The report's main recommendation was to build as much as possible on cheap, undeveloped land on the outskirts of cities, advocating what it described as the "two-storey cottage," built in short terraces with each home having an inside toilet and bathroom, hot and cold running water, and a rear garden.

The recommended design did not include a parlor, since Unwin and other architects considered it to be an extravagant underutilization of space in small houses. Yet for prospective residents the parlor had a symbolic meaning, reserved for use on special occasions. Without a parlor, tenants faced the obligation to invite guests into the kitchen. On the other hand, considerable attention was given to the arrangement of roads and the need to ensure that they did not become shortcuts, attracting traffic from main thoroughfares. Culs-de-sac were especially endorsed for safe children's play. The Ministry of Health published the detailed recommendations in a housing manual in 1920.

Most of the public housing estates built in the interwar period followed the ministry's manual and could be recognized—just—as Unwin-inspired garden suburbs in pseudo-Arts-and-Crafts style, with curvilinear street plans and "cottage"-style homes (fig. 7.1b, c) that included the modern conveniences of gas and electricity, inside toilets, and fitted baths. Some were huge: Becontree Estate, built on cheap farmland on London's metropolitan fringe, had seven thousand homes, fifty miles of roads, and a population of 116,000: larger than many British provincial towns (although with far fewer amenities). Even though these first public housing estates were initially established with former slum dwellers in mind, they were allocated to the "respectable" working classes rather than the most needy: the rents that local authorities had a statutory duty to charge were higher than could be afforded by the least well-off—a seemingly insoluble problem. Applicants for the new estates were vetted for suitability and obliged to demonstrate a record of regular rent payment before being allocated a dwelling. Nevertheless, the new estates represented a radical change to the established sociogeographic order of things, and inevitably prompted opposition. In an early case of NIMBYism ("Not In My Back Yard"), some residents who found themselves living next to the LCC's Downham Estate, for example, actually built a brick wall across the road that ran between their development and adjacent council houses. The idea of homes for heroes may have been indisputably popular, but the prospect of whole neighborhoods for heroes, it seems, was not. Through the 1920s and 1930s successive governments shifted the emphasis between private and public sector housing back and forth; but mass public housing had now become an immovable element in the political economy of the country.





**7.1. Homes for Heroes.** Following the First World War, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863–1945; 7.1a) set the country on the path to better housing conditions through an extensive program of public housing. It was the first genuine prospect of the good city for the country's working classes. Much of the housing took the form of pared-down garden suburbs in Arts and Crafts style. The LCC's Old Oak Estate in Hammersmith (7.1b and 7.1c) has curving streets with grass verges and trees that created a picturesque townscape. All the homes were provided with sculleries, running water and toilets, but only the larger four- and five-room cottages were originally fitted with baths.



## Economic System-Shock and Recovery

The Great Depression was a second system shock with deep repercussions: an economic upheaval so catastrophic that central governments had to become both client and funder to prevent outright social collapse. The fundamental economic problem was an acute overaccumulation crisis. In the Roaring Twenties too much capital had been generated, in aggregate, relative to the opportunities for its profitable investment. Surplus labor, surplus productive capacity, and surplus capital existed side by side. The scale of the problem undermined the credibility of classical, laissez-faire liberalism and led to its eclipse by an egalitarian liberalism based on the theoretical framework of macroeconomic management outlined by British economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynesianism relied on the state to manage economic development and soften the unwanted side effects of free-market capitalism, with public expenditures used to stimulate demand or, through public employment, to absorb surplus labor.

The system shock of the Depression established strong government intervention as accepted rather than exceptional practice, although policy initiatives on both sides of the Atlantic were really rather disjointed. Overall, Keynesian strategies of economic management made cities important targets for policy because of the potential multiplier effects of public expenditures in metropolitan settings. In the United States, an important precedent was established with the creation of the country's first public housing authority, the New York City Housing Authority. The authority's two flagship projects were the Williamsburg Houses and Harlem River Houses (fig. 7.2). Both were built with federal funds, and were originally segregated. Williamsburg Houses, for whites, consisted of twenty four-story buildings spread over twelve city blocks; Harlem River Houses, for black families, consisted of 574 apartments in three groups of four- and five-story buildings. Both projects included child care and health care facilities, community rooms, and play areas.

But other efforts to build federally supported public housing were fiercely resisted by the Republican Party and the National Association of Real Estate Boards. Progressive interventionism also brought the first real experiments in urban and regional planning; but the most profound impact in terms of urban development can be traced to fiscal policies that triggered tenure transformation, paving the way for suburbanization, which in turn provoked dismay and derision among the cognoscenti within the design professions.

## Suburban Growth Machines

In practice, the great interwar boom in suburban homebuilding established a new ideology of homeownership embedded in a new system of building provision—one in which design professionals were largely unhappy bystanders. Governments encouraged households to purchase rather than rent, providing privileges and concessions to consumers as a “Bulwark against Bolshevism”: defending the property system by giving as many people as

*An important precedent was established with the creation of the country's first public housing authority*



**7.2. New Deal Public Housing.** In the United States, New York City was an exception in providing significant amounts of public housing. The Harlem River Houses (7.2a, 7.2b), together with First Houses in Manhattan and the Williamsburg Houses in Brooklyn (7.2c, 7.2d), were the first federally funded public housing projects in the city. Opened in 1937, they were funded by the Public Works Administration. Widely acclaimed by architects, planners, and social reformers, they were not widely copied in other cities because of opposition from real estate interests.





possible a stake in it, thereby fragmenting working-class solidarity and defusing its potential radicalism. Home ownership was made attractive by providing tax relief on mortgage interest payments and exempting equity gains from capital gains tax. As policy, it was rationalized by the idea first advanced by Victorian housing reformers: that stimulating new homeowner construction would improve overall standards of housing as the chain of residential moves initiated by the construction of new homes for the more affluent would allow the filtering of households up the housing scale, creating a vacancy chain that ended with the demolition of a vacant slum. Financing home ownership by way of long-term loans from savings and loan companies provided a further source of social and political stability, since the debt encumbrance represented by mortgage repayments inevitably induced a conservative mindset among mortgagees.

Nevertheless, owner-occupation was still an alien concept to many families: it involved dealings with middle-class professionals and institutions and taking on a massive and very long-term debt. It required a sustained marketing campaign on the part of realtors, developers, and savings and loan institutions to promote the idea of the single-family home as something worth sacrificing and going into debt for, a stepping-stone of intergenerational upward mobility. In the United States, the whole trend was cleverly tied into an updated version of the American Dream by the emergent quasi-profession of real estate brokers. “The conception of real estate brokerage as an occupation-cum-profession depended upon the existence of ‘home’ as an intellectual and cultural object. ... Thanks in large measure to real estate brokers’ cultural and political work, the single-family home on a quarter-acre lot in a low-density suburban development became the ‘American Dream,’ and the vast majority of Americans bought into it.”<sup>5</sup> Working in collaboration with various government agencies and civic groups, realtors’ “Own Your Own Home” campaign promoted the idea of the single-family home as a culmination of the long-standing American ideological strand linking property ownership to civic virtue. Built on individual freedom and private property rights, America would be free, it was implied, from the degenerative ravages of class struggle. By the mid-1930s, realtors’ political and cultural work had “created national housing policy that privileged suburban sprawl, middle-class privatization of social space, and racial segregation.”<sup>6</sup>

When the New Deal introduced federal mortgage insurance, the American Dream fell within the immediate reach of millions more households. Mortgage insurance was part of a broad package of Keynesian macroeconomic management introduced by the Roosevelt administration in response to the overaccumulation crisis of the Depression.<sup>7</sup> The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), established in 1934, played a key role in stimulating the labor-intensive construction industry by stabilizing the mortgage market and facilitating sound home financing on reasonable terms. It was no coincidence that automobile ownership became a distinctive component

*A long-standing  
ideological strand  
linking property  
ownership to civic  
virtue*

of the American Dream at about the same time. As an essential adjunct to suburban lifestyles, private automobiles conferred another dimension of freedom—personal mobility—as well as another very visible means of demonstrating personal success. The immediate effect of Depression-era Keynesian policy was to reignite suburban growth, creating a “spatial fix” to the overaccumulation crisis.<sup>8</sup>

The FHA not only created these “Keynesian suburbs” but also shaped their character. It established and enforced minimum standards for the housing financed by its guaranteed loans, thus helping to eliminate shoddy suburban construction. The FHA’s 1936 bulletin *Planning Neighborhoods for Small Homes* drew on the views of influential planners like Thomas Adams, Clarence Stein, and Clarence Perry, firmly rejecting the grid plan in favor of culs-de-sac of single-family housing in neighborhood units centered on an elementary school. In its 1939 *Underwriting Manual*, the FHA openly recommended that subdivision developers use restrictive covenants to prevent the sale of homes to minorities. Mortgage redlining, which designated certain sections of an urban area as unsuitable for FHA-insured mortgages, was common practice. These efforts were ostensibly intended to reduce the risk that homeowners would default on their federally insured mortgages. It was not until 1949 that discriminatory restrictive covenants were declared unconstitutional. By then the FHA had formulated the nation’s suburban planning template, and realtors and developers had ensured that it was fully realized.

Because the Depression had forced down the cost of labor and materials, house prices relative to incomes were lower than at any time before (or since). The opportunity to expand markets was recognized by the consumer products industry. “In 1935 General Electric sponsored a ‘House for Modern Living’ architectural competition that drew 2,040 entries, then helped build a nationwide series of all-electric ‘New American Homes’ from these plans. Not to be left behind, Nash-Kelvinator built over a hundred ‘Kelvin Homes’ in twenty-six states.”<sup>9</sup> Whereas housing starts in the US had fallen to just over 90,000 in 1933, the number of new homes started in 1937 was 332,000, and in 1941 it was 619,000. Similar growth in suburban housebuilding took place in the more prosperous regions of Britain. A barrage of advertising was brought into homes via national, regional, and local newspapers, sometimes in the form of extensive property supplements. Women’s magazines played a major part in encouraging the conspicuous consumption that could be accommodated in new homes: vacuum cleaners, electric irons, electric kettles, toasters, refrigerators, washing machines, and so on. The lure of homeownership became so strong that many of the households that were grasping the lowest rungs of the housing ladder not only stretched household accounts to meet monthly mortgage payments but also acquired furniture on hire-purchase and furnished rooms one by one as they could afford to. Developers deployed roadside hoardings, filled show houses with modern furniture and equipment, and marketed the house-search process as a leisure activity. A common denominator in much of the advertising was the ideology

*The FHA had formulated the nation’s suburban planning template*



of rural tranquility and the restorative qualities of open countryside—which, of course, was being systematically destroyed by the new suburbs.

### **Community Builders**

The homeownership boom also reshaped the building industry. The industry was exceptionally easy to enter, since working capital was readily available and equipment needs were minimal. A large number of new speculative house-building firms came into existence. Some were created by realtors or surveyors who seized the opportunity to become involved more directly in the property market; others were started by those with little or no previous connection with house building (and who were liable to find that ease of entry to the industry was matched by probability of exit). The stabilization of mortgage markets allowed more and more builders to become what came to be known as “community builders”—developers who subdivide and improve raw land and design, engineer, finance, construct, and sell buildings on the extensive sites that they have prepared.

Community builders would come to dominate the design and construction of suburbia on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, it was the community builders of the 1930s and 1940s who pioneered deed restrictions mandating uniform building lines, front and side yards, standards for lot coverage, and innovations in landscaping, street layout, and planned provision for retail and office buildings, parks and recreation facilities, churches and schools.<sup>10</sup> Their enterprises required the pursuit of economies of scale, the standardization of products, the perfection of prefabrication technology, and the rationalization of street layouts. Many community builders dispensed with sidewalks altogether, partly to save money, partly to emphasize the exclusivity of the neighborhoods to the automobile-owning classes, and partly to lend an arcadian feel.

What these firms produced was a mosaic of garden suburbs, garden villages, and basic sprawl of varying quality. Professional architects were not helpful: their fee structure did not fit the low-cost, low-profit-margin, high-volume business model of speculative builders, and their professional culture generally viewed speculative housing with thinly disguised contempt. Things did change a little as the housing boom gathered momentum and the larger firms began to use architects. In Britain, the sheer volume of potential fees prompted a series of articles in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* encouraging the involvement of architects in speculative house building, and a subcommittee of the Institute’s Public Relations Committee recommended reduced fees for speculative work. Eventually, about a third of interwar private house building involved professional architects, although most of this involvement was restricted to the preparation of routine paperwork relating to codes and regulations rather than the design of house plans or the aesthetics of exteriors.

The inexorable logic of cost-saving led to homes designed around standardized floor plans. British developers built to a “universal plan”

consisting of two-story houses with two ground-floor rooms (a living room and a front room, one behind the other), a kitchen behind the entrance hall, and, upstairs, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a toilet. The bathroom and toilet were always above the kitchen, and the smallest bedroom above the entrance hall. To mitigate the consequent uniformity, exterior detailing was finely differentiated by developers in the hope of exploiting marginal symbols of social distinction. The most popular styles in interwar suburbia were retrogressive. British developers drew on English vernacular architectural traditions, with mock Tudor and Jacobean touches like fake half-timbering that allowed developers to cover up poor brickwork. In the United States, Early and Colonial American styles had strong appeal for middle-class households buffeted by the Depression, conditioned by isolationism, and seeking “an elemental return to American basics.”<sup>11</sup>

### **‘A Spate of Mean Building’**

Town planning, meanwhile, still barely existed as a profession. In spite of the advocacy of the likes of Patrick Geddes and Thomas Adams and the prewar establishment of the Town Planning Institute in Britain and the American City Planning Institute in the United States, few local jurisdictions in either country had acquired a professional planning staff in time for the suburban house-building boom. As a result, almost all interwar growth took place with only rudimentary land-use planning. Another result was that the design professions were at best marginal players in the local progrowth coalitions that came to form the basis of urban politics. “Progrowth coalition building ... became a central feature of national as well as local politics. National politicians and the federal government became important actors in local politics, and this involvement, in turn, integrated local politicians, program administrators, and program beneficiaries into a new national political framework.”<sup>12</sup> From this point on, design professionals found themselves playing catch-up and second fiddle to the local economic-political coalitions of financiers, accountants, lawyers, developers, builders, engineering firms, realtors, insurance companies, commercial banks, property managers, and transportation and utility companies who would be the principal drivers and shapers of urbanization.

Although the idea of suburbanization was championed by housing reformers and planning activists like Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, Raymond Unwin, and Catherine Bauer Wurster, the actual product of interwar community builders began to provoke censorious views from the intelligentsia. Alarmed by the accelerated urbanization of the countryside afforded by automobiles and commuter railways, the leading voices of the upper-middle class let rip on the new plague of suburbia. Their cultural snobbery, expressed in terms of concern for aesthetics, betrayed underlying class antagonisms. After all, the countryside that had hitherto been the preserve of an aristocratic and upper-middle-class elite was now being invaded by the lower-middle classes. Sprawling urbanization came to be portrayed as a

*The most popular styles in inter-war suburbia were retrogressive*

despoiler of the countryside and the cause of rampant speculation, banal, monotonous environments, and lifeless communities.

Thought leaders within the design professions were especially patronizing, expressing thinly veiled contempt for other classes: for everyone but themselves, in effect. Thomas Sharp, who was to become president of both the Town Planning Institute and the Institute of Landscape Architects, derided the “drab, revolting neutrality” of suburbia in his polemic *Town and Countryside* (1932). Clough Williams-Ellis, an architect best known for the kitschy tourist village of Portmeirion in Wales, was an energetic writer on the subject, authoring *England and the Octopus* (1928), a sustained attack on sprawl and its inhabitants. “The spate of mean building all over the country is shriveling up the old England—mean and perky little houses that surely none but mean and perky little souls could inhabit with satisfaction ... cultivated people of all classes must deplore what is happening.” “Disfiguring little buildings,” he wrote, “grow up and multiply like nettles along a drain, like lice upon a tape-worm.” He saw “nothing at all noble or satisfying” in the suburbs: “Whether bungalows or garages, teashops or villas, their nastiness is assured.”<sup>13</sup> In 1937 he collaborated with other influential figures, including John Maynard Keynes, G. M. Trevelyan, Patrick Abercrombie (fig. 7.3) and E. M. Forster, to reiterate the message in an edited volume, *Britain and the Beast*. The beast, of course, was suburbia.

The avant-garde among the design fields were equally scathing. The fourth meeting of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), held in 1933 on a passenger cruiser sailing from Marseilles to Athens to consider the future of the urban environment, produced ninety-five declarations. Several of these expressed strong opposition to suburban development, including the assertion that the suburb “constitutes one of the greatest evils of the century.” The suburb, it was resolved, constituted “a squalid antechamber of the city, ... a kind of scum churning against the walls of the city.”<sup>14</sup>

For many design professionals, though, unplanned suburbia represented a clash of loyalties, their aesthetic revulsion incompatible with their conviction that slums should be cleared and people housed. Resolving the dilemma would require planning controls and design guidelines.

### The Turn to Planning

Urban planning thus began to emerge as a necessary activity and recognized profession. But its foundational ideas, carried over from utopian and reformist origins, were shaped by the exigencies and conceptual preoccupations of the interwar period. Economic planning and the policy process were two new strands that were woven together with the utopian/reformist aspirations of managing the physical design and development of towns to promote health, beauty, and prosperity.<sup>15</sup> They were all inflected by an increased appreciation of the regional context of urban development, and by contemporary biological/ecological theories and analogies.



7.3. Patrick Abercrombie (1879–1957). Britain's most influential architect-planner in the decades before and after the Second World War.

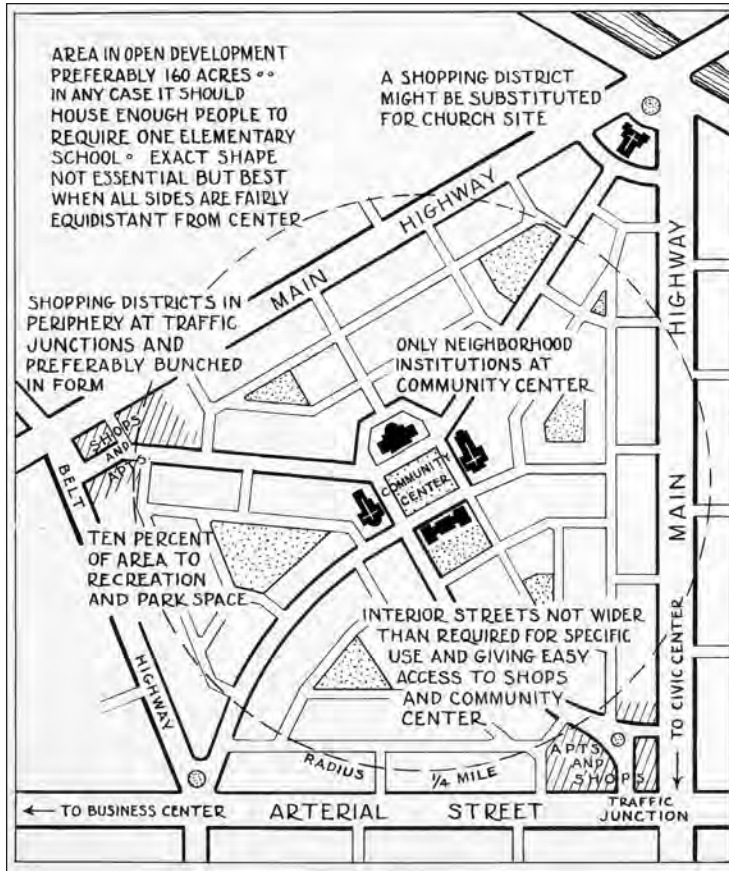
A mobilizing force behind planning in the United States was the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), formed in 1923 as an association of reform-minded individuals that included Clarence Stein (fig. 7.4; an architect and proponent of the garden city movement), Benton MacKaye (forester and conservationist), Lewis Mumford (writer and critic), Alexander Bing (developer and real estate investor), and Henry Wright (architect and landscape architect). The RPAA's intellectual roots owed a lot to Patrick Geddes, and it fell to Mumford to translate Geddes's radicalism to the American context, fusing it with the ideals of the garden city movement and the rather more conservative approach of Stein and others. Together they enlisted the aid of New York financiers to build Sunnyside Gardens in Queens, New York, a demonstration of the RPAA's progressive ideals, designed along garden city lines and built in 1926 to 1928.

The following year they began construction of the larger and more ambitious suburb of Radburn, New Jersey, where several of-the-moment planning concepts were deployed. One was Clarence Perry's idea of the neighborhood unit (fig. 7.5) as a social setting large enough to provide a base for schools and services yet small enough to engender a sense of place and ringed by major traffic arteries. Second was the superblock concept, which arranged residential units around the periphery of a large area, allowing the interior to be developed as landscaped communal parks with meandering foot paths and scattered play facilities for children. Third was the separation of pedestrian and automobile traffic, using Central Park-style underpasses (fig. 7.6).

### **Rationality, Alliances, and Traveling Ideas**

Planning the physical development of cities became increasingly associated with the credo of scientific management. An article published in 1913 in the popular magazine *The American City* and titled "Efficiency in City Planning" optimistically asserted that "the principles of modern industrial efficiency, of 'Taylorizing' are now being applied to city planning."<sup>16</sup> Land use planning and zoning were seen as rational means of managing urban physical development to minimize negative externalities and therefore ensure and enhance property values generally.<sup>17</sup> The interwar period saw a slew of path-shaping decisions and initiatives. The prospect of regulatory intervention in property markets nevertheless raised deep-seated and long-standing concerns about individual property rights. In the United States the issue was clarified through the Supreme Court's 1922 ruling in *Pennsylvania Coal Company v. Mahon* that a regulatory act that diminishes the value of property is a "taking" that requires compensation. The same year the US Department of Commerce drafted the Standard State Zoning Enabling Act, a model law developed to help states create zoning restrictions.

With the legal landscape clarified, city governments began to act. In 1925 Cincinnati became the first American city to have a comprehensive plan approved and adopted into law by a city council, and the following year



**7.4. Clarence Stein** (1882–1975). Co-founder of the RPAA, Stein participated in several of the most influential housing complex designs of the twentieth century.



**7.5. Clarence Perry** (7.5a, left) and the **Neighborhood Unit** (7.5b, far left). Living in Forest Hills Gardens convinced Perry (1872–1944) that the correct layout of a project could foster

community spirit. His neighborhood unit idea, conceived at the beginning of the automobile era, was based on the walking-distance catchment area of an elementary school and focused on the school itself, local stores, and a central community space, all bounded by streets wide enough to handle through traffic. Its publication as part of the 1929 *Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs* led to its widespread promotion as a planning tool.



**7.6. Radburn, NJ.** Designed by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, using Perry's neighborhood unit idea and a mix of Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival domestic styles, Radburn's key innovation was the separation of automobile and pedestrian movement.



the legal landscape was further clarified with the landmark US Supreme Court case of *Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.* With this ruling the Court established the power of local governments to “abate a nuisance,” ruling in favor of the municipality’s right to prevent a property owner from using land for purposes other than for which it had been zoned. A nuisance, the Court ruled, could be defined very broadly to include anything affecting the general welfare of a residential area. As a result, zoning promptly came to be used to exclude not only undesirable land uses from residential areas but also (by requiring large—and therefore expensive—minimum lot or dwelling sizes, for example) undesirable people.

In Britain, urban planning was supported by an unlikely alliance between, on the one hand, a vociferous lobby on behalf of depressed industrial districts and, on the other, rural conservationists who were alarmed at the rate of urban sprawl. Their concerns prompted several royal commissions whose recommendations were to make urban planning a central element within the contours of a redesigned welfare state. “Planning was conceived as the means by which the best use of land could be secured irrespective of market conditions.”<sup>18</sup> In the early 1930s, with war once again looming, there was already concern that the spread of urbanization would limit the capacity of the country’s farmland to sustain the population in the event of a blockade. In the climate of antiurbanism fostered by the country’s patrician intelligentsia, geography professor Dudley Stamp organized the Land Utilization Survey of Britain, carried out by volunteers using field maps at the detailed scale of six inches to the mile (1:10,560). The maps and charts distilled from Stamp’s data served to underscore worries about urban encroachment. Resolving the principles behind the idea of the “best” use of land was left to expert committees and commissions rather than the courts. The *Scott Report* (1941) addressed rural land use while the *Uthwatt Report* (1942) set out the issues involved in public control of land use, the implications of increased land values (“betterment”) resulting from public development and questions of compensation to private landowners.

British concern over urban encroachment also produced a strategic precedent that would become an influential traveling idea: green belts. The idea can be traced to Ebenezer Howard. The London Society, founded in 1912 to advance “the practical improvement and artistic development of London,” took up the idea. In 1919 the society published a development plan for Greater London that called for new parks and waterside reservations to be connected, where possible, by “belts of green parkways.” In the society’s book *London of the Future* (1921), Raymond Unwin, in his role as the senior architect–planner in the Ministry of Health and principal author of the *Tudor Walters Report*, set out the case for a green belt surrounding the metropolis. In 1924 the London County Council resolved that its Town Planning Committee should consider the potential for an unbuilt or green belt around London in order to contain growth. The committee felt that a belt of half a mile would be a reasonable distance, but considered the challenge of land acquisition to be too great.

*A strategic precedent: the case for a green belt*

After the Labour Party won control of the LCC in 1934 the council agreed to allocate £2 million over three years to assist local authorities in the purchase of open spaces, offering to pay up to half of the cost of any land selected “to provide a reserve supply of public open spaces and of recreational areas and to establish a green belt or girdle of open space lands not necessarily continuous, but as readily accessible from the completely urbanized area of London as practicable.”<sup>19</sup> The policy was attractive enough to prompt the passage of the Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act 1938, formally empowering (but not funding) local authorities to buy land to keep it open as part of a green belt. It was too little, too late, and it was in any case sidelined by the outbreak of war. But it nevertheless established both concept and precedent for the planned redevelopment and management of postwar metropolises.

### **Conceptions of Urbanism**

At a more abstract level, planners’ approaches to fostering “efficient” urban development and “good” cities were conditioned by contemporary academic theories. Some of the most influential of these relied on biological metaphors and analogies in economic and social contexts. Patrick Geddes had in fact made his case for urban planning by analogy with a farmer’s need to manage fields of crops or herds of animals. By the 1920s, Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and colleagues in the Chicago school of sociology had propagated a conception of the city as a kind of social organism, with individual behavior and community organization bound up in a human ecology dominated by a “struggle for existence.” The biological analogy provided Park and his colleagues with a seductive general framework in which to place their studies of the “natural histories” and “social worlds” of different subgroups in Chicago. Just as in plant and animal communities, they concluded, order in human communities must emerge through the operation of “natural” processes such as dominance, segregation, impersonal competition, and succession. Their ecological approach suffused through urban studies for decades. Although they sought to produce a “scientific” view of the city, their choice of metaphor helped to make the existing social order seem natural and inevitable.

Also influential among planners were deterministic and environmentalist interpretations of city life that had their roots in the social philosophy of Ferdinand Tönnies, Émile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel. Louis Wirth, another member of the Chicago school, argued that, faced with the abundant and varied physical and social stimuli experienced in large, dense, and highly diverse city environments, individuals have to adapt “normal” behavior in order to cope. City dwellers thus become, for example, aloof, brusque, and impersonal in their dealings with others and emotionally buffered in their relationships. Nevertheless, the intense stimuli of city environments will sometimes generate what has subsequently been dubbed a “psychic overload,” leading to anxiety and nervous strain. Furthermore, the

loosening of personal bonds through this adaptive behavior tends to leave people both unsupported in times of crisis and unrestrained in pursuing ego-centered behavior.

The net result, Wirth argued, is an increase in the incidence, on the one hand, of social incompetence, loneliness, and mental illness and, on the other, of deviant behavior of all kinds: from the charmingly eccentric to the dangerously criminal. Meanwhile, the specialized neighborhoods and social groupings resulting from economic competition and the division of labor result in a fragmentation of social life between home, school, workplace, friends, and relatives; and so people's time and attention are divided among unconnected people and places. This weakens the social support and control of primary social groups such as family, friends, and neighbors, leading to a lack of social order and an increase in "social disorganization."

Wirth's essay "Urbanism as a Way of Life"<sup>20</sup> became the most often quoted and reprinted article in the literature of the city and provided planners with a powerful rationale for their role in promoting neighborhood identity and community. It fit comfortably with emerging planning ideology; but political scientists have argued that the consequent focus on neighborhood community character led to fragmented and introspective sociopolitical settings and the neglect of broader issues of urban resource allocation and class conflict.<sup>21</sup>

Frederick Ackerman, an architect-planner and RPAA member, was one of the few within the design fields to recognize that as planners became increasingly involved with physical planning they were implicitly accepting the fundamental dynamics of urban political economy as normal.<sup>22</sup> This meant accepting "the right of the individual to use the community as a machine for procuring individual profits and benefits without regard to what happens to the community." America would continue to have dysfunctional cities "so long as the spokesmen of city planning continue to proclaim that adjustment can be had without touching the sacred causes of maladjustment."<sup>23</sup>

### **Urban Planning as Social Engineering**

Eugenics—the idea of improving a human population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics (and eliminate undesirable ones)—was another direct influence on planning thought. The social engineering possibilities of eugenics appealed to an extraordinary range of thought leaders. Sidney and Beatrice Webb (the founders of the Fabian Society), John Maynard Keynes, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, and H. G. Wells in Britain, for example. Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes were sympathetic to eugenics, while blowhard architect Clough Williams-Ellis was a fellow of the British Eugenics Society. In the United States President Theodore Roosevelt had been a proponent of eugenics, and the advocates of the movement received extensive funding from the likes of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Institution, the (perhaps predictable) support of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the

*Wirth's essay provided planners with a powerful rationale for their role in promoting neighborhood identity*

(perhaps unexpected) endorsement of African-American intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois. In this climate it is not surprising that there was overlapping membership between city planning and eugenicist groups,<sup>24</sup> and that the emerging planning tradition became tinged with eugenics:

Exactly who constitutes a better citizen is a question shared both by the eugenics advocates and the expert planners. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid concluding that twentieth-century planners' efforts to move urban dwellers to a more wholesome and ordered environment were themselves a form of eugenics. Wielding new powers over land-use, such as zoning, planners now had the capacity not only to distribute population segments but also to effectively quarantine the more favored from contact with those considered undesirable.<sup>25</sup>

### **Regionalism**

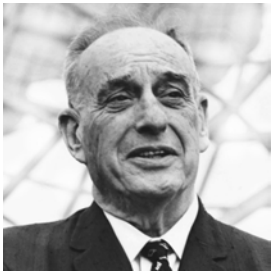
The Depression and the compelling reasoning of Keynesianism threw economic and regional planning into focus. British concerns about economically depressed industrial regions, coupled with worries about the vulnerability of London and the South East to air attack, prompted the Barlow Commission (1937). It became an important forum for integrating the varying ideas of the day and a blueprint for many of the policies of the post-Second World War period. The commission's report recommended a centralized regional policy aimed at moving industry to depressed regions and a comprehensive system of land-use planning strategies that would halt the spread of the economically overheating and strategically vulnerable towns and cities of the South East.

In the United States the RPAA was influential in its advocacy of the case for regional networks of highways and electrical power that would bring the benefits of advanced technology to less developed areas while easing the pressure on congested industrial and metropolitan centers. The New York State Housing and Regional Planning Commission, chaired by Clarence Stein, published the first state-level land-use plan in 1925. The plan, which was primarily written by Henry Wright, focused on providing transportation corridors and settlement areas, as well as on preserving rural land. The Depression prompted a scattershot of New Deal programs—including the Civil Works Administration, Public Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, and the Resettlement Administration—that introduced a variety of regional economic planning initiatives. Meanwhile the National Planning Board, established in 1933 (renamed the National Resources Committee in 1935), brought the rationality of scientific, survey-based planning to everything from public works improvement to health, education, employment, and regional development.

The Resettlement Administration, in its brief lifetime, was one of the most powerful and revolutionary planning authorities ever created in the United States. Under the leadership of Rexford Guy Tugwell, RPAA ideas were vigorously pursued through a program of Greenbelt cities: suburban new towns that, it was hoped, would attract enough city dwellers to enable

inner-city slums to be turned into parks. It proved a bit too revolutionary, as political opposition severely limited the scale of the program. Funds were allocated for only eight of twenty-five proposed Greenbelt cities and Congress, under strong pressure from the private development industry, whittled this number down to five. Two of the five were blocked by local legal action. The remaining three were built: Greendale, southwest of Milwaukee; Greenhills, near Cincinnati; and Greenbelt, just north of Washington, DC (fig. 7.7). It was, nevertheless, a landmark program that established both concept and precedent for what was to become an increasingly influential traveling idea.

The interwar period also saw the emergence of a charismatic figure who would serve as an ideological figurehead for the field as a whole. From 1924 to 1968 Robert Moses (fig. 7.8) was a powerful bureaucrat and powerbroker in New York (both the city and the state) who led a vast building program aimed at modernizing urban infrastructure, expanding the public realm with extensive recreational facilities, removing blight, and making the city more livable for the middle class. The comparison with Haussmann is unavoidable, but Moses oversaw an historically specific kind of urban development in which the American Dream was translated as the freedom to build for money and the freedom to drive. It was also an extreme case of a more general phenomenon: the evangelical zeal of a field that had been newly granted the power and resources to reconceptualize the city in an innovative modern form.<sup>26</sup> Moses began his career as a passionate believer in reform, a vigorous opponent of the favoritism and corruption of politics in New York. He saw himself as leading a mission to save the city from obsolescence and decline. Early in his career he developed a reputation as an effective bureaucrat in New York State government but he quickly concluded that he needed to beat the growth-machine power brokers at their own game in order to get things done.



**7.8. Robert Moses** (1888-1981). A power broker who played a larger role in shaping the physical environment of New York City than probably any other figure in the twentieth century.

When New Deal tax dollars became available from the Works Progress Administration Program, Moses was one of the few local officials who had “shovel-ready” projects planned and prepared. Funded by federal dollars, Moses dealt out patronage extensively, building support from labor unions, construction firms, investment banks, insurance companies, and real estate developers. He used his influence to fast-track projects in legislators’ home districts; in return, they repaid him by granting money for ever more ambitious projects. At one point, he held twelve separate titles, maintaining four palatial offices across the city and Long Island, controlling all federal appropriations to New York City. By 1936 Moses was employing eighty thousand people on projects that included building a series of parkways in the outer boroughs, developing oceanfront beaches, refurbishing Central Park Zoo, and building 255 playgrounds, and eleven outdoor public swimming pools.<sup>27</sup> His influence increased after World War II, and with it a critique of his “bureaucratic evangelism,” discrimination, and overreach that would eventually sour public confidence in the field.



7.7. **Greenbelt, MD.** A product of the New Deal social experiments that followed the Great Depression of the 1930s, Greenbelt was aimed at generating jobs and providing affordable housing as much as it was an attempt to create a better urban community. Rexford Guy Tugwell, appointed by President Roosevelt as head of the Resettlement Administration, appointed Clarence Stein to prepare design guidelines and to serve as the principal planning consultant for the project. The layout incorporated Clarence Perry's "neighborhood unit" concept and was designed as a complete town, with businesses, schools, roads, and facilities for recreation and town government, as well as affordable housing. Homes, mostly row houses and apartments, were grouped in super-blocks, with a system of interior walkways and underpasses permitting residents to go from home to town center without crossing a major street. All of this was surrounded by a greenbelt of parkland eight hundred yards wide.



## The Avant Garde and Collective Consensual Plagiarism

If the interwar period was formative for the field of urban planning, it was transformational for architecture. The complex and volatile politico-cultural environment created by the trauma of war, followed by the economic and social dislocation of the Depression, fostered a swirl of radical ideas that coalesced around modernism. At the heart of these radical ideas was an ideological faith in technology and industrial rationalization. They raised the question of architects' responsibility to society as a whole, rather than just their clients and their peers. Their broadly shared vision involved a rejection of all things bourgeois. Ridding architecture of its role of symbolizing power, hierarchy, and class would be the field's contribution to a peaceful and egalitarian future. Holding firm to the conceit of architecture as an autonomous discipline, in parallel with the independent development of fine art, modernist architects saw themselves as the collective controlling intellect of urban development, acting as the workers' cultural benefactors. The purified geometry and the architectonic strictness of modernist aesthetics would ensure the democratization of good taste.

The artistic avant-garde provided the main point of departure for the development of Modern architecture. Manifestos, declarations, and movements—abstractionism, constructivism, cubism, Dadaism, futurism, impressionism, montage, primitive art, purism, pointillism, tactilism, neo-plasticism, realism, and surrealism, along with developments in photography, film, and advertising—collided with one another, provoked further reactions, and fused into a self-consciously avant-garde culture. Architects took their cue from this, adding an ideology of scientific rationalism in pursuit of an aesthetic that was characterized by moralistic aphorisms such as “integrity of surface,” “truth to materials,” and “less is more.”

The modernist conceptions of space and plan were self-consciously founded on a constructional fact: The structural cage of steel or ferroconcrete had eliminated the wall's function of providing support. Walls could therefore be reduced to a membrane (of which glass gave the most literal expression), fitted between the columns of the cage or placed in advance of it like a screen. The interior planes, similarly freed of all supports but the skeleton, could become open geometries. In these the designer could place partition walls, stairs, and other service elements without disturbing the immateriality of three-dimensional space but, on the contrary, articulating it and composing it.<sup>28</sup>

Continental Europe, and Germany in particular, was the locus of radicalism among those concerned with the role of art, architecture, urban design, and technology in society. Among the most important groups were the Deutscher Werkbund, the Arbeitsrat für Kunst, the Novembergruppe, and Der Ring.<sup>29</sup> The Werkbund was a loose coalition of artists and craft firms founded in 1906, hoping (echoing William Morris) to reform the relationship between artists and industry. The guiding principles in their manifesto were that quantity and quality should complement each other and that

*Modernist architects  
saw themselves  
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development*

architecture should leave behind the refinements and symbolism of the old order and replace them with a plain, functional aesthetic.

The development of such an aesthetic was the focus of the Staatliches Bauhaus, a school established in 1919 in Weimar, Germany, that combined architecture, crafts, and the fine arts. In its fourteen-year history the Bauhaus brought together a remarkable concentration of some of the greatest artists and designers of the twentieth century—Josef Albers, Marcel Breuer, George Grosz, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, László Moholy-Nagy, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Oskar Schlemmer—and became the “refinery of ... European avant-gardes,”<sup>30</sup> setting the standards for modern design in everything from teapots to workers’ housing. Walter Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus from 1919 to 1927, rallied designers to “the creation of type-forms for all practical commodities of everyday use.”<sup>31</sup> The type-form was the idea of a perfect—or at least optimal—solution to the functionality of every product, every type of building.

It followed that the unsophisticated tastes of the untutored and bourgeois public needed to be reformed through the evangelistic discourses of the avant-garde. There was no use consulting the public directly: as Gropius pointed out, they were as yet “intellectually undeveloped.” Modernism, observed Nigel Whiteley,<sup>32</sup> “supposedly rational, unsentimental, functional and serious—was about how architects and designers felt people should live; it did not grow out of the way people do live.” Neither the progressive art nor the socialist ideology that was clearly embodied in the school’s approach went down well; however, with German fascism, and the closure of the Bauhaus in 1933 was among the first of the Nazi suppressions after Hitler came to power. It was an act that contributed to the subsequent canonization of the Bauhaus as the font of modernism, while the diaspora of German modernists set in motion by Nazi persecution was, ironically, a significant factor in the broader dissemination of the new aesthetic.<sup>33</sup>

It was from these roots that there emerged a modernism that was founded in the idea of architecture and design as agents of social redemption. Through industrialized production, modern materials and functional design, good architecture could be produced inexpensively, become available to all, and thus improve the physical, social, moral, and aesthetic condition of cities. As Le Corbusier declared in his famous concluding lines of *Toward a New Architecture* (1927): “Architecture or revolution. Revolution can be avoided.” The radicalism of the Modern movement was also a platform for architects to escape their limited and subaltern role in bourgeois culture and systems of building provision.

The heroic scale of Corbusier’s ideas and his sheer irrepressibility drew admiration from the salariat of architects who craved leadership and recognition. His writing, together with that of Sigfried Giedion, an architecture critic and historian, was the focus of a meeting of twenty-four European architects in Switzerland in 1928. Their concluding statement, the La Sarraz Declaration, “demanded that architecture should be taken

*The diaspora set in motion by Nazi persecution was a significant factor in the broader dissemination of the new aesthetic*

away from the classically oriented Beaux-Arts schools of architecture and linked to the general economic system. Its signatories invoked ideas drawn from the American industrial process theorist and management consultant Frederick Winslow Taylor.”<sup>34</sup> This was the group that became the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) and met regularly in various European countries until 1939, and again from 1947 until 1956. Its members were “the Jesuits of the new faith”<sup>35</sup> and CIAM became a forum for “collective consensual plagiarism”<sup>36</sup> that played a major role in redefining both the objectified and symbolic cultural capital of modernism.

The ideal of the “Functional City” came to dominate CIAM discussions. The most notorious of CIAM’s gatherings was the one held in 1933 on the promenade deck of a cruise ship, the SS *Patris II*. The design and future development of the Functional City, it was agreed, should be based on the needs of the working masses. Echoing Thomas Adams’s and Tony Garnier’s belief in the separation of land uses as a rational basis for urban development, discussions were framed around four categories of urban functionality: dwelling, work, recreation, and transportation. Their conclusions, heavily edited by Le Corbusier, would eventually be incorporated into the Athens Charter (1942), a document credited (among many European architects, at least) as crusading and far-sighted, establishing rational principles for urban planning. In fact, the charter was highly derivative (not least of Corbusier’s own work) and glossed over some significant disagreements. It did, however, furnish the rhetoric and ideological framework for architectural modernism in urban planning praxis in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

As Saunier points out, national organizations and transatlantic networks had already been established for the circulation among municipalities of new ideas, texts, designs, and ideology.<sup>38</sup>

Initially, these were based on pre-existing networks (e.g. the Socialist International or the co-operative movement), the personal networks and letter-writing activity of key individuals (e.g. John Nolen or Patrick Geddes), and various universal exhibitions and international congresses (e.g. the International Housing Congresses, founded in 1889). Eventually, these systems became relatively fixed through associations such as the Union Internationale des Villes (UIV—established in 1913 and developed into the International Union of Local Authorities or IULA in 1928) and their conferences and journals (e.g. *Annales de la Regie Directe*).<sup>39</sup>

This “Urban International” became “an environment where ways of judging, apprehending and acting on the city were defined, where expertise and professional legitimacies were created, where knowledge and disciplines were constructed, and where the profiles of politicians responsible for urban issues were modified.”<sup>40</sup>

### **The Modernists’ Good City**

Modernists maintained that architecture and urban design should no longer be dominated by bourgeois values of civil refinement, historicism, privacy,

*The ideal of the “Functional City” came to dominate CIAM discussions*

and individualization. Rather, there should be a *Neues Bauen*, a new way of building, encompassing a mixture of social classes and encouraging the formation of communities on the green periphery of the city. This kind of urban development, it was believed, would produce a new, socially able kind of person (*neuer Mensch*) suited to the progressive development of the future republic. The concept of community was an important focus of the debate, thanks in large part to the influence of the book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society) by sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. Originally published in 1887, the book's popularity surged during the Weimar years, with five new editions between 1920 and 1926.

The idea of fostering community within an enclosed spatial framework of close interpersonal relations became a rallying point for visionary architectural schemes, especially among progressive architectural pressure groups like *Der Ring*. Martin Wagner, appointed as planning director for Greater Berlin in 1925, was a key member of this architectural avant-garde, along with Peter Behrens, Walter Gropius, Ernst May, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Hans Scharoun, and Bruno Taut. He was also deeply committed to socialism and the Social Democratic Party. Wagner was an early proponent of the application of new approaches to construction: using inexpensive nontraditional materials such as concrete panel construction, avoiding labor intensive practices (such as building interior walls with small, hand-laid bricks), and using the newest materials-handling techniques such as traveling cranes. Only this way, he argued, would it be economically feasible to provide "light and air, dignity and order" for working class households.

The *Hufeisensiedlung* (fig. 7.9), designed by Wagner in association with Bruno Taut and built between 1925 and 1933, was a seminal example of the *Neues Bauen*. The core of the project, from which the entire district took its name, is a three-story, horseshoe-shaped group of apartments built around a natural pond: a space that Taut saw as serving the residents' need for a place where children could play and adults could socialize. The district epitomized the radical spirit of the Weimar Republic, not only in terms of the progressive amenities of the housing but also in terms of the semiotics of the design. The *Hufeisensiedlung's* flat-roofed apartments had political overtones, while much of the row housing was painted red, an overt reference to Wagner's and Taut's socialist ideals, and a provocative demarcation from the neighboring *Eierteich* District with its traditionalistic design and pitched roofs.

In Britain, Marcel Breuer proposed a garden city of the future, a utopian scheme produced in collaboration with F. R. S. Yorke for the Ideal Home Exhibition in 1936. They replaced the garden city movement's familiar radial avenues lined with Arts-and-Crafts cottages with massive concrete ziggurat-shaped shopping centers, Y-shaped modernist apartment blocks, and sinuous pavilions. It was a high-density, mixed-use version of the garden city idea that was not received at all well, though its fundamental elements were to resurface in the New Towns of the British welfare state after 1947.





**7.9. The Hufeisensiedlung, Berlin.** The Hufeisensiedlung, in Berlin's outlying borough of Neukölln, designed by Martin Wagner in association with Bruno Taut and built between 1925 and 1933, was a seminal example of the *Neues Bauen* ("new way of building") during the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), when Berlin was particularly progressive socially, politically, and culturally. Commissioned by GEHAG, a trade union housing association, to provide housing for its members, the Hufeisensiedlung was a significant milestone in the history of modernist housing construction. The apartment designs had what were, for the time, unprecedented amenities: recessed balconies, and attic space that could be used for washing and for storage. Once built, the main critique was that the development was too nice for its working-class residents. The original development amounted to more than a thousand dwellings, while a further two thousand were added before the Nazi takeover ended socialist progressivism and proscribed Modernist design.



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The more general modernist solutions to worker housing were interpretations of the garden city idea, using superblocks aimed at providing every dwelling with the best possible conditions in relation to air, light, and space. These Siedlungen were conceptualized as “daughter towns” attached to the “mother” city by mass transit lines. Most followed the Zeilenbau principles of interwar German modernism, with midrise blocks running in parallel north–south strips (so that most rooms received either morning or afternoon sunlight), with alternating bands of green space and service yards. The narrow ends of the blocks, usually windowless, would face a circuit of arterial streets, simultaneously defining and cloistering the development, much as in Clarence Perry’s concept of a “neighborhood unit,” and in accordance with CIAM canon that traffic flow should be a primary determinant of urban form. By the early 1930s, superblocks of public housing influenced by Zeilenbau principles had begun to spread beyond Continental Europe, creating the template for much subsequent public housing. In the United States an early example was the Carl Mackley Houses, built from 1933 to 1934 in Philadelphia for the Hosiery Workers Union.<sup>41</sup>

But while Siedlungen and Zeilenbau principles were templates for worker housing, they fell short of a modernist template for the redesign of entire cities. This challenge was taken up by Le Corbusier. His early work involved writing, painting, and designing single-family residences and gained him a reputation as a very gifted artist and architect. In 1922, he published his initial ideas on the principles of urban design in a book entitled *La Ville Contemporaine*. The key, he argued, was to reduce the congestion of city centers by increasing their density: by building upward, in other words. High-density, high-rise city cores, he argued, would leave plenty of space for wide avenues to carry automobile traffic and for green space for recreation. *La Ville Contemporaine* (figs. 7.10) was conceived as a class-segregated city, with the best-located, most spacious and best-appointed tower blocks reserved for elite cadres of industrialists, scientists, and artists. Blue-collar workers were to have smaller garden apartments located in satellite units at some distance from the central cultural and entertainment complex.

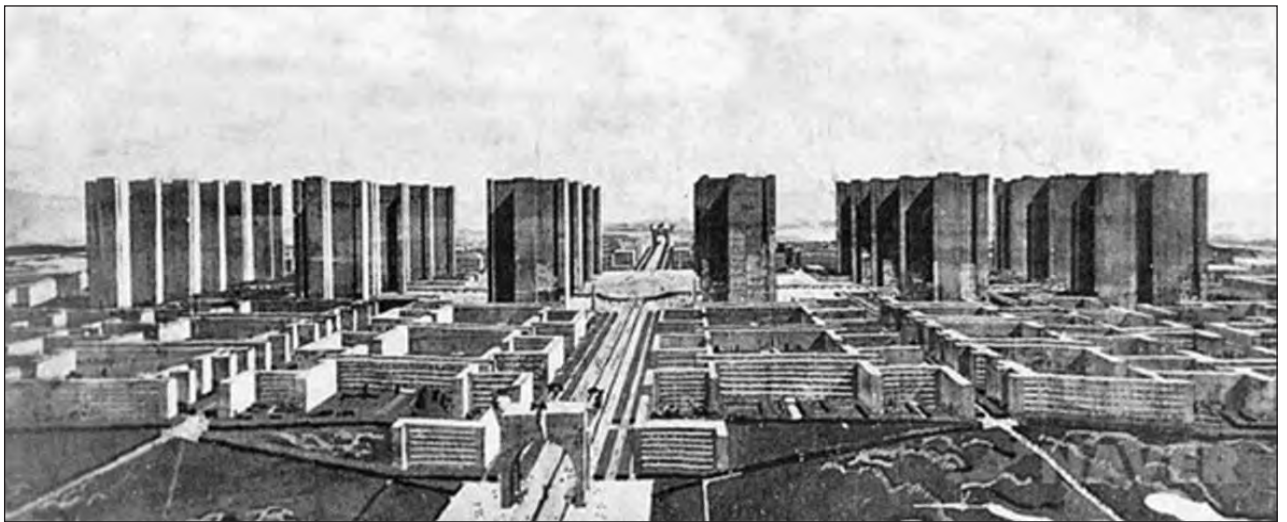
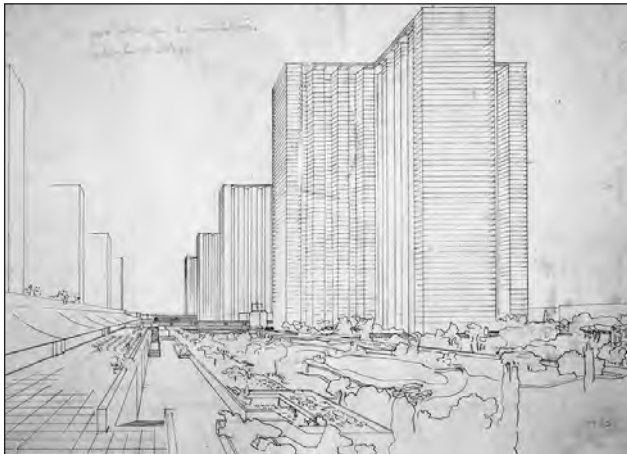
His plan for Paris, the Plan Voisin, reflected this strategy without any concessions to the existing city or to its inhabitants. The Plan Voisin called for eighteen, seven hundred-foot towers that would have required the demolition of most of historic Paris north of the Seine. Not surprisingly, such a radical, totalitarian plan attracted a great deal of opposition. Le Corbusier claimed not to be able to understand it, choosing instead to regard his own ideas as beyond the grasp of ordinary citizens. After the bourgeois power elite failed to support his ideas and the Great Depression took away the potential for industrialists to back his ideas, he revised his stance on urban development and came to believe in the virtue of centralized planning.

It seemed that only discipline could create the order he sought so ardently. Coordination must become conscious and total. Above all, society needed authority and a plan. Syndicalism, Le Corbusier believed, would provide a “pyramid of natural





7.10. Le Corbusier (1887-1965; 7.10a) and *La Ville Contemporaine* and *Plan Voisin* (7.10b-e). Le Corbusier's ideas on city planning and urban design were first developed in *La Ville Contemporaine*, a theoretical exercise published in 1922 featuring sixty-story cruciform residential towers. A proposal for the redevelopment of central Paris, the *Plan Voisin*, 1925, basically imposed a grid of similar towers on the existing fabric of the city with no reference to the urban context in terms of morphology, transportation, or socioeconomic considerations: a crass approach that would come to be adopted by planners in scores of cities.



hierarchies” on which order and planning could be based. The bottom of this pyramid is the syndicat, the group of workers, white-collar employees, and engineers who run their own factory. The workers have the responsibility of choosing their most able colleague to be their manager and to represent them at the regional trade council.<sup>42</sup>

In *La Ville Radieuse* (1933), he argued that everyone should live in huge collective apartment blocks called *unités*. The highly regulated spaces were to be the crucibles and shapers of new and better patterns of social life, imbued by a “new spirit” of syndicalism. This crude social engineering was never pursued, but Le Corbusier’s physical proposals grew into a conventional wisdom that asserted the need to modernize cities through ruthless redevelopment, tearing out their centers and replacing them with high-rise housing and freeways. The failures of many of the urban renewal projects inspired by Le Corbusier’s ideas were eventually to give modernism a bad name.

### **The Cult of Personality**

The cultural and intellectual affect associated with the Modern movement meanwhile launched a different trajectory of path dependency, intensifying the cult of personality as a distinctive trait within the design fields. Career success amid the febrile exchanges of collective consensual plagiarism within the Modern movement required a certain amount of flair—if not shameless self-promotion—in order to be noticed. “Thus there came into being another unique phenomenon: the famous architect who did little or no building.”<sup>43</sup> In contrast to the “purified” arts scene,<sup>44</sup> the design field required celebrity as an endorsement for the routine practice of its lesser lights. If modernism had yet to establish iconic buildings, then at least it could offer Great Men who could be canonized as “hero” designers in modernism’s master narrative—in which the March of Reason in the Arc of History would bring creativity, enlightenment, and a progressive sensibility to a confused and reactionary world.

The most notorious example was Le Corbusier himself. Born in 1887 as Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, he changed his name to Le Corbusier in a meaningless but brilliant stroke of personal branding. A determined self-publicist, even his signature was designed, while his distinctive spectacles were to become a global shorthand for “architect.” Undoubtedly a talented artist and architect, his professional success and notoriety were also a result of his monomaniacal, narcissistic, and pugilistic temperament and his deeply authoritarian, opportunistic, and cynical approach to professional work.<sup>45</sup>

In an artistic and intellectual climate that had become highly politicized and dominated by utopian and futuristic manifestos, Le Corbusier got himself noticed as a result of his deliberately shocking slogans and outrageous claims. He would not tolerate any thought of moderation in his approach. Standardization, anonymity, and purity of form were essential, he asserted, in creating a “mass production spirit” that would properly shape



the daily routines, desires, and leisure activities of the industrial proletariat in modern cities. (Meanwhile, though, he was not above taking commissions for luxury homes from wealthy individuals.) Unfortunately, his behavior as well as his ideas became something of a role model for lesser talents.

Le Corbusier's performance and notoriety intensified the "Consecrated Genius/Great Buildings" narrative within the design professions, modernist or otherwise. Nikolaus Pevsner's foundational account in 1936 of the history of design, for example (*Pioneers of the Modern Movement*), reads as the inevitable outcome of the work of inspired minds, a progressive shift toward a conclusion at the Bauhaus, where the conflicts between art and industry are resolved. Sigfried Gideon sought to redress the balance in his 1948 book, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History*, while another prominent historian of design, Reyner Banham, provided a compendium of the baffling arcana of highly aestheticized discussions of the art compounds, congresses, conferences, symposia, and panel discussions of the interwar period in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960). The literature on design (and in design education) ever since has been written in the spirit of Thomas Carlyle's 1841 book (*On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*): "the baton of genius or avant-garde innovation passes from the hand of one great designer to the next in an endless chain of achievement."<sup>46</sup>

### **The Avant Garde as Useful Idiots**

Modernism and modernist sensibilities in North America developed almost entirely without the political radicalism that drove the European avant-garde. The first stylistic development to appear in American cityscapes was art deco, a hybridization of art nouveau with smooth rounded forms and surfaces and geometric decorative motifs inspired by the international exposition in Paris in 1925. Art deco had no strong philosophical or political roots or intentions: it was a purely decorative, hedonistic movement that was directly influenced by the events and technologies of the time. Aviation, electric lighting, the radio, ocean liners, and skyscrapers inspired streamlined styling and generated a spin-off genre, *Streamline Moderne*, or simply *Streamline*. *Streamline Moderne* had its roots in automobile, aircraft, and locomotive design, reducing air turbulence around fast-moving objects. It was consonant with the zeitgeist of the Roaring Twenties. Soon, "Architects and designers began using the same style for things that could never possibly move, such as office buildings, factories, automobile filling stations, and houses."<sup>47</sup> When the Depression hit, all-American *Streamline art deco* became the institutional face of the New Deal, signaling that a new era was under way.<sup>48</sup>

It was an early example of cultural entrepreneurship that brought European Modern architecture to the United States. Two well-connected American architects, Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, pulled off an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1932 featuring models and images of the work of prominent European modernists.

*Le Corbusier's behavior  
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talents*

The exhibit judiciously downplayed the leftist political underpinnings of the material for visitors to the exhibit—who would, of course, be drawn overwhelmingly from New York’s haute bourgeoisie—treating modernism simply as an aesthetic movement. Slyly framing the appeal of the exhibit to mainstream American clients and audiences, Johnson and Hitchcock minimized its close linkages to CIAM and propagated the myth<sup>49</sup> of links to the earlier works and ideas of home-grown Frank Lloyd Wright. More in hope than as a reflection of reality, the exhibition was called “The International Style.” The label and the implicit idea of a new-wave style, unencumbered by social or political meaning, caught on immediately; and so the radical European avant-garde were effectively reduced to “useful idiots” in the commodification of the modernist aesthetic.

The publicity surrounding the exhibition also paved the way for the arrival of prominent European modernists in America. As it became clear that modernism did not sit well in the emerging fascist political economy of Germany, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and László Moholy-Nagy decamped to Britain in the mid-1930s, before moving to the United States. Gropius took up the chairmanship of Harvard’s Graduate School of Design and was joined by Breuer. Moholy-Nagy set up a short-lived New Bauhaus in Chicago that was eventually absorbed into the Illinois Institute of Technology, where Van der Rohe had arrived in 1937 to head a newly formed Department of Architecture. By the time they took up their positions in their new environment, it was clear that the most receptive sponsors of modernism in America were the executives of business corporations, who were attracted to the visual language of modernism, seeing it as symbolizing progress and prosperity. Thus, in the course of its absorption into the American mainstream, modernism’s commitment to an egalitarian society was edited out, the social agenda replaced by one that was almost exclusively commercial. The general visual aesthetic remained the same, but its meaning was changed. Modernism now represented capitalism—corporate capitalism—not socialism. The subsequent fusion and transformation of Modern design into the glib Esperanto of the International Style and the simultaneous adoption of the style as the preferred image of corporate and bureaucratic conservatism, respectability, and solidity left the raw power of avant-garde modernism to pass quietly into the mythology of architectural education and the coffee-table books of the cognoscenti.

*Modernism’s  
commitment to an  
egalitarian society  
was edited out*

### **American Exceptionalism**

While the staging and subsequent influence of the International Style exhibition was conditioned by the deep-seated American adherence to laissez-faire capitalism, it ran counter to another deep-seated conviction: the idea of American cultural exceptionalism and its emphasis on individual freedom and ingenuity. This was increasingly important in the interwar period among architects, architectural historians, artists, critics, political and cultural historians, novelists, and composers. By focusing on uniqueness and

exclusivity, “one could explain the visual and intellectual appeal of American art without having to apologize for the fact that it did not measure up to the innovation and originality of its European peers. ... The Americanness issue enabled scholars to turn what had commonly been assumed to be a provincial and marginal body of work into a complex and intellectually exciting project.”<sup>50</sup>

America’s own self-styled visionary intellectual architect, Frank Lloyd Wright (fig. 7.11), was anxious to position himself as a man with a distinctively American flavor. Rattled by the attention given to Le Corbusier, he did not appreciate the idea of an International Style. “Wright himself was furious and, for one of the few times in his life, bewildered. It was hard to say what got under his skin more: the fact that his work had been upstaged by the Europeans or the fact that he was now treated as a species of walking dead man. He was not deprived of honor and respect, but when he got it, it often sounded like a memorial service.”<sup>51</sup>

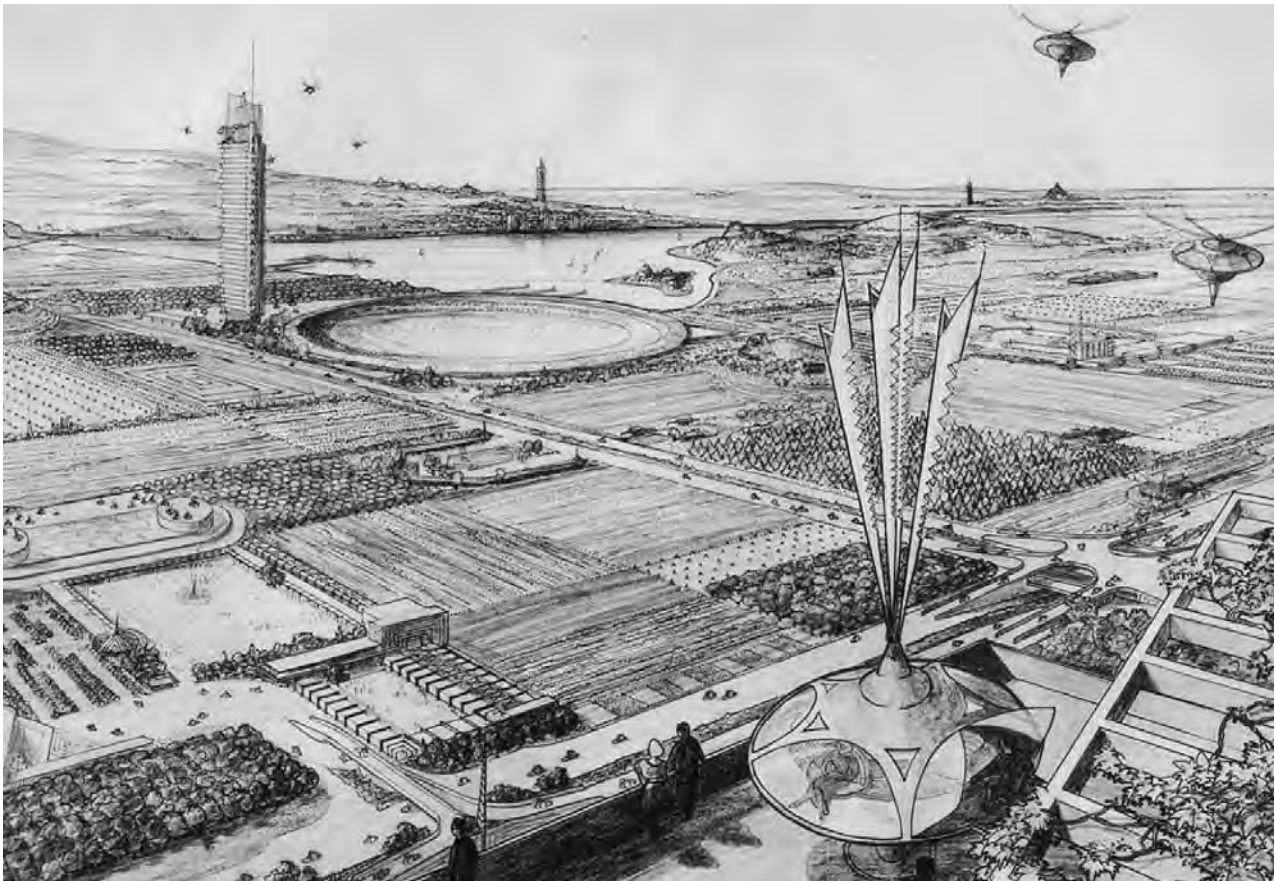
Ever the iconoclast, Wright decided to be an architect who hated cities. His vision was for a “Usonian” (a word play on US own) future, with his own brand of distinctive Prairie-style architecture (fig. 7.12). In contrast to the International Style, and in direct contradiction of the rationale of Le Corbusier’s high-rise Ville Radieuse, Wright argued for a low-density, low-rise pattern of settlement in his idealized Broadacre City (1934; fig. 7.13). Invoking the individualism and naturalism of Jefferson, Thoreau, and Emerson, Wright took a stance that gave primacy to individual freedom rather than to the modernists’ emphasis on social democracy. Single-family homes on one-acre lots, he argued, provided the only way to guarantee the individual freedom that was the birthright of Americans; Broadacre City would be the ultimate expression of a truly democratic society. Further, it would be healthful, aesthetically pleasing, and morally and culturally uplifting. The inaccessibility inherent to the large lots and low densities of Broadacre City was to be conquered by a network of landscaped parkways and freeways, with the focal point of semirural neighborhoods being provided by huge gas stations, architectural centerpieces that would double up as cafeterias and minimarts. While visionary, it was entirely conservative, framed around middle-class white households—not surprising, perhaps, given his freely aired racial antipathies and protofascism.<sup>52</sup>

Apart from the discriminatory logic lurking within his project’s framework, Wright, like most would-be visionary architects before and since, did not really understand cities and their complex, recursive interdependencies. He paid scant attention to cities’ fundamental economic functions as efficient and effective environments for organizing labor, capital, and raw materials, for distributing finished products, and as ecologies for generation of innovation, knowledge, and information. Like his predecessors, his contemporaries, and his successors, Wright was able to see no further than a prescriptive and deterministic relationship between urban design and individual well-being. It is, rather tiresomely, a recurring theme.

*Ever the iconoclast,  
Wright decided to  
be an architect who  
hated cities*



7.11. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). Upstaged by European modernists and "treated as a species of walking dead man," he decided to be an architect of suburbs and exurbs, rather than cities.





Wright's narrowly conceived goal was to spare cities from the congestion threatened by the rapid spread of automobile ownership. From this position it was only a short step to the notion of the automobile as the means of gaining access—for some, at least—to the blessings of the Great Outdoors. In this way, two powerful American traits—a pioneer affinity with Nature and growing infatuation with the automobile—might be reconciled. Where Le Corbusier wanted to increase densities and build tall, Wright wanted to decrease densities and spread out. It must have seemed like a good idea at the time. Where Le Corbusier wanted people to live in megastructures, Wright wanted them to live in differentiated and individualized homes that were designed to be in harmony with their natural surroundings.

Broadacre City would be achieved on the basis of two new technologies: the automobile and mass-production building technology using high-pressure concrete, plywood, and plastic. It was a vision that was endorsed, of course, by the road lobby and automobile industry. A Shell Oil advertising campaign in the 1937 “City of Tomorrow” featured a model built by Norman Bel Geddes that became a prototype for a much larger and more ambitious version displayed 1939 World’s Fair in New York. The theme of the exhibition was “Building the World of Tomorrow,” and it featured Futurama, an enormous scale model “City of 1960,” sponsored by General Motors. It envisaged a vast suburban landscape serviced by automated highways and country clubs.<sup>53</sup>

Developers had already made the first moves toward communities based on “automobility.” The best-known are Palos Verdes Estates (Los Angeles, master planned by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.), Shaker Heights (Cleveland), and the Country Club District (Kansas City). They were characterized by very low densities (for the time) of about three dwellings per acre, high-quality landscaping, recreational facilities (golf courses, in particular), public gardens, and plazas, in addition to shopping amenities, and strict deed covenants aimed at preserving the character and appearance of the entire community. The Country Club District, at the edge of the new Kansas City Parkway System, was the most influential of these.<sup>54</sup> It was the creation of developer Jesse Clyde Nichols, who later founded the Urban Land Institute, an independent research organization concerned with urban land use and development from the developers’ point of view. Nichols had been impressed by the garden city movement in Europe and was determined to put together a project large enough to sustain a self-contained community.

**7.12 Pope-Leighey House, Alexandria, VA** (opposite, top). Designed in Usonian style by Wright for the Pope-Leighey family in 1940.

**7.13. Broadacre City** (opposite, bottom). First described by Wright in 1930, Broadacre City was designed to reflect American values and as a foil to Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse*. Presented as a critique of existing cities, it nevertheless failed to address existing forms of inequality, privilege, and prejudice. Instead, it became a blueprint for placeless sprawl.



The centerpiece was Country Club Plaza, the world's first automobile-based shopping center. It featured waterfalls, fountains, and expensive landscaping, with extensive parking lots behind ornamental brick walls. Nichols carefully controlled the composition of businesses through leasing policies that brought upscale retail stores to the first floor of the development, and lawyers, physicians, and accountants to the offices on the second floor. Similarly, the residential sections of the Country Club District were carefully landscaped and controlled. Densities were kept low, streets were curvilinear, trees were preserved wherever possible, and houses were set back from the street, with driveways and garages. All sales were subject to racially restrictive deed covenants, and all purchasers were required to join the homeowners' association, the purpose of which was to ensure lawn care and to supervise the general upkeep and tidiness of streets and open spaces. It was a commercial success from the start and, despite the obvious problematic elitism of the venture, it attracted critical acclaim from builders, developers, and planners who came from across the United States to view the shape of the future.

# 8

## The Golden Age

Postwar economic recovery and the commitment of central governments to full employment and social welfare set up a golden age for the design professions. It was a chance, at last, to make real and substantial contributions to the quality of urban life. An entire generation would now grow up living healthier lives in better housing and safer and more efficient cities. The benefits of better environments were meanwhile matched by economic and educational opportunities and advances in civil rights that ensured unprecedented upward mobility among working-class communities. Nineteenth-century slums disappeared, to be replaced by districts of modernist towers and midrise apartments; cities acquired modern suburbs and new highway infrastructure; and entire city centers were redesigned and spruced up. But all this was not without negative consequences, either for the physical and social fabric of cities or for the design fields themselves. By the mid-1970s, the design fields had lost their way, and cities had developed a new set of problems.

The achievement of so much toward the good city and better lives was not all, of course, down to the design professions. While they could claim a great deal in terms of inspiration, innovation, and execution, their accomplishments were enabled and shaped by the political economy of the period. Equally, design professionals were only partially, if at all, responsible for the negatives. Design practitioners were responsible for their own confusions, aggressions, and misunderstandings; but their best efforts were often undercut, constrained, and overwhelmed by the dynamics of urbanization over which they had little control.

The path dependencies set in motion by the legacies of the Second World War and recovery were different in Europe and North America. But as each path developed it influenced the other, engendering commonalities as well as contrasts. The Second World War, observes Rosemary Wakeman,

is central to understanding postwar urban planning. It scattered the avant-garde, and encouraged transnational (often clandestine) mobility, conviction and conversation, threw open ideas, the stock of policy models and planning solutions. The war opened up an unparalleled demand for experimentation and innovation. With the war's end, this internationalism expanded even further in scope, fuelled by reconstruction projects, international exhibitions and competitions, and the diffusion of professional journals. Members of the Bauhaus and CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) fanned out across the globe.<sup>1</sup>

Europe, having borne the brunt of the conflict, was distinctive for the scale of rebuilding and the comprehensiveness of welfare states that were the civil settlement of successive world wars. For six years there had been almost no new housebuilding in Britain while the existing stock had been reduced by bomb damage: two hundred thousand homes were destroyed and more than three-and-a-half million significantly damaged. Postwar recovery and reconstruction were hampered by shortages of building materials and by the continuation of the strict building controls that had been imposed during hostilities. Consumer rationing lasted until the mid-1950s; but amid the austerity there was an entirely new sensibility. The complacent middle-class attitudes of the interwar period had been replaced by a “postwar consensus”: a determination to break with the past and a conviction that centralized planning—which had served the country well during the war—was necessary to forge a new, more prosperous and more healthy society. “The expectations for social and urban reform were enormous. It gave urban planning a messianic ring. It was the discipline of the future.”<sup>2</sup>

In Britain, a Labour government swept into power in 1945 with a mandate to implement a comprehensive program of civil transformation and social engineering that included the establishment of a “cradle to grave” welfare state and the selective nationalization of major industries and utilities. It was nothing less than a secular Reformation. The built environment became an important arena for economic redistribution and social policy. Along with social insurance, pensions, health-care and education, housing was one of the main pillars of the welfare state.<sup>3</sup> Tasked with articulating progressive solutions to urban development, the design fields acquired new significance for which they were not entirely prepared. In seizing the chance to create the good city, architects and planners drew on ideas, preconceptions, and habits of mind accumulated from premodern times onward, buoyed by the revolutionary fervor of the interwar period.

Britain’s decisive acceptance of collectivist provision and state intervention in the market astonished observers in America, where the most distinctive element of postwar political economy was McCarthyism, smearing anything remotely progressive as incipient communism. Of more lasting significance was the simultaneous transition from a market economy to an economic system increasingly dominated by a cartel of corporations geared to Fordist strategies of mass production for mass consumption: the new “technostructure” of capitalism, as John Kenneth Galbraith called it. Nevertheless, like Britain, the United States also had a backlog of urban development: by the end of the war it was estimated that at least five million housing units were needed immediately. A commitment to providing homes and educational opportunities for returning service personnel was a social

*The built environment became an important arena for economic redistribution and social policy*

compact that, together with the British welfare state, signaled the beginning of a new transatlantic regime of “embedded liberalism,”<sup>4</sup> featuring Keynesian domestic economic policies aimed at ensuring demand-side growth through extensive welfare spending. Policymaking and planning, urban governance, and urban development all presupposed one another in the rationalization of space required by Fordist systems of production. It launched an era of technocratic policymaking and urban planning, whose practitioners enjoyed more public confidence than ever before or since in their ability to re-create cities as equitable and efficient settings for people, commerce, and industry.

Postwar economic recovery soon evolved into economic boom, ushering in what John Kenneth Galbraith in 1958 called the “affluent society.”<sup>5</sup> By the late 1960s, Guy Debord had identified the emergence in Western culture of a “Society of the Spectacle,” preoccupied with commodity consumption.<sup>6</sup> Consumerism was supercharged by the increasing availability of credit cards. Thanks to Fordism, consumers’ dreams could be fulfilled more quickly and more affordably, but they had to be delivered through a variety of specialized settings—“cathedrals of consumption”<sup>7</sup>—department stores, shopping malls, strip malls, and chain stores. The Fordist corporate sector, meanwhile, required its own supporting infrastructure of office buildings, conference centers, and business hotels. The design professions—planners, in particular—were also called upon to address strategies and policies for the districts and communities left behind by the rise of the affluent society. Poverty was “rediscovered” in both Britain and America,<sup>8</sup> with Lyndon Johnson’s declaration of a “War on Poverty” in 1964 belatedly installing an incipient welfare state regime in the United States.

*Modernism took on wider appeal as the logical aesthetic for recovery*

### **Everyday Modernism**

Modernism had already become consecrated among the cultural avant-garde, its orthodoxies held to be self-evident: “Of course we must have white walls. Of course there must be no decoration. Of course a building should express its function.”<sup>9</sup> In the aftermath of the Second World War, modernism took on wider appeal as the logical aesthetic for recovery: wipe-clean and futuristic, its claims to social redemption ready-made in both practical and symbolic terms for the build-out of fledgling welfare states. Meanwhile, stripped of its political progressiveness in its guise as the International Style, modernism furnished the preferred aesthetic for corporate office buildings and showrooms. Then, as recovery developed into prosperity, modernism lent itself to luxe versions that were a key element of the habitus of the culturally progressive, midcentury nouveau riche. One way or another, modernism rapidly became an everyday dimension of cityscapes everywhere.

## Welfare States and Everyday Modernism

Postwar welfare states developed around five main public services, funded from taxes and insurance contributions: health, education, social security, personal social services, and housing. All made an impact on the built environment: schools, clinics, hospitals, transport infrastructure, new towns, social housing, and the offices of public bureaucracies. The shape of things to come was manifest in the 1951 Festival of Britain. The centerpiece was an exhibition held on a riverside bomb site in central London, across from Parliament. With the aim of promoting a feeling of recovery, most of the exhibition consisted of futuristic temporary installations such as the Dome of Discovery and the Skylon. But the Royal Festival Hall, in concrete modernist style, was to be a permanent legacy, the kernel of a “Great Cultural Centre” envisaged by Patrick Abercrombie in the plan for London that he had developed during the war. The *Architectural Review* heralded the exhibition as “the first modern townscape,”<sup>10</sup> but it was the “living architecture” element of the festival that provided a more accurate glimpse of the future. Located in London’s Docklands, the Lansbury Estate (fig. 8.1) was a model social housing estate designed by Frederick Gibberd and featuring the first purpose-built pedestrian shopping precinct in the United Kingdom.

It was social housing, of course, that was far and away the most significant element of welfare state provision in terms of immediate impact, spatial extent, and symbolic power. Nevertheless, housing was a “wobbly pillar” of welfare states, dominated by urgent quantitative imperatives rather than systemic reform objectives.<sup>11</sup> There was a huge backlog of unfulfilled demand for housing from the Depression and war years, and immediately after the war the resumption of domestic life by millions of men and women who had been in the armed services led to a sudden increase in the rate of household formation and a sharp increase in birth rates, that is, the “baby boom.”

The problem was acute and it was urgent: perfect for radical, modernist solutions. Le Corbusier, who had famously concluded “Architecture or revolution. Revolution can be avoided,” saw the opportunity at once. Having already submitted a radical plan for Paris (the Plan Voisin) featuring seven-hundred-foot residential towers and proposed an ideal

*The problem was acute and it was urgent: perfect for radical, modernist solutions*

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**8.1 Lansbury Estate and the Christ Street Market, Poplar** (opposite, top). Built as part of the Festival of Britain, it was intended as a demonstration of an ideal neighborhood for the new era of the welfare state. It was heavily influenced by Clarence Perry’s concept of a self-contained neighborhood unit. The market and its clock tower were designed by Frederick Gibberd.

**8.2 Unité d’Habitation, Marseille** (opposite, bottom). Completed in 1952, the building took Le Corbusier’s most famous quote—that a house is “a machine for living in”—and applied it to an entire community. L’Unité redefined high-density housing by reimagining a neighborhood inside an eighteen-story slab block with shops, a hotel, and a rooftop terrace. Its 1,600 residents and 337 apartments were connected with interior “streets.”





city (La Ville Radieuse) in which everyone should live in huge collective apartment blocks called “unités,” Le Corbusier now focused on the design of unités themselves as a technological shortcut to social change. His Unité d’Habitation (built 1947 to 1952), an eighteen-story apartment block for 1,600 people in Marseilles (fig. 8.2), was the model. It was constructed as a rectilinear ferro-concrete grid into which precast individual apartment units were slotted, like “bottles into a wine rack,” as Le Corbusier put it. With its integrated community services, daycare facilities, and shops, it carried through his formula of apartment buildings as “machines for living” in the new welfare states. The building’s functional lines struck the right chord with the design community—as did his brilliant branding, deploying an updated version of da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man as the basis of a “Modulor” system that he used in drafting the plan, section, elevations, and apartment dimensions of the building. It was deterministic and irrelevant to the functioning of the building, but its pseudoscientific flavor and invocation of the Great Man of the Renaissance helped to reinforce the appeal of high-rise unités among design professionals.

Others still had to be convinced of the desirability of high-rise living. The established modernist housing solution, after all, was based on midrise blocks using Zeilenbau principles. The LCC’s 1950s “Estate of the Future,” Woodberry Down (fig. 8.3), was based on a Zeilenbau layout, with five- and eight-story blocks. High-rise building was still the exception through the mid-1950s, when the Royal Institute of British Architects held an influential symposium on high-rise flats. It was opened by Dame Evelyn Sharp, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, who quoted a poem about the beauty of tall buildings. It was an encouraging sign for followers of Le Corbusier, but the real turning point was the government’s realization that the combination of its slum-clearance program, its desire to limit sprawl, and the high cost of urban land, together with an unexpectedly high birth rate, was resulting in an impossible arithmetic. There was no alternative but to build dense and build tall.

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**8.3 Woodberry Down, Hackney, London** (opposite). By the time it was completed, Woodberry Down consisted of 2,500 homes in fifty-seven blocks. The estate was conceived as a neighborhood unit with schools, a community center, a public library and a health clinic, the first to be built under the National Health Service Act. The taller blocks (8.3a) were built in concrete because of postwar shortages of steel and bricks. This gave them something of the look of avant-garde prewar apartment buildings in Stockholm and Vienna. As building materials became available, five-story blocks in a simplified neo-Georgian style (8.3b) were built, with streamlined balconies the only nod to modernism. They attracted intense criticism from the architectural press, which saw their barrack-like appearance and retreat to a style of building that simply continued the template of the prewar years as a betrayal of the opportunity for a new architecture.







By way of encouragement for high-rise municipal building, the central government introduced a schedule of subsidies in 1956 that gave city councils more money per apartment the higher it was from the ground: three times as much for an apartment in a fifteen-story block as for a ground-floor unit, for example. The LCC's prestigious Architect's Department led the way, under the leadership of Leslie Martin. With more than 1,500 staff, including 350 professional architects and trainees, Martin's department became the most significant influence on the postwar design of social housing in the country. The architects on staff were genuinely idealistic, many of them adhering to strong socialist—if not communist—principles. They were famously split between fans of hard-line Le Corbusian high-rise solutions and those of the “New Humanism” of Swedish welfare-state housing in Stockholm suburbs such as Vällingby that had inspired them on their study tours. Both were represented in the LCC's much-admired Alton Estate (fig. 8.4) in Roehampton, in London's southwestern suburbs.

A common denominator was the widespread use of rough, unfinished concrete for all tall buildings. It had been used for L'Unité by Le Corbusier, who described it as *béton brut* (raw concrete). In a clever word play, design critic, and polemicist Reyner Banham popularized the term “Brutalism” to describe the directness of purpose associated with this architecture, and it caught on. “There was a certain conscious monumentalism to Brutalism but, if it was statement architecture, it spoke for the moment to an architecture of social purpose and was widely seen as the architectural style of the Welfare State—a cheap way of building quickly, on a large scale, for housing, hospitals, comprehensive schools, and massive university expansion.”<sup>12</sup>

The Alton Estate was certainly brutalist, as were many of the most ambitious social housing projects in postwar Britain. Park Hill, in Sheffield, was one of these; Robin Hood Gardens (fig. 8.5), near the Lansbury Estate in London, was another. The linear Park Hill complex included pubs, shops, social clubs, a community center, a health center, and nursery and primary schools. The 985 apartments were fronted by nine-foot wide decks: “streets in the sky” (fig. 8.6). The futuristic resonance of “streets in the sky” had come from Alison and Peter Smithson, two of the self-styled *enfants terribles* of postwar modernism. The idea of deck access came straight from Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation*, which featured internal corridors based on the passenger decks of the ocean liners that he admired so much, with cabins accessed from promenade

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**8.4 Alton West, Roehampton** (opposite). The public housing estate was a tableau of five substantial tower blocks raised on stilts over open, sloping parkland, along with two groups of point blocks and bungalows for pensioners. Alton West was directly inspired by Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation*. The project was designed by a team of hard-line modernists in the LCC Architect's Department, led by Colin Lucas, a pioneer of building in concrete. Innovative story-high pre-cast panels were used for the high-rise units.





decks. The Smithsons' own exercise in creating "streets in the sky," Robin Hood Gardens, was based on two linear high-rise blocks arranged fortress-like around an inner space that they likened, presumably with straight faces, to London's Georgian squares. The space was filled with lumpy grassed mounds, to discourage noisy ball games: something the residents of actual Georgian squares had not had to worry about.

All of these examples were system-built, using precast components designed to minimize on-site construction work. System-building worked well enough for Brutalist schemes like Robin Hood Gardens and it helped, among the design community, that the likes of Le Corbusier, Gropius, and Buckminster Fuller favored system building as a matter of principle, for its techno-rationalist appeal. In practice it was driven by the combination of new manufacturing techniques and a shortage of construction workers with traditional skills, boosted by government-sponsored research into system building, encouraged by municipalities seeking to symbolize their town's modernity, and sustained, for a while, by government subsidies for tall buildings. But only large construction firms with national markets could exploit the economies of scale required to operate with patented processes such as the Sectra system, the Larsen-Nielson system, and the Jespersen 12M system. As a result, the entire system of building provision was skewed toward large firms, locked-in to a very specific sociotechnical regime, with a progressive narrowing of options for design professionals. One outcome was the cloning of cityscapes around the country as system-built "point blocks" replaced aging terraces and bombed-out streets.

Although social housing was widely seen in the United States as ideologically distasteful, the depth of the Depression had created exceptional needs, and a social housing program was able to be sold politically in terms of employment creation rather than housing subsidy. After the Second World War a more extensive and ambitious national program was launched. The Housing Act of 1949 linked social housing construction to slum clearance programs, authorizing the construction of 810,000 low-rent units over six years. It represented a significant commitment to subsidized housing for the poor, especially since the country was in the grip of McCarthyism. For Senator McCarthy and his many followers in the private construction and manufacturing sectors,

*Corbusier, Gropius,  
and Buckminster  
Fuller favored  
system building  
as a matter of  
principle*

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**8.5 Robin Hood Gardens, Poplar, London** (opposite, top). Critically acclaimed but socially disastrous. More than 75 percent of residents supported the demolition of this Brutalist public housing project when consulted by the local authority, Tower Hamlets. Designed by Alison and Peter Smithson and completed in 1972, it was sculpture posing as housing.

**8.6. Park Hill, Sheffield** (opposite, bottom). Park Hill was one of the most ambitious inner-city housing projects in Britain. Designed by Ivor Smith and Jack Lynn for Sheffield City Council and opened in 1961, it was credited as being the first successful community-wide slum clearance project. Its wide communal walkways—"streets in the sky"—were intended to be a modern version of the cobbled terraces of the former slums.

social housing was “a breeding ground for communists.” Their preferred solution was federal insurance to underwrite large private builders, coupled with the abolition of zoning and building codes and the end of union labor. But their opposition to the 1949 act was deflected by a coalition of other interest groups, all with different agendas and different assumptions about the main purpose of the legislation. Political liberals saw it as a means of eliminating slums and rehousing the poor, but business interests saw it as a means of bolstering central city property values; while many local politicians saw it as a means of bolstering their tax base and luring back some of the more affluent consumers and taxpayers who had decamped to the suburbs.

Flush with federal cash, city redevelopment agencies commissioned city planners to prepare slum-clearance master plans. Following a similar logic to their British counterparts, their preferred design solutions were (very broadly) Corbusian-style clusters of towers.<sup>13</sup> Big cities generated big projects. The twenty-eight sixteen-story buildings of the Robert Taylor Homes project in Bronzeville on the South Side of Chicago (fig. 8.7) stretched for two-miles along Interstate 90. The Pruitt-Igoe project in St Louis (fig. 8.8) housed fifteen thousand tenants in thirty-three, eleven-story blocks, with glazed internal galleries intended to create “individual neighborhoods” within each building. Completed in 1954, the project had been conceived as two segregated sections (Pruitt for blacks and Igoe for whites), but a Supreme Court decision handed down that same year forced desegregation. The Cabrini-Green complex in the Near North Side of Chicago was of similar size, using a mix of mid- and high-rise apartment buildings.

### Corporate Modernism

With stars like Gropius and Breuer at Harvard and van der Rohe installed at the Illinois Institute of Technology, the influence of modernism spread throughout the country’s design schools, finally displacing Beaux Arts as the dominant paradigm. Corporate clients were especially enamored of the International Style, free of awkward political symbolism. In 1951,

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**8.7. Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago** (opposite, top). When the project opened in 1962 it was the largest public housing development in the country. With 4,415 apartments in twenty-eight identical sixteen-story buildings, mostly arranged in U-shaped clusters of three, it was designed to house about eleven thousand people, but it ended up with almost twenty-seven thousand residents. The overcrowding, along with inadequate maintenance, contributed to a rapid deterioration of the project. It was eventually demolished in 2005.

**8.8 Pruitt-Igoe, St Louis** (opposite, bottom). The now-notorious project was created under the U.S. Housing Act of 1949, which made funds directly available to cities for slum clearance, urban redevelopment, and public housing. In 1950 the St. Louis Housing Authority commissioned the firm of Leinweber, Yamasaki & Hellmuth to design the project for a fifty-seven-acre site on the city’s northside black ghetto. Their solution was truly Corbusian in scale, with the 2,700-unit project housing fifteen thousand tenants on its completion in 1954.



The Golden Age



Gordon Bunshaft showed how the International Style could be deployed in downtown high-rise buildings without having to compromise the form of the building with the stepped set-backs that were the traditional response to New York's land-use zoning (in order to allow light and air to reach the street). His design for Lever House on New York's Park Avenue simply moved back the base of the steel-and-glass office skyscraper, leaving the space left at the foot of the building as a corporate plaza and the building itself as pure form. A few years later, Mies himself designed an even sleeker steel-and-glass skyscraper, the Seagram Building, just across Park Avenue from Lever House.

Between them, these two buildings immediately set the preferred image for corporate signature skyscrapers. Landmark buildings included the Pan Am (now Met Life) Building and the World Trade Center towers in New York, the Prudential Building, Boston, the Sears Tower, and the Standard Oil building in Chicago and, in Britain, the CIS Tower in Manchester, and Centre Point and Millbank Tower in London. By the 1960s, technological improvements had made it possible to have glass façades without having to pay the price of uncomfortably high levels of solar gain. At about the same time, new techniques for mounting glass made it possible to have continuous exterior glass surfaces. Putting the two together resulted in "glass-box" architecture, buildings that disappear in the reflection of their own surroundings, the ultimate expression of van der Rohe's famous dictum, "less is more." Office towers were attended by high-rise business hotels like architect John Portman's Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles and Hyatt Regency hotels in Atlanta and San Francisco, with their monumental multistory atria.

Transformed under the banner of revitalization, downtown cityscapes were dominated by corporate towers. Downtown expressways, offices, hotels and retail infrastructure replaced slums and underperforming zone-in-transition real estate. The funding for urban renewal programs provided an ideal platform for the propagation of progrowth coalitions. These varied in character from city to city, but typically included business elements (developers, bankers, and financiers), blue-collar interests (labor unions), liberal interests (planners and welfare agencies), and representatives of both local government (city managers and political leaders) and the federal government (urban renewal executives).

In Chicago, for example, Arthur Rubloff, a real estate and policy entrepreneur, assembled and managed a network that included building owners, realtors, journalists, attorneys, bankers, and lawmakers "capable of delivering small favors like parking garages and Interstate highway reroutings as well as helpful public policies like urban renewal legislation and multimillion-dollar subsidies."<sup>14</sup> The initial focus of the network was the redevelopment of North Michigan Avenue, which Rubloff cleverly renamed the Magnificent Mile, and it morphed into a



growth machine that extended its reach to Fort Dearborn and the North Loop, driving a dramatic upsurge in downtown property values, office rental charges, retail sales, and tax revenues. Rubloff and the interdependent web of actors in his coalition could tell themselves (and their readers and voters) that they were creating the good city. But the virtues of profit and economic development were offset by the iniquities of small-business closures and displaced low-income households.

Similar events unfolded in other cities—even in Britain, with a very different policy regime. Property developers Jack Cotton, Harry Hyams, Felix Fenston, and Charles Clore were able to mobilize progrowth coalitions in London and Birmingham, for example,<sup>15</sup> while in Newcastle the central figure in the city’s central-area redevelopment was a politician, T. Dan Smith (fig. 8.9), whose commitment to orchestrating a modernist built environment was such that he spoke earnestly of the shipyard city becoming the “Brasilia of the North.”<sup>16</sup>

### Modern Suburbs and Suburban Modernism

Postwar economic recovery was written into the landscape in most pervasive form through suburban growth. In the United States the suburban boom produced about thirty million new housing units between 1950 and 1970. Developers, taking advantage of Fordist production principles, began to encircle every city of any significance with huge, sprawling subdivisions. One of the largest was the Lakewood Park complex, built to accommodate more than one hundred thousand people on sixteen square miles of brushland south of Los Angeles. Without doubt the most famous was the original Levittown on Long Island (fig. 8.10), begun in 1947 by Abraham Levitt and his sons William and Alfred. They were the first large-scale developers to apply a highly rationalized, assembly-line approach to residential development. The suburban boom was boosted by a massive increase in federal mortgage insurance under the terms of the 1949 Housing Act.

There was also a significant phase of road building as a result of the Federal Aid Highway Act (1956), which authorized forty-one thousand miles of limited-access highways. Every major city was linked into the system, with circumferential beltways that made outlying locations more accessible, particularly where there were intersections with major radial interstate spokes. It coincided with a dramatic postwar increase in prosperity and the consequent rise of consumerism. Between 1948 and 1973 the economy grew at unprecedented rates. Gross national product increased five-fold, median income more than doubled (in constant dollars), and home ownership rose by 50 percent. The number of automobiles on the roads jumped from just under twenty-six million in 1945 to more than fifty-two million in 1955 and ninety-seven million by 1972.<sup>17</sup>

It was the era of the “sitcom suburb” in America, where life imitated television.<sup>18</sup> The suburbs were modern in the sense that they



8.9. T. Dan Smith (1915-1993). As leader of Newcastle’s City Council in the 1960s he was enthusiastic about town planning and the arts as means of improving the quality of life.

**8.10. Levittown.** William Levitt (1907-1994; **8.10a**) and his brother Alfred dramatically altered the U.S. residential suburban landscape with single-family, mass-produced, eight-hundred-sq ft homes. Levittown, Long Island (**8.10b**, center) and its counterpart in New Jersey (**8.10c**, bottom) are arguably the most famous suburbs of all, the prototype models for the “democratic utopia” of mid-twentieth-century American suburbia. Their fame derives in part from their scale: at the time of their construction they were the largest-ever suburban subdivisions. But the principal reason for their fame derives from the way that they made suburban lifestyles affordable for working-class families by introducing Fordist principles to urban development. Their immediate success made them the precursors of hundreds of sprawling subdivisions that rapidly came to encircle every U.S. city of any significance.



were full of new ranch and split-level homes, each filled with gas or electric cookers, refrigerators, televisions, and various electric appliances. Sitcom suburbs also boasted modern drive-through banks and fast-food outlets, drive-up windows to drop off and pick up laundry, drive-in theaters, motels, and shopping malls. The Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota, was the model for regional shopping malls that would inadvertently anchor unplanned versions of Broadacre City all over the country, turning a bad idea into a worse one.

The Southdale Mall was designed by Victor Gruen, whose practice went on to design more than fifty of the roughly eight thousand shopping malls that appeared around US metropolitan areas between 1960 and 1979. Gruen had envisioned a mall that included amenities such as medical centers, schools, and even residences, but like most others, it ended up organized entirely around retail. In a 1978 interview, Gruen made it clear he did not support the direction modern malls had taken. “I am often called the father of the shopping mall,” he said. “I would like to take this opportunity to disclaim paternity once and for all. I refuse to pay alimony to those bastard developments. They destroyed our cities.”<sup>19</sup>

If sitcom suburbs were modern, they were not modernist in any sense, nor was there much by way of input by design professionals beyond larger structures like malls. But suburban sprawl and automobility coincidentally triggered the radical separation of housing, work, recreation, and traffic that had been advocated by Le Corbusier and the CIAM. Volume builders meanwhile had little need for architects, planners, landscape architects, or urban designers, apart from attending to technical details relating to codes and regulations: “the architect’s fee is the element of expense that the builder can most easily eliminate, turning instead to floor plans and elevations in books and catalogues.”<sup>20</sup>

Where modernism did intrude into suburbia, it was mostly in the form of isolated custom designs for wealthy clients. One small estate of a few dozen homes with a clear modernist aesthetic was built on Long Island, New York, but it was less a suburban tract and more of an enclave of second homes. Located in Sagaponack, on the Atlantic Seaboard of the Hamptons, it was a speculative venture by developer Coco Brown, who hired architect Richard Meier as a consultant and commissioned a few other prominent architects to design modernist residences: a “discrete kind of utopia,” as Gropius is said to have observed,<sup>21</sup> but as remote as could be from the sociopolitical ideology of European modernism.

A little closer in this regard was the Mar Vista Tract, near Venice Beach, California, designed by architect Gregory Ain for middle-income suburbanites with a taste for a modernist aesthetic. The Mar Vista Tract, built in 1948, remains an identifiable district with a single house type and a minimalist aesthetic. Ain collaborated with landscape architect Garret Eckbo to plan tree-lined streets and parkways and yard spaces

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with a communal sense of place. He intended the entire district to be a cooperative venture and kept costs low by using affordable materials and flexible, open floorplans with sliding panels and folding doors, allowing residents to have one to three bedrooms, depending on the needs of the family at any given time. The cooperative model soon proved unworkable, however. Only fifty-two of the planned one hundred homes were completed, because of the FHA's skepticism about the creditworthiness of mortgages for buildings with a modernist aesthetic. Faced with having to sell to more affluent owners, Ainslie had to agree to covenants banning sales to blacks or Asians. The result was another discrete kind of utopia.

In Britain, volume builders such as Bovis, Barratt, Taylor Woodrow, and Wimpey were building another version of sitcom suburbia, albeit under the constraints of a stricter planning regime, a marked scarcity of buildable land, and with semidetached and terraced units as well as detached.<sup>22</sup> Like their American counterparts, they were overwhelmingly modern in appearance—reskinned versions of prewar houses, with larger windows, and plainer façades—with modern appliances. Space constraints, coupled with high levels of demand, meant that builders sought to pack as many houses into as small a space as possible. Maisonettes of the sort common in Scandinavian social housing projects (terraces of apartments with their own private entrances) were a common solution. With their flat roofs and rectilinear massing they were the closest thing to an everyday modernism in Britain's private sector.

There were, of course, exceptions. Among the most notable were the pocket estates built by Span Developments in aspirational corners of suburban London and its commuter exurbs. They were the product of the architect Eric Lyons and developers Geoffrey Townsend and Leslie Bilsby in collaboration with the landscape designer Ivor Cunningham. The name of the company reflected Lyons's and Townsend's commitment to spanning the gap between unimaginative speculative estates and architecturally designed, bespoke residences. The hallmarks of Span projects were short terraces of houses and flats grouped around landscaped courtyards or set among shared gardens.<sup>23</sup> The architecture blended modernist features such as flat roofs, open-plan interiors, and clerestory windows with vernacular features including hung tiles and stock brickwork.

To maintain the quality and overall aesthetic of the developments, each homeowner became a shareholder in his or her neighborhood. Underpinned by a residents' covenant that discouraged any customization, the homeowner association effectively became a defender of the Span faith. This was to build "homes within a garden," and its best developments included interior courtyards that served as landscaped communal gardens with play facilities, ponds, and specimen trees. Span's modernist aesthetic provoked a significant amount of NIMBYism at the time of construction, but the houses have become design classics, gaining



a cult following among design-aware households. Span's formula was repeated by the volume-builder Wates as a brand warranty for the rest of its product line. The Lakeside development in Ealing, for example, was a small, enclosed development comprising three-story townhouses and a tall block of flats set in a landscaped site with a pool inherited from the gardens of the house it replaced. Wates built similar Span-style developments on in south London where it engaged a range of leading architects including Team 4, Atelier 5, and Austin Vernon & Partners.

### **The Triumph of the Eunuch**

The postwar period was a golden age for planners, but they came into it with the accumulated intellectual and ideological baggage of the previous century: the promotion of civic beauty, concerns with sanitation and congestion, housing conditions, social equity, the imposition of spatial order, the separation of land uses, the idea of social mix, and the radicalism, rationalism, and scientific leanings of modernist ideals. The field was also trapped, still, in its conflicting roles: a hybrid field, dedicated on the one hand to humanistic reform, but charged on the other with the management of urban land and services according to the imperatives of capitalist production. While the explicit tasks of city planners may have been to draft land-use plans, zoning ordinances, and slum clearance schemes, the implicit task of the field, still, was to maintain the conditions for capital accumulation while maintaining social harmony or, at least, avoiding outright political unrest. The contradictions between these roles were reconciled in the minds of modernist planners by the significantly improved conditions of the working class. As market forces were regulated, the city organized, and prosperity diffused socially and spatially, lower-income households would, they believed, rise in affluence and take on the values and behaviors of the middle class: a process of "embourgeoisement."<sup>24</sup>

The immediate postwar years were a propitious time for the field to show what it could do. The establishment of welfare states created practical needs and opportunities accompanied by a huge upwelling of expectations. After seeing the importance of state-directed planning for the war effort, public trust and belief in urban planning was high, and the war-weary public increasingly expected bold and imaginative action. Local governments, responsible for housing and education, had a compelling interest in land use and land ownership. Central states, increasingly involved with social investment expenditures, also had a strong interest in land use and land ownership and understood that the potential for urban planning to instill predictability and stability of land use would be an important attribute of property markets, without which investment would not be forthcoming.

By the early 1950s, the basis had been reached for an enduring legislative consensus on comprehensive physical and land-use planning.



Before long, national economic recovery and rising affluence made for a heady euphoria that set the stage for a golden age of planning on a truly heroic scale.<sup>25</sup> Yet in relation to the overall dynamics of the postwar urban political economy, the formal roles of planners and the powers they acquired were relatively insignificant. As decision makers, planners had but limited potential and, set against the grand scheme of things, could control very little. But by acting as managers and technicians they were able to fulfill their role as a sort of synchromesh, supporting the conditions for capital accumulation while maintaining social harmony. It was the “Triumph of the Eunuch.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Modernist Urban Planning**

Modernist planners believed in a future “in which social problems are tamed and humanity liberated from the constraints of scarcity and greed. ...[and] Social control is wielded in order to drive society forward along a path of progress.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout Western Europe and North America, the postwar period between 1950 and 1980 saw a proliferation of government programs for housing, urban renewal, land-use zoning, transportation planning, environmental quality, and comprehensive redevelopment. All of these provided jobs for planners and enhanced the profession’s visibility and growth. Planners became indispensable links between various kinds of projects and various layers of government and so there was an unprecedented growth in the number of urban planners, in their collective impact as a profession, and in their self-confidence concerning the possibility of delivering better, safer, nicer, and more efficient cities.

Higher education shifted into gear: the number of urban planning programs in the United States, for example, increased from about twenty in the mid-1950s to around ninety by the end of the 1970s. The output of formally qualified planners increased over the same period from about one hundred per year to more than 1,500 per year. Their educational curricula were informed and inspired by the ideas of Howard, Geddes, Olmsted, Burnham, Le Corbusier, Wright, and Stein; and by tales of a recent professional history featuring can-do pioneers like Robert Moses and Dave Loeks, director of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Planning Commission. The influence of European modernism and CIAM and the Charter of Athens added a penchant for sweeping, futuristic solutions.<sup>28</sup> From these roots there developed an evangelical spirit to the entire profession: Cities should be better places; they could be.

Equipped with the latest developments in social science research and theory—the languages and toolkits of behavioral theory, economics, regional science, quantitative geography, systems analysis, and transportation modeling—planners laid claim to a scientific and objective logic that seemed to transcend the interests of capital, labor, and the state. They set about recasting cities through strategic plans based

*The formal roles of planners and the powers they acquired were relatively insignificant*

on the modernizing principles of strict separation of land uses, slum clearance, large-scale civic and commercial renewal projects, urban expressways, new towns, and public housing schemes. In Britain, successive governments increased the targets for new housing construction, with the expectation that one-in-two new dwellings would be in the public sector, where government subsidies encouraged industrialized construction methods and medium- and high-rise buildings. Every large city also had its flagship city-center redevelopment schemes. As John Gold observes:

Bold decisions on large-scale clearance and renewal seemed to suggest, even demand, large-scale and imaginative solutions. ... Psychologically, there was a deep-rooted sense that this was a key moment in the lives of cities. City centres were the heart of urban life. Failure to grasp modernity and introduce change could leave central areas languishing, damage local businesses and condemn a town to second-class status in relation to regional rivals. By contrast, positive and uncompromising decisions could say much about its thrusting, progressive and dynamic nature. Civic pride and place promotion were at stake as well as the need for modernization.<sup>29</sup>

At first there were relatively few professionally qualified and experienced city planners. As a result, much of the early work was undertaken by consultants. In Britain, Patrick Abercrombie was the nodal figure in a busy network of consultants. Abercrombie had trained as an architect before becoming the professor of civic design at the University of Liverpool and then professor of town planning at University College London. Before the war he had founded the Council for the Preservation of Rural England to campaign against sprawl and protect the symbolic value of the English countryside; and during the war he drafted a strategic plan for Greater London. Among the consultants in his network were Edwardian-era prominenti like architects Edwin Lutyens and Clough Williams-Ellis and landscape architect Geoffrey Jellicoe. The involvement of opinionated and egotistical architects like Williams-Ellis inevitably set up a fierce professional demarcation dispute about postwar reconstruction. Architects generally felt that they could, should, and must be involved, preferably as “executant planners,” using trained city planners only as specialist consultants.<sup>30</sup>

In the United States there was a similar shortage of qualified planners. Among the early leaders and shapers of city planning departments, only Dave Loeks, an MIT graduate, was trained as a planner. Robert Moses, whose power base in New York had already been established, had a degree in political science. Edward J. Logue, head of New Haven’s Redevelopment Agency who went on to become leader of the Boston Redevelopment Authority and then New York State’s Urban Redevelopment Corporation, was a lawyer; and Edmund N. Bacon (fig. 8.11), executive director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, was an architect by training.<sup>31</sup>

*Cities should be  
better places; they  
could be*



**8.11. Edmund Bacon** (1910-2005). Executive director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission from 1949 to 1970, whose strong vision for the city was backed by an even stronger will.

These early leaders brought strong elements of liberal idealism; environmental determinism; design determinism; a penchant for radical, comprehensive solutions; and a concern for the efficiency and economic well-being of their cities. They also strove to bring reason to bear on patterns of urbanization. As they hired planning graduates from the universities, their staff became increasingly technocratic in approach. The public interest, it was believed, would best be revealed through a positivist scientific understanding of urban dynamics. The dominant paradigm was a comprehensive, rational model of problem-solving and decision-making to guide state intervention.

As Robert Beauregard observes, “Theorists of this model believed that they had found the intellectual core of planning: a set of procedures that would generate conceptual problems for theorists, serve as a joint object for theory and practice, and guide practitioners in their daily endeavors.” From this perspective, “the state could be an instrumentality representative of the interests of all its citizens as disclosed by the expertise of planners. In this way, modernist planners skirt the ideological issue of the compatibility of planning and democracy. Instead, they rest easy on the democratic pretensions of the state and their privileged insights into the public interest.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Reframing Cities**

In practice, the strategies pursued by city planning departments relied on combinations of established tactics. Slum clearance, comprehensive redevelopment, zoning and land use regulation, road and traffic improvements, neighborhood unit plans, and new towns were all vigorously pursued in reframing postwar cities.

The exemplar was London, for which Abercrombie and the LCC’s chief architect, John Forshaw, had drafted the County of London Plan (1943), Abercrombie following up with the Greater London Plan (1944). The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act ensured a radically progressive policy framework within which to implement the plans, including a nationwide system of planning permission that required local authorities to develop and implement local land-use plans, gave them powers to control outdoor advertising, preserve woodland or buildings of architectural or historic interest, create green belts, and—briefly—imposed a 100 percent tax on the increase in the value of land that derived from the granting of planning permission.

This radicalism was rooted in prewar concerns that had been highlighted in the Land Utilization Survey, the Scott Report, the Uthwatt Report, and the Barlow Report. It endured as a fundamental element of the British welfare state. The exception was the 100 percent development levy, abolished in 1953 by an incoming Conservative government. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, introducing the bill that became the Town and Country Planning Act, 1953, noted that “The people whom the Government must help are those who do things: the developers, the people who create wealth.”<sup>33</sup>

Abercrombie and Forshaw wanted to preserve the distinctive “city-of-villages” character of London while simultaneously erasing slums and controlling sprawl. (They ignored the awkward fact that many of London’s archetypal and tight-knit urban villages—the likes of Bethnal Green, Lambeth, Poplar, Whitechapel, Wapping, and Limehouse—were in fact dominated by the kind of inner-city slums they proposed to flatten; what they evidently had in mind for preservation were upper-middle-class exceptions like Chelsea, Greenwich, Highgate, Hampstead, Kensington, Marylebone, and St John’s Wood.) They also wanted to ease traffic congestion. Their plan was cleverly conceived to achieve both objectives. Slums would be eradicated in a series of local comprehensive redevelopment programs. A hierarchy of new roads and highways was proposed, not only to avoid traffic congestion, but also to give definition and shape to the neighborhood units they separated.

A series of concentric ring roads provided the metastructure of the reframed metropolis in Abercrombie’s Greater London Plan, with a green belt about five miles deep keeping the metropolis from spreading too far. Critically, a series of New Towns, located beyond the green belt, would be established to provide new industrial spaces and accommodate a workforce of “overspill” population from the thinned-out inner-London slums. Abercrombie proposed an initial ring of ten New Towns, each accommodating between thirty to sixty thousand people. Industry would be steered away from inner London and encouraged to set up in the New Towns, so that they would be self-contained, not simply dormitory towns. Landscaped second-tier parkways, following existing open space as much as possible, would radiate from the inner zones of the metropolis to connect them with the countryside beyond the green belt. It was all derivative of prewar planning ideas, but as a package it had a powerful appeal among planners and policymakers in many other cities.

American public sector planning, equally “Unwilling and unable to deal with the deeper aspects of the urban crisis, ... [also] turned to ‘urban renewal’ as the answer to the city’s problems.”<sup>34</sup> Leading city planning practitioners such as Edmund Bacon saw the solution of social and economic problems as dependent upon physical reconstruction. Here was a close parallel with British planning thought and practice. In both settings, the rational planning model pointed to comprehensive change, requiring extensive clearances of slums and semi-slums to make way for renewal projects, both public and private, many of them on a scale worthy of Le Corbusier himself. The 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act required the services of the “federal bulldozer”: every major city was to be linked into the interstate highway system, while internal city traffic was to be restructured—often according to a hub-and-spoke model with circumferential beltways intersecting with radial interstate spokes. The highways were part of a “new urban dowry” of postwar urban infrastructure development<sup>35</sup> along with airports, science parks, and shopping malls; but part of the dowry’s price was that hundreds of thousands would lose their homes.

By the mid-1960s, the New Deal coalition between urban blue-collar classes and liberal reformers was reaching maturity. President Johnson's "War on Poverty" was part of an attempt to build the "Great Society" implicit in the New Deal vision. In 1966, Johnson created the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which was a landmark in urban affairs because of the subsequent proliferation of national urban policies and the expansion of federal aid to cities. By 1969 more than five hundred federal grant programs were targeted for cities, with total annual appropriations amounting to \$14 billion. At the beginning of the decade, there had been only forty-four such programs, with appropriations amounting to less than \$4 billion.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike their British counterparts, American planners were not at all interested in green belts. Although America's leading design critic and planning advocate, Lewis Mumford, was a proponent, and Lexington, Kentucky, had become the first US city to enact an urban growth boundary in 1958 (to protect bluegrass and horse farms that were considered part of the city's identity), the idea of restricting the development rights of property owners around cities was generally a nonstarter in America's free-enterprise culture. In any case, it was not as if there was the same shortage of land as in Britain. The idea of new towns had more appeal, though not in any sense related to strategic urban and regional planning, as in the British case where New Towns were established to stimulate regional development and accommodate decentralized industry and population.

*The idea of restricting the development rights of property owners was generally a non-starter*

Rather, American versions were large-scale, private master-planned communities. "Ranging in projected population from ten thousand to five hundred thousand, these communities were planned to be phased, coordinated, socially balanced, environmentally aware, and economically efficient. Their developers wanted to create whole communities rather than simple subdivisions. By avoiding many of the problems of uncoordinated incremental growth—or sprawl—they imagined both improving urban areas and creating a real estate product that would sell."<sup>37</sup> This was the "new community" experiment. It was certainly inspired by the success of government-sponsored post-war new town programs in Europe, and it carried forward an eclectic mix of influences, including Perry's neighborhood unit concept and the arcadian ideals of the nineteenth-century seers.

Two of the most notable examples of these new communities were in the Washington, DC, area. Columbia, Maryland, and Reston, Virginia, were planned suburbs that were organized into "villages" of ten to fifteen thousand people, each with a village center, recreational facilities, and schools. Meadows, woods, and a system of open space corridors containing walkways and bicycle paths separated the villages from one another. Reston is noted for its emphasis on design. Its layout gave strong consideration to the preservation of the site's natural topography and woodland. Built form was intended to create a distinctive sense of place: the first village to be developed, Lake Anne, was (very) loosely modeled on the Italian fishing village of Portofino, with apartments and shops enclosing a waterfront piazza.



Columbia was organized into nine villages, each with a mixed-use village center consisting of stores, schools, and community facilities. Columbia's developer, James Rouse, placed special emphasis on creating socially diverse and nonsegregated communities. The cellular village structures common to these and other new communities such as the Irvine Ranch, in Orange County, California, and The Woodlands, north of Houston, Texas, were intended to create settings with an identifiable sense of place and to foster social interaction, civic engagement, and a sense of community. For the developers, the cellular structure of neighborhood units was especially attractive because it provided a neat, logical way to phase the build-out of what were planned to be unusually large developments, requiring substantial investments of capital.

### **Social Engineering: The Neighborhood Unit and Social Mix**

Running through most postwar urban planning initiatives, public and private, were the interdependent concepts of the neighborhood unit and socially mixed (or "balanced") communities. It was taken as given that a top priority was to create community, thereby reuniting—spatially—the social classes that nineteenth century urban dynamics had separated. As we have seen, the kernel of the idea of the desirability of social mix dates from the Victorian-era idealization of preindustrial villages and country towns, with their apparently harmonious mingling of classes, their neighborly values, and implicit social controls; while the concept of a physically determined neighborhood unit was carried over from Clarence Perry's Edwardian-era concern with the assimilation of immigrants.

The rhetoric attached to postwar urban renewal programs implied that social mix would contribute to community stability (code for the absence of dangerous neighborhoods) and stem the movement of upper-middle class households from elite central city neighborhoods to the suburbs. In Britain, the early New Towns—Crawley, Harlow, Stevenage, and Welwyn Garden City—were designed with neighborhood units separated by parkways as their main organizing principle. Although Harlow boasted Britain's first residential tower block—"The Lawn," a ten-story block of social housing units—the New Towns were, to the disappointment of modernists, direct descendants of the garden city and garden suburb movements and the conservative social engineering ideals of Ebenezer Howard, Raymond Unwin, Clarence Stein, and Clarence Perry.

There was also a widespread willingness to believe in the desirability of social mix for reasons stemming from the political climate of postwar society and the world at large. One aspect of this was a desire to extend the feelings of togetherness and the attenuation of social barriers that had been experienced during the war years. The ideological challenge of the Cold War meanwhile gave the Western democracies an opportunity to frame their own lifestyles and consumer culture in

contrast to those of the Soviet Union.<sup>38</sup> In this context, planned neighborhoods incorporating social mix were seen as a way “to demonstrate that under its new welfare economy the lengthening arm of [US] government will now be employed to secure a decent family life in neighborhoods which afford equal access to all, regardless of race, creed, or color.”<sup>39</sup> The ideal of social mix and the “socially balanced” neighborhood was accorded a self-evident status in planning texts and the professional literature, although neither the degree of mix nor the means of achieving mix was spelled out very clearly.<sup>40</sup>

### **Spatial Engineering: Townscape and the Emergence of Urban Design**

It did not take long for challenges to modernist aesthetics (or, to be precise, modernist aesthetics as implemented by planners and developers) to occur from within the design fields. Unlike critiques from the lay public and a few architectural dissidents, it did not take the form of outright rejection. Rather, challenges from within the fields were aimed at improving the sensory experience and behavioral implications of both Corbusian and garden city design from the perspective of lived, on-the-street experience.<sup>41</sup>

Josep Lluís Sert, who was president of CIAM and dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Design in the mid-1950s, was influential in advocating such an approach. Along with his planning colleague Jaqueline Tyrwhitt and the art historian Sigfried Giedion he introduced an emphasis on urban “ambience” and historic context. Sert’s view invoked the Athenian ideal of the good city as the basis for civic culture and the good life. He was effectively laying claim on the nascent field of urban design, the fundamental purpose of which, observes Peter Buchanan:

is to provide a framework (spatial, functional, circulatory, economic, legal etc) to best guide the development of the citizen as well as the city or urban area. It is about the interdependencies and mutual development to fulfil the latent potentials of citizen and city by elaborating as richly and coherently as possible the many different places of the city and so also of the lived experience of its inhabitants.<sup>42</sup>

The emergence of urban design further distanced the modernist aesthetic from its highly politicized socialist roots. The approach also opened up new ground for academics in design fields to explore new concepts and advance new assertions. It presaged an important shift in emphasis in design thinking, from “taste” to “perception.” Kevin Lynch, at MIT, took the lead, among design-field academics, in staking out environmental perception and symbolic meaning as a significant area of study. Later, P. F. Smith, apparently one of the few design-field academics to bother consulting the literature based on empirical analyses from the social and behavioral sciences, was able to speculate on the “syntax” of the built environment from the perspective of neuroscience.<sup>43</sup> And

*The ideal of the  
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was accorded a  
self-evident status*

architect Jan Gehl, recognizing that “first we shape the cities—then they shape us,” advanced his own innovative observations on “life between buildings,” cataloging the subtle qualities that shape interactions among people in public spaces.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, it had not taken long for various elements of concern for urban ambience to coalesce, in true design-field style, into a movement. Propagated by the editors of the monthly *Architectural Review* (“Outrage!” “Counter-attack!”) and headed by writer Gordon Cullen, the “Townscape movement” emerged as a reaction to the sculptural architecture of modernist towers and dissatisfaction with the ambience of the British New Towns. With its cultural and intellectual roots in the Picturesque it reasserted architecture, and asserted urban planning and design, as fundamentally visual arts. Townscape stressed the “art of relationship” among elements of the urban landscape, and the desirability of the “recovery of place” through unfolding sequences of street scenes, buildings that enclose intimate public spaces, and variety and idiosyncrasy in built form.

Such a “way of seeing” has its roots in Renaissance humanism.<sup>45</sup> It was reasserted in the United States by influential public intellectuals Paul Goodman and Jane Jacobs. Richard Sennett, an academic who was on his way to becoming a public intellectual, wrote elegantly and persuasively about the importance of public space and urban design in the social life of cities.<sup>46</sup> The design field’s expanded professional apparatus of specialist magazines, journals, conferences, and academic curricula ensured that the ideas quickly circulated among practitioners. Edmund Bacon, in Philadelphia, was an early adopter, seeking to draw on precedents from London, Rome, and Paris in planning the spatial articulation of Philadelphia’s renewal projects.

A different strand of reaction to the loss of urbanity came from the neo-rationalist movement. The most influential of the early neo-rationalists was the Italian scholar-practitioner Aldo Rossi. His book *Architecture of the City*, published in 1966, was a critique of what he saw as modernism’s denial of the inherent complexity of cities. As an alternative to the totalizing models of modernist architecture, the neo-rationalists sought to identify various “types” of architecture appropriate to economic and geographic context, with rules for the rational combination of all its elements. Neo-rationalists saw the built environment as a “theater of memory” and hoped to identify “the fundamental types of habitat: the street, the arcade, the square, the yard, the quarter, the colonnade, the avenue, the center, the nucleus, the crown, the radius, the knot. ... So that the city can be walked through. So that it becomes a text again.”<sup>47</sup>

## **Intellectual Anarchy**

By the 1960s the design fields were finally ensconced in academia, with formally accredited curricula and access to a greatly expanded set of

“discursive tools”—journals, conferences, and exhibitions—as well as the forum of the lecture hall and the arena of the studio. But they had little to offer by way of distinctive bodies of knowledge underpinned by explanatory theory. Instead each field tended rely on collective declarations, manifestos, and editorials for its intellectual underpinnings. It made for an anarchic intellectual milieu that fostered a solipsistic climate of academic insecurity and professional involution and introversion.

### **Professional Involution**

Urban planning, in its search for legitimacy and a distinctive identity and purpose, moved away from its shared roots with architecture toward positivist systems-based and rational decision-making approaches and then to a pragmatic political-bureaucratic approach, all within the space of a couple of decades. As a result, planning lost much of its visionary capacity, its claims on the guardianship of an overarching public interest and, ultimately, its professional authority. In Britain, the Schuster Committee had recommended a greater social science content in urban planning education as early as 1950, something that had already begun to take shape at the University of Chicago and a few other American universities. Before long, an essentially physical or morphological view of towns and cities was replaced with a view of urban settlements as systems of interrelated social and economic activities.<sup>48</sup> Eventually, “the architectural content of planning, the urban design tradition, was steadily reduced to an absolute minimum. By the 1990s, it was possible to become a qualified planner without any architectural knowledge or sensibility at all.”<sup>49</sup>

At the forefront of planners’ “borrowed intellectual baggage” were “scatterings of social science” from the Chicago School of sociology, geographers’ concepts of functional regions and central places, economists’ forecasting models, cost-benefit analysis, and theories of bid-rent, and the locational economics of the new field of regional science, along with engineers’ models of traffic flow and the systems thinking of another new field, cybernetics. These were employed simply as “snippets of useful knowledge,” not as any consistent framework of understanding.<sup>50</sup> Rather, they were deployed as justification for a process of incremental planning: the “comprehensive-rational” approach based on sequential stages of goal formulation, problem formulation, generation and evaluation of options, and policy selection.

As the shortcomings of such an approach became apparent (data limitations, mis-specified models, failure to respect pluralism, inability to address issues affecting low-income and minority communities, etc.),<sup>51</sup> other borrowings led to different approaches. The field’s own theories of planning (or “planning theories”) were inward-looking, second-order theories that took as their subject the process of planning:

philosophical accounts of how, ideally, planners should plan; or typologies of how planners actually do plan.<sup>52</sup> The idea with most traction in academia was “advocacy planning,” based on a model adapted from the legal profession, in which planners actively advocate on behalf of the socially and economically marginalized.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, mainstream planning ideology, having generated various “disparate, incommensurable, and idiosyncratic ‘conceptions’ of urban planning,” was “deeply confused as to the meaning, properties, and tasks of theoretical enquiry.”<sup>54</sup>

One consequence of this intellectual involution, as Robert Beauregard noted, was to move planning education away from a studio model to the pedagogical model of the social sciences: the lecture and seminar, with students learning through texts rather than direct problem-solving. Beyond academia:

... planning practice diversified into a multitude of specialties: environmental, manpower, social planning, health planning, transportation, energy planning, and regional planning along with the traditional land-use and housing ... A variety of social planners challenged the increasingly specialized physical planners. As a result, planning practice underwent centrifugal disintegration. The common object of interest—the city—that had initially attracted ‘progressive’ reformers was lost.<sup>55</sup>

Political scientist Aaron Wildavsky observed that planning had extended so thinly over so wide an area that it was almost meaningless: “if planning is everything, maybe it’s nothing.”<sup>56</sup> Planning practitioners became increasingly oriented to pragmatic politics and marginal analyses of policy impacts. Peter Hall caricatured the changing focus of practitioners as follows:

In 1955 the typical newly graduated planner was at the drawing board, producing a diagram of desired land uses; in 1965, she or he was analyzing computer output of traffic patterns; in 1975, the same person was talking late into the night with community groups, in the attempt to organize against hostile forces in the world outside.<sup>57</sup>

### **Solipsistic Practitioners**

In contrast to planners’ introspection about theory, architects generally persisted with a cavalier approach bordering on willful ignorance. Unhampered by historical and socioeconomic analysis, many architects “assumed that architecture had an independent role in shaping social life, and this assumption of autonomy had given rise to a ‘visionary confidence’ that enabled the architect to believe himself able to ‘correct society on the drawing board.’”<sup>58</sup> Peter Hall quotes Frederic Osborn, chairman of the British Town and Country Planning Association, writing to Lewis Mumford in 1952 about the “cult” of Le Corbusier at the Architectural Association: “the young men under his influence are completely impervious to economic or human considerations.”<sup>59</sup>

Architecture educators shared the same impediments as planners (no distinctive body of knowledge and no explanatory theories; also

*“If planning is everything, maybe it’s nothing”*



no PhD required, so little or no training in either theory or methodology). Encouraged by the outrageous claims of celebrity practitioners and embedded in a culture of manifestos and everyday casual assertion, they developed an insouciant disregard for conceptual grounding, explanatory theory, and empirical testing. Architects insisted on being the sole collective judge of their own work (incidentally making professional critics and historians the newest “useful idiots” of the field). For architecture professors, just like leading practitioners, the key to having a “feel for the game” meant developing a talent for talking about design in vague and elusive language: making normative statements without explanatory foundations, and perfecting tangential remarks, elliptical arguments, and denigrating put-downs. A discourse, in other words, that labels some drawings, buildings, and architects great, and others not.

There were some, nevertheless, who were curious about the possibilities of more rigorous, even scientific, approaches to design. Driven in part by a desire to share in the legitimacy and status of the sciences, engineering, and social sciences, these academics sought to shed the approach of architecture-as-art in favor of a scientifically based one. The College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley, for example, deployed an interdisciplinary approach, integrating sociology, policymaking, and regional planning into the curriculum. Buckminster Fuller called for a “design science revolution” based on technology and rationalism to overcome the human and environmental problems that he believed could not be solved by politics and economics.<sup>60</sup> Herbert Simon<sup>61</sup> called for the development of a “science of design” in universities, based on a body of intellectually tough, formal, analytic, knowledge about the design process. At the Architectural Association in London, John Frazer penned *An Evolutionary Architecture*, in which the logic of the human genetic code was borrowed to generate form.

But design-field academics simply did not have the interest or the training to take up new computational methods and emerging social science theory to develop a “scientific method” for design. As Robert Gutman observed, the tendency of architects was “to leaf through books on social science and philosophy, looking for phrases that express their personal views and lend an imprimatur to their design work.”<sup>62</sup>

The work of Kevin Lynch provides a case in point. His best-known work—on peoples’ mental maps of Boston—was innovative, and commendable for its aim of introducing into the design process the views of ordinary citizens. But his portrayals of peoples’ mental maps came less from his subjects than from his own interpretation of paths, nodes, landmarks, and districts as the keys to the sensual qualities of the built environment. Lynch acknowledged the weaknesses of his research design and methodology (an awful sampling frame, no real basis for comparison among case studies, no account of any variance among

*A disregard  
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testing*

respondents of different background or experience) and of his imposed conceptualization of mental maps (static, rigid). But rather than offering suggestions as to how such work might be improved or developed, he preferred to defend it on the grounds that it is “cheap and fun to do.”<sup>63</sup>

The main weakness of Lynch’s approach to mental maps, as with his work on urban form and design, is that it failed to engage the production of space or its economic, social, and political context. The built environment is abstracted from space and society, treated simply as a source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction for the “common man” and the object of skillful manipulation by designers and planners. Lynch himself, while apparently oblivious to much of the literature on space and society and indifferent to the literature on semiotics, admitted at least to the significance of studying environmental meaning. But, he lamented, “If only it were not so difficult!”<sup>64</sup> For a scholar of design and the built environment, he showed little appreciation of history. For a scholar of any kind, he relied too heavily on truisms and simplistic rhetoric.

Meanwhile, Christopher Alexander and his colleagues at the University of California, Berkeley, set out to formulate principles for building and maintaining the good city.<sup>65</sup> They did this by seeking to identify a “language” of patterns among elements of built form and public spaces, the rationale being that a knowledge of such patterns might be useful in imbuing urban design with “timeless” sensibilities. Each “pattern,” in their approach, was translated into a design guideline for solving an urban problem. The sum of the patterns, they believed, would provide a recipe for utopian urbanism. Alexander et al. identified no less than 253 patterns/guidelines, varying in scale from the largest (#1: “work toward independent, self-governing regions in the world, each with a population between two and ten million”) to the smallest (#242: “build a bench outside your front door, so people can watch the street”).<sup>66</sup> In between are patterns such as #190: “vary ceiling heights throughout the building”; and #71: “in every neighborhood provide still water for swimming.” In the context of architectural discourse in the 1960s and 1970s, this met an increasing appetite for normative approaches to the creation of better cities.

The methodologies deployed by both Lynch and Alexander were innovative but naïve and unreliable, and their logic was based on undiluted environmental determinism (built-form stimulus → human/social/cultural response). Nevertheless, their results were unquestioned within the design fields and their work was held in high regard, often serving as evidence for architecture’s claims on original scholarship. But the paradigm shift to a scientific method of design never took hold. “The architects who had recruited sociologists for support in teaching and practice expected endorsement, but instead were rebuked for their simplistic social theory.”<sup>67</sup>

### Architecture's Silly Season

It turned out that architects were more comfortable with avant-gardism, unconstrained by either scientific method or reality. The economic prosperity and technological advances of the 1960s and early 1970s inspired novel ideas, many of them techno-utopias, some of them verging on science fiction. They included the sophomoric provocations by members of the Archigram group: Ron Herron's "Walking City" (1963), for example, consisted of gigantic modules reminiscent of the alien war machines from H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (fig. 8.12). Their retractable legs would hook up to the service infrastructure of existing cities before moving away on cushions of air like giant hovercraft and then setting down elsewhere.

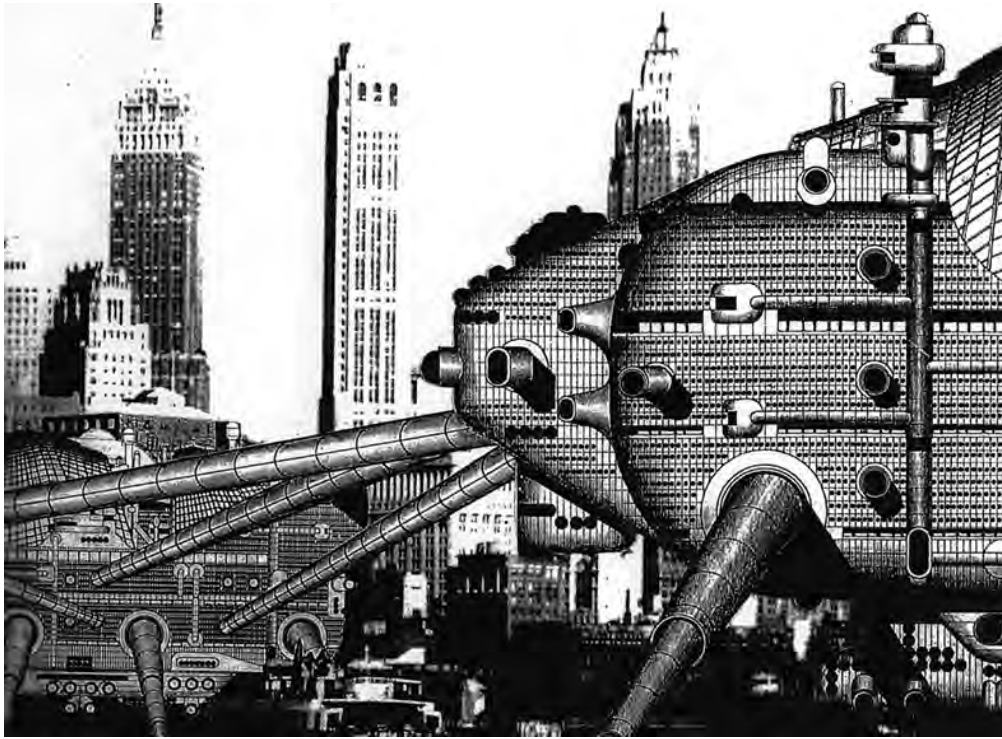
Peter Cook's "Plug-in City" (1964) was conceived as a linear corridor stretching from central England across the Channel to northeast France, its spine consisting of an infrastructural framework of tubes that would contain the city's electricity, water, and sewage systems, passenger pods, and goods distribution systems. Modular units would be clipped on to the framework, producing a city of standardized components on racks. In the heady atmosphere of the 1960s such outlandishness gained an extraordinary amount of attention (perhaps the only real intent), though it was, reassuringly, satirized by the Italian Archizoom group. Their "No-Stop City" scheme featured an underground, artificially lit and multilayered city where the incarcerated inhabitants would only gain access to the surface—now a nature reserve—by elevators.<sup>68</sup>

Others were serious in intent, even if their ideas were doomed to dissolve on contact with the world they hoped to change. Expo '67, the World's Fair in Montreal, featured Habitat '67, a twelve-story megastructure of prefabricated housing units with the appearance of a jumble of concrete shipping containers (fig. 8.13); inspired, we were to believe, by Mediterranean hilltop villages. London-based architect-engineer Willy Frischmann proposed housing an entire city in a two-mile-high structure with a footprint only 870-square feet ("It can be done!" he insisted).

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**8.12. Walking City** (opposite, top). A playful concept by Ron Herron, one of six young architects in a collective—Archigram—that found notoriety in the 1960s by challenging the architectural establishment that they felt had become reactionary and self-serving. Their fantasies reflected their fascination with consumer culture, new technologies, pop art, and their mischievous sense of humor. They were taken seriously; although the collective never had any built projects, Archigram was awarded the RIBA Gold Medal in 2002 on the strength of its insurgent ideas.

**8.13. Habitat 67, Montreal** (opposite, bottom). Built as the Canadian Pavilion for the World Exposition of 1967, the design originated as Moshe Safdie's undergraduate architecture thesis at McGill University in 1961. Constructed from 354 identical six-hundred square feet prefabricated modules arranged in groups of one to four, the apartments were an attempt to integrate two housing typologies: the suburban garden home and the high-rise apartment building.



Buckminster Fuller proposed a “Tetrahedral City,” a vast floating triangular atoll intended to house up to one million people. Another fabulist, Glen Small, at the Southern California Institute of Architecture, proposed a biomorphic biosphere, a self-sufficient megastructure fifty miles long, rising to a height of eight thousand feet and capable of housing the entire population of Los Angeles. It would, he dreamed, be energy self-sufficient from solar power and wind-generated electricity, using condensation-collected water and hydroponically grown food. It would also recycle all its own waste.<sup>69</sup>

Architect Paolo Soleri wrote about the notion of “arcology,” a combination of architecture and ecology. Like Le Corbusier, he dreamed of avoiding the sprawl of urban and suburban development and of preserving Nature by concentrating populations in megastructures ranging in size from Arcosanti (five thousand people) to Babelnoah (a settlement for six million people). A small experimental version of Arcosanti was established in Paradise Valley, Arizona, but has never developed beyond a curiosity. The fever of futuristic possibilities even extended to government departments. A major British government report, *Traffic in Towns* (1963), sought to plan for a future involving not only automobiles but also hovercraft, helicopters, and conveyor belts, all “as possible substitutes for the motor car.”

*Avant-gardism was dominated by the abstract theorizing of “art compound” architects*

### **New Avant Gardes**

Against the backdrop of these nutty proposals a new avant-garde developed. Or, rather, avant-gardes, since they took different directions on either side of the Atlantic. In Europe some young modernist architects, feeling that the leadership of CIAM was out of touch with postwar conditions, formed Team 10, dedicated to building a “utopia of the present.” They rediscovered Geddes’s organic view of urbanism, with its focus on scale and territory, and used it as the basis of their personality-fueled squabble with CIAM leadership. Team 10 rejected CIAM dogma on the separation of land uses (dwelling, work, recreation, and transportation), instead framing their rhetoric around scale: house, street, district, and city.<sup>70</sup> Their preferred aesthetic was the New Brutalism of Team 10 members Alison and Peter Smithson, and their preferred “-ism” was structuralism. Confusingly, their use of the term referred not to any structural properties of the built environment but to a commitment to designing in sympathy with the sociocultural attributes of the overarching political-economic system, or structure: another example of misplaced borrowing from the social sciences, this time from neo-Marxist theory in anthropology, philosophy, and political science.

In the United States avant-gardism was dominated by the abstract theorizing of iconoclastic “art compound” architects like Peter Eisenman and Bernard Tschumi and an elite and self-referential commercial avant-garde that included Robert Stern, Charles Gwathmey, and



Michael Graves. Once again, the Museum of Modern Art in New York was catalytic. An exhibit and colloquia on Five Architects featured the work of Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk, and Richard Meier. With the singular pretension that had become a common affliction among leaders of the field, they liked to be called “The Five” or “The Whites.” They were concerned with design purely (hence the “Whites”) from the point of view of form, favoring abstractions unclouded by bothersome social or cultural concerns. Drawing directly from the worldview of van der Rohe, they regarded people as beholders, not willed agents. The good city was defined in terms of good design; good design was to be decided by the Yale-New York-Princeton axis of academics and magazine writers; and it was patently to be only for those who could afford and appreciate it.

### **Evangelistic Practitioners**

Encouraged by public confidence in professional expertise, bolstered by an overly optimistic view of social and economic trends, heavily conditioned by hero worship of Le Corbusier, Unwin, Perry, and Abercrombie, and superconfident in their own abilities, design professionals unleashed their good intentions in ever-grander schemes. But to get things done they had to form alliances with one another and with developers and politicians. In many cases it amounted to connivance rather than alliance, with little opportunity for public comment or debate before old cityscapes were replaced with new ones. At best, public input was admitted to goal-setting, after which practitioners would come up with design solutions and policy strategies.

There are several time-honored techniques that senior bureaucrats and private-sector practitioners are able to use in getting their own way. Among the more widely recognized are “swamping” city councilors with a large number of long reports; “blinding” councilors “with science” by writing reports full of technicalities and statistics; and withholding information or bringing it forward too late to affect decisions. By the 1970s, novel computerized visualization techniques enabled planners and landscape architects to present enticing prospectuses of proposed cityscapes. In the graphic words of one councilor in Birmingham, England, “It’s a subtle blend of bullshit and flannel.”<sup>71</sup>

Increasingly influential within the postwar political economy, design professionals acquired a strong sense of evangelism to add to their self-image of imaginative farsightedness, selflessness, fairness, and humanitarianism. The combination produced a professional make-up that proved tragically unsuited to the ideals that they espoused. Even in their finest hour, they were forced to watch themselves fail. Their evangelism and environmental determinism led them to get bogged down in “bureaucratic offensives” of urban renewal and highway construction, to the point where the communities whose lives they had hoped to improve

*Design  
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schemes*

were angry and afraid.<sup>72</sup> Before they knew it, planners' rationality and their predilection for efficient and tidy land-use patterns had led them to become social gatekeepers. In their rush to grasp the opportunities of an expanding labor market, they set aside their synthetic, progressive perspective in favor of a fragmented, opportunistic, and reductionist view of urbanization. Before they knew it, architects' evangelical belief in high-rise living led them to adopt system building while their insistence on the primacy of architecture-as-art relegated both clients and users to passive beholders. There were many, of course, who prospered professionally under these circumstances, enjoying their unprecedented status with the complacent vanity of the evangelist. It was to prove short-lived.

Two of the most high-profile evangelists—Moses and Le Corbusier—carried on from where they left off at the start of the war. Robert Moses's influence increased after World War II and he used it to squash the development of a citywide comprehensive zoning plan that would have restrained his power. By now almost unchallenged, he turned his attention increasingly to "tower in the park" urban renewal projects and to extending his highway and bridge-building program, using tolls collected from his new bridges and tunnels to finance ever more projects. Responding to critics who pointed to the displacement of tens of thousands of households and the demolition of historic buildings, his attitude was: "When you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat ax."<sup>73</sup>

By the time of his retirement in 1968 he had presided over the construction of thirteen road bridges (including the George Washington Bridge and the huge Verrazano-Narrows Bridge), more metropolitan superhighway (420 miles) than in Los Angeles, and twenty-eight thousand apartment units on urban renewal sites. His achievements were not even-handed, however. His entire strategy was based on the idea of creating a more livable city region for the white middle classes. His highway projects on Long Island followed a circuitous path so as not to upset wealthy landowners. He actively resisted the use of public transit and steadfastly refused to accommodate plans for subway, bus, and train improvements. Critics have also pointed out that a pattern of barriers to access for nonwhite citizens—steep stairs or busy highways, for example—appeared repeatedly in his public projects.<sup>74</sup>

Le Corbusier's work in the years after World War II ranged from expressionist designs in sculptural concrete (like his famous chapel at Ronchamp in France) to cubist-inspired angular concrete residences for wealthy clients. But by far the most influential of all his built work was L'Unité d'Habitation, evangelically promoted as an ideal model not only by Le Corbusier himself but also by an army of enabling enthusiasts in the architectural press and among university faculties. Like Le Corbusier's own drawings, their futuristic renderings of high-rise living

*A professional  
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espoused*

for the masses were seductively simplistic, depicting people strolling leisurely between towers through landscaped greenery and happily promenading under giant flyovers (rather than, as it was to turn out, scurrying between buildings and under flyovers as fast as possible). The reality could never match the schematics, especially when, in practice, they were translated through hurried schedules and limited budgets. Everyday modernism became everyday misery for the residents of poorly planned, badly designed urban renewal schemes.<sup>75</sup> Towers leaked, walls condensed, elevators broke down, teenagers vandalized public spaces, old ladies lived in fear. “Machines for living” required rules—no cycling, no ball games, no pets—that diminished livability rather than enhancing it and killed off community rather than promoting it.

Both Moses and Le Corbusier are generally understood in the context of the “Great Men” narrative of the design fields, but they can also be understood as examples of “catastrophic men” whose overweening ambition and dedication to self-advancement prevents them from recognizing the mistakes they make. It is a trait, of course, that is by no means exclusive to the design fields. “Successful psychopaths”—high-flyers with pronounced traits such as egocentricity, insincerity, lack of empathy or remorse—have been documented among military and business leaders, for instance. United by an imperviousness to the suffering they cause, they are sustained in a professional bubble that feeds narcissistic delusions.<sup>76</sup>

### Icons of Failure

In Britain, the shortcomings of industrialized high-rise housing were dramatically exposed by the Ronan Point disaster in 1968, when the corner of a twenty-three-story block in Canning Town, London, collapsed after a simple kitchen accident, killing four and injuring seventeen. Ronan Point had been constructed using the Larsen–Nielsen system of factory-built, precast concrete load-bearing walls and precast floors and stairways. Intended for buildings of up to only six floors, the system had been extended well past the point of safety at Ronan Point and in dozens of other towers around the country. When Ronan Point was dismantled, investigators found unfilled gaps between floors and walls (with some joints filled with newspaper rather than concrete), the weight of the building resting on just two bolts per panel rather than the specified mortar.<sup>77</sup>

Four years later, the spectacle of the dynamiting of the Pruitt-Igoe project in St Louis provided another critical moment. Good as Pruitt-Igoe might have looked on the drawing board in 1954, it turned out to be unlivable less than twenty years later. Apart from any design faults, shoddy construction and coercive management policies had made Pruitt-Igoe a deeply unattractive place to live. Before long, the project was inhabited by the poorest and most demoralized segment of

*The reality could never match the schematics, especially when they were translated through hurried schedules and limited budgets*

the population, while increasing numbers of vacancies put the St Louis Housing Authority in a financial squeeze. Maintenance was neglected, breakdowns went unrepaired, vandalism and violent crime intensified. When only six hundred people remained living in the thirty-three blocks (with a capacity of fifteen thousand), the decision was taken to dynamite the whole thing.<sup>78</sup> Architecture critic Charles Jencks claimed that it represented the symbolic death of Modern architecture.

Ronan Point and Pruitt-Igoe were iconic because of spectacular and tragic failures, but there were many more examples of failure of the modernist project: unimaginatively designed as architecture, they were poorly planned, badly administered, and inadequately maintained. It was the “programmed failure” of American public housing.<sup>79</sup> In Chicago, the Cabrini-Green and Robert Taylor Homes projects became bywords for a bleak new kind of urban poverty. In London, the more notorious of the postwar estates were Broadwater Farm in Tottenham, Chalkhill in Wembley, Aylesbury in Southwark, the Ferrier Estate in Greenwich, and the North Peckham Estate: all so unpopular that some prospective tenants refused offers of accommodation, while many existing residents pleaded to be housed elsewhere.

Not all spectacular failures were in the public sector. I. M. Pei’s John Hancock building in Boston (1966–1967) is a case in point: Pei and his principal designer, Henry Cobb, designed a slim sixty-two-story crystalline tower with reflective glass panels. Before the building was occupied, hundreds of the glass panels cracked and some fell out, requiring the tower to be patched up with plywood sheets (thereby creating an embarrassing parody of failed social housing). Eventually, all 10,344 glass panels had to be removed and replaced with stronger glass at a cost of \$8.2 million. Another \$17.5 million was needed to stiffen the building’s lean frame and to install two three hundred-ton adjustable counterweights to help stabilize the structure against the push of the wind.

Evidence of failure took a long time to dent the evangelism of leading practitioners or to restrain developers and city planning departments. Robin Hood Gardens, the precast New Brutalist scheme in London’s Docklands, was completed in 1972, a few years after the collapse of Ronan Point and just as Pruitt-Igoe was being demolished. Architects Alison and Peter Smithson were lauded by the design press for their concept of “streets in the sky,” but living in them soon proved to be a miserable experience. Peter Smithson, channeling Le Corbusier, blamed the residents. But Robin Hood Gardens was sculpture posing as architecture, concrete boxes posing as homes. Eventually, more than 75 percent of the project’s residents supported its demolition when consulted by the local authority, Tower Hamlets. The Twentieth Century Society prompted an episode of dark comedy by promoting a campaign to get the buildings formally “listed” by English Heritage as statutorily

protected and thus save them from destruction. Building Design magazine, backed by such star architects as Zaha Hadid and Richard Rogers, supported the campaign. English Heritage declined, noting that Robin Hood Gardens had failed as a place for human beings to live.

### **The End of an Era: 1968 and 1973**

Iconic failures aside, criticism of the welfare state's everyday modernism was already mounting during the 1960s, along with feelings that cities were being stripped of their identity as expressways cut through settled neighborhoods, and the impersonal streets and "rational, passionless landscapes"<sup>80</sup> of blank modernist offices, apartment blocks, and mixed-use developments came to take the place of distinctive features and familiar landmarks.

More important, these feelings were bound up in two significant shifts in the political economy of Western countries. The first was a cultural, social, and moral turning point instigated by the baby boom generation, with its rebellious counterculture of iconoclastic politics and a collectivist approach to the public interest, fueled by the civil rights movement, feminism, and the campus free-speech movement. Student-worker alliances emerged to fight for social justice, women's rights, and better pay and working conditions and to protest against consumerism and American imperialism. In Europe, the spring of 1968 saw a protracted period of demonstrations, general strikes, and occupations of factories and universities. In the United States, the sociopolitical dynamic was colored by protests against the Vietnam War and punctuated by widespread civil unrest and riots that reached a peak in the summer of 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. More generally, community activists and their supporters came to represent the vanguard of urban social movements that epitomized the "people power" that underpinned a new kind of militant activism that was strong enough to change the dynamics of urban politics.<sup>81</sup>

The second key turning point was economic in nature. In October 1973 an Arab-Israeli war led Arab countries to impose an embargo on shipments of oil to the United States and other Western countries, and soon afterward the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quadrupled oil prices. The subsequent shock to the economic system reinforced a number of long-term structural economic problems, with the result that Western economies were plunged into an episode of stagflation (simultaneous falling demand and rising inflation). The Fordist period of postwar economic growth came to an abrupt end, and with it the property bubble and the optimism and confidence that had sustained the golden age of modernist urban planning and design.

A new conventional wisdom emerged around the critique that had been put forward by Jane Jacobs at the beginning of the 1960s in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.<sup>82</sup> Jacobs (fig. 8.14), a writer

*A new  
conventional  
wisdom emerged*





**8.14 Jane Jacobs** (1916-2006). An urbanist and activist whose writings championed community-based approaches to city building. Her work would become hugely influential in the critique of modernist architecture and planning.

and activist, would eventually become recognized as one of America's great public intellectuals. With no formal training or experience in the design fields, her views on the built environment had at first been marginalized. A combination of hubris and evangelical zeal had enabled the design press and academic community to keep her critique, along with uncomfortable sociological evidence, at bay. But with the turning points of 1968 and 1973 bracketed by the iconic failures of Ronan Point and Pruitt-Igoe, Jacobs's book was discovered by a wider audience and gave voice to widespread dissatisfaction.

Jacobs argued that cities were serving as "sacrificial victims" to the misguided ideas of Ebenezer Howard, Lewis Mumford, Patrick Geddes, Clarence Stein, Clarence Perry, Raymond Unwin, and Le Corbusier. The pursuit of their ideas, she asserted, had taken away the life and vitality of cities, tearing out their sclerotic hearts only to replace them with a "great blight of Dullness" in the form of high-rise apartment blocks; and meanwhile freezing the existing social order in physical form. Adherence to the dogma of land-use segregation, she pointed out, resulted in the loss of vitality and serendipity in urban life. Left to planners, she argued, city landscapes:

... will be spacious, parklike, and uncrowded. They will feature long green vistas. They will be stable and symmetrical and orderly. They will be clean, impressive, and monumental. They will have all the attributes of a well-kept, dignified cemetery.<sup>83</sup>

Jacobs was a strong believer in the value of street and neighborhood life and the "close-grained diversity" that is only possible in central city settings. Her advocacy of "eyes on the street" as a key element of neighborhood stability and security was reinforced in 1972 with the publication of Oscar Newman's influential attack on modernist housing. He argued that Modern architecture had been too preoccupied with form, with architecture as sculpture, and insufficiently attentive to people's need for functional, defensible spaces. Specifically, he suggested that much of the petty crime, vandalism, muggings, and burglaries in modern public housing projects was related to a weakening of community life and a withdrawal of local social order caused by the inability of residents to identify with, or exert any control over, the space beyond their own front doors. Sociability among residents, in short, had been "designed out" by modernists, along with color, variety, and ornamentation.<sup>84</sup>

The tide of opinion had turned; it was the end of an era. Critics in the popular press tended increasingly to portray architects as narcissistic, dogmatic, elitist, and arrogantly self-regarding, and planners as authoritarian and unaccountable. Planners:

... who had previously enjoyed general endorsement as midwives of essential urban transformation ... now found themselves vilified as dictatorial figures who betrayed public trust and imposed unwarranted change on society—largely by exploiting

their eagerly cultivated status as experts. The erstwhile creators of environments fit for tomorrow's society were rebranded as manipulative social engineers. Root-and-branch criticism, not always accurately targeted, had fallen on aspects of road planning, neighbourhood design, land use policy, town centre development and, above all, public sector housing.<sup>85</sup>

For better or worse, urban planning was no longer any real force for progressive socioeconomic change in cities. The dialectics of urban development had brought it entirely, rhetoric aside, into the service of the powerful and the power brokers. The public, its putative beneficiaries, no longer believed or trusted in its abilities or intentions. Practitioners and academics had their own doubts. Alison Ravetz, in her book *Remaking Cities* described how urban planning had been transformed from an “enabling” to a “disabling” profession as a result of its professional ideology (that it, its paternalism, spatial determinism, futurism, and preoccupation with aesthetics) and its evangelical mantle that enabled practitioners to turn a deaf ear to criticism.<sup>86</sup> Leonie Sandercock characterized planning as having pursued “anti-democratic, race and gender-blind, and culturally homogenizing practices.”<sup>87</sup> The progressive *New Society* magazine published an essay on “Non-Planning,” co-authored by architectural and design historian Reyner Banham, the architect Cedric Price, the geographer Peter Hall, and the magazine's deputy editor, Paul Barker.<sup>88</sup> They asked themselves the question: Could things be any worse if there were no planning at all?

Architecture did not fare any better. Architectural historian and critic Manfredo Tafuri traced the history of efforts by architects in contributing to the good city. He did not dispute their good intentions but concluded that all that architecture could offer was “form without utopia.”<sup>89</sup> Tom Wolfe's over-the-top debunking of modernism and ridicule of its leading practitioners in his book *From Bauhaus to Our House*<sup>90</sup> became a bestseller, reflecting widespread popular disrespect for the profession.

### **Disaffection and Disenchantment**

The design professions also lost standing as a result of sins of omission: failing to contribute positively to the aesthetics of suburbia and failing to control sprawl. By the early 1970s, sitcom suburbs had become tinged with an aura of failed ambition, and disenchantment with suburbia had become the conventional wisdom in both the popular and the academic press. “Planned sprawl”<sup>91</sup> had acquired a charge sheet that listed not only the bland standardization and rationalization of “placeless” subdivisions but also environmental degradation, social isolation, and malaise.

The low densities inherent to single-family suburban development resulted in increased traffic, ever-longer commutes, and chronic dependence on automobiles. The ad hoc nature of most suburban development,

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the end of an era*

it was pointed out, was destroying millions of acres of wildlife habitat and agricultural land every year. The health costs included an increased incidence of asthma, lung cancer, and heart problems. Stress resulting from commuting, it was argued, led to adverse effects on marriages and family life. Classic social science monographs such as *The Eclipse of Community*, *The Lonely Crowd*, *The Organization Man*, *The Levittowners*, *Middletown*, and *Working Class Suburb* established suburbs as settings of loose-knit, secondary ties where lifestyles were focused squarely on the nuclear family's pursuit of money, status, and consumer durables and the privacy in which to enjoy them.<sup>92</sup> Suburban neighborhoods were portrayed as "communities of limited liability"—just one of a series of loose social networks in which people might or might not choose to participate.

Within the suburbs themselves, conformity, shallowness, isolation, and the separation of the public and private spheres of life were hallmarks. A century after the publication of *Walden* it was the mass of residents of suburbia who were evidently leading lives of quiet desperation. And then there was how it all looked. Tightly zoned suburban developments resulted in neighborhoods that lacked visual, demographic, and social diversity. Suburban shops and shopping malls brought with them acres and acres of parking space that imposed an unrelieved sterility to the suburban landscape. To accommodate this parking space, buildings had to be set back so far from the road that commercial signage became ever larger and more outlandish in an attempt to catch the motorist's eye.

As urban historian Jon Teaford succinctly put it, "Sexual intercourse, connubial affection, motherly devotion, atmospheric purity, flora and fauna, civic loyalty, and individual happiness all seemed to be victims of the relentless sprawl of the edgeless city."<sup>93</sup> The design professions seemed to have had no more positive effect in shaping the suburban dimension of the good city than they had in reshaping inner-city districts.

Part III

The Continuing Struggle

# 9

## The Neoliberal City

The frustrations and disillusionment associated with the turning points of 1968 and 1973 were preludes and preconditions to a long goodbye to welfare capitalism. The four-fold increase in the price of crude oil by the OPEC cartel triggered a shake-out of the business world. Transnational corporations grew in size and number as manufacturers sought to realign their supply chains using cheap overseas labor. This, in turn, required a more sophisticated system of international finance, which led to the emergence of giant financial conglomerates like Citigroup, UBS, HSBC, and Deutsche Bank. To some observers, the shifts involved in this globalized capitalism—“supercapitalism” in Reich’s terminology<sup>1</sup>—amounted to an epochal change. Ulrich Beck has characterized this change as the onset of a “Second Modernity” involving the emergence of new institutions and the reframing of old ones to cope with competitiveness and interdependence at the global scale.<sup>2</sup>

Amid all this, the postwar consensus that had been built around the reciprocity between the state and civil society was overtaken by a new political economy. This created a significantly different operating context for the design professions. Urban planning, no longer central to the public sector, slipped into marginal and regressive roles. Architecture’s public-sector commissions all but disappeared and, unmoored from rationalism and progressivism, the field fell into an extended excursion into postmodern fatuousness. Interurban competition and the aestheticization of consumption did, though, generate new and different kinds of commissions that resulted in innovative architecture. The homogenizing tendencies associated with globalization meanwhile sparked an appetite for the placemaking capacities of urban design and landscape architecture.

### **Supercapitalism, Globalization, and Neoliberalism**

Within just a few years of the upheavals of the mid-1970s, the political economies of North Atlantic countries had been altered beyond recognition. The incipient secular Reformation that had created the New Deal and postwar welfare states was supplanted by a counter-Reformation founded on a resurgent ideology of competition and self-reliance. Partly in response to longer-term structural economic trends and partly in response to the jarring economic, social, and fiscal experiences of the mid-1970s, a new



conservatism—neoliberalism—emerged to dominate both national and local politics. Initially, it was a politics aimed at freeing up the economy for recovery by reducing government regulation, lowering taxes, and cutting back on expenditures for public services. Its advocates were encouraged by the doctrinaire writing of economists like Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek. Governments, the argument ran, are inefficient, bloated with bureaucracy, prone to overregulation that stifles economic development, and hemmed in by social and environmental policies that are an impediment to international competitiveness. Just as the idea of market failures had been a powerful notion in the ideological shift from classical liberalism to egalitarian liberalism in the 1930s, so the idea of government failures had become a powerful notion in undermining the egalitarian liberalism of Keynesian welfare states. The very concept of the public good was tarred with the same brush as Keynesianism, as government itself (to paraphrase Ronald Reagan) came to be identified as the problem rather than the solution.

Globalization also played a part: Keynesian economic policies and redistributive programs came to be seen as an impediment to international competitiveness. In lieu of progressive social programs there emerged a discourse on the importance of resilience, in which the emphasis was on individual adaptability and self-reliance.<sup>3</sup> In Britain, Margaret Thatcher declared that, “There is no such thing as society.”<sup>4</sup> In the United States, economic fundamentalism became inextricably linked with a moralizing social conservatism, producing the peculiar mix of conservatism and libertarianism that has become the hallmark of contemporary America.

By the mid-1990s, neoliberalism had become widely accepted, even among mainstream Democrats in the United States and New Labour in the United Kingdom. It was everyone for themselves as the state’s roles switched from being a regulator of markets and provider of welfare services to a facilitator of markets and agent of business. Communities and individuals would have to take responsibility for the conduct of their own lives; the voluntary sector would have to make up any shortfall in social well-being and the quality of urban life.

## **The Neoliberal City**

The proponents of neoliberalism claim that increased competitiveness and the rising tide of economic development will float all boats, urban and rural, central city and suburban: a fundamental basis for the good nation, the good region, and the good city. The good city is thus reconceived as one that is good for business: increasingly entrepreneurial in pursuit of jobs and revenues; increasingly probusiness in terms of municipal expenditures; and increasingly oriented to the kind of policies that keep property values high.<sup>5</sup> If necessary, social goals and regulatory standards must be sacrificed, it is asserted, to ensure that business has the maximum latitude for profitability. At the same time, neoliberalism also draws on the cultural legacy of antiurbanism, “uneasy with cities both as centers for the generation of new ideas,

movements, and challenges to the status quo, and as places where the usefulness of the principles of collective provision and consumption of services is most manifest.”<sup>6</sup>

Brenner and Theodore suggest that the implicit goal of neoliberalization at the metropolitan scale has been “to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices.”<sup>7</sup> In this context, design—product design, landscape design, and urban design as well as architecture—becomes a vital dimension of the exchange value of places and things and a key determinant of their marketability. With images and aesthetics so central, planners found themselves at a competitive disadvantage compared to the image-producing, taste-making fields of architecture and urban design. In any case, the idea that cities could be successfully planned and managed had become increasingly suspect within neoliberal regimes: urban form must now follow market forces, with planners called upon simply to smooth the rough spots. Cities, no longer able to afford grand schemes, turned to planning departments to assist in branding rather than in shaping real change. Stripped of their authoritative technocratic position and their comprehensive social mandate, planners were left to broker public-private partnerships and “smart growth” strategies whose purposes and directions were almost always dominated by the private sector.

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### **Reviving “dead” capital**

Among the early portents of neoliberalism in the United States were “taxpayer revolts.” The first was Proposition 13 in California in 1978, which resulted in a 60 percent reduction of state property taxes. The same year, the first US National Urban Policy Report called for the disengagement of the federal government from urban affairs. In Britain, the Thatcher administration went straight for a cornerstone of the welfare state: social housing. In 1980 the Thatcher government gave sitting tenants the right to buy their homes at a substantial discount: between 33 and 50 percent of their home’s market value, depending on how long they had been renting it. As well as a major symbolic commitment to privatization it was a nakedly political attempt to create home-owning Tory voters. It also turned out to be a strategic device for clearing potentially lucrative inner-city real estate of the poor.

Under the provisions of the UK’s 1980 Housing Act, space standards for social housing were scrapped and municipalities were barred from using the proceeds from sales of social housing to build or acquire new homes. This effectively ended municipalities’ capacity to provide social housing. The remaining supply of affordable social housing quickly fell behind demand, resulting in massive waiting lists. London’s left-leaning Greater London Council (GLC) was made to transfer its housing stock to politically weaker boroughs. The GLC itself was disbanded altogether a few years later. Its buoyant municipal socialism had been a thorn in the side of Conservative governments, and its abolition left the metropolis effectively defenseless against the free-for-all commercial exploitation fostered by neoliberalism.

The right-to-buy legislation did have a stabilizing and upgrading effect in nicer districts with a high proportion of desirable municipal properties, such as the LCC's cottage estates. "Dunroamin" suburbs were joined by "Dunrentin" homes. It meant, though, that other social housing estates sank into disrepair, and without sufficient investment in maintenance or management they became stigmatized as "sink" estates, characterized by high levels of socioeconomic deprivation and with shadow-effect landscapes of unkempt public spaces, discount stores, payday lenders, charity shops, and derelict sites. It was a manifestation of the kind of social distress and inequality that Keynesian economists and welfare state planners had previously thought possible to eradicate.

The sell-off of social housing was a stalking horse for further rounds of privatization: everything from roads, bridges, and municipal buildings to bus operations and maintenance, landscaping, street repair, vehicle fleets, water supplies, and waste collection. The land, buildings, houses, and factories of London's New Town corporations were sold off, and many municipalities began offloading their assets—playing fields, community centers, libraries, youth clubs, and swimming pools. Brett Christophers has calculated that between the late 1970s and 2017 approximately five million acres of land—equivalent to more than 8 percent of the total land area of Britain—disappeared from public ownership.<sup>8</sup> The bulk of privatized land has entered corporate ownership, making "dead" capital liquid. Harvey argues that this is another case of accumulation by dispossession: a modern parallel across the Anglo-American world to the British enclosure movement of the 1800s.<sup>9</sup>

## Privatization

In the United States, the 1988 Report of the President's Commission on Privatization concluded that privatization "may well be seen by future historians as one of the most important developments in American political and economic life in the late 20th century."<sup>10</sup> For the corporate sector, privatization provided new markets, new outlets for investment capital, and new entrepreneurial opportunities. The timing was of critical importance: it was no coincidence that private capital became available for public-private partnerships just as cities were facing retrenchment and fiscal stress: both were the product of a phase of overaccumulation following the economic system-shock precipitated by the OPEC price hike. Changing circumstances in international, national, and real estate markets brought the private sector to the public sector as much as ideological and fiscal shifts brought the public sector to the private sector.

The progrowth, probusiness entrepreneurialism of city governments meanwhile saw the implementation of what were effectively instances of the "non-planning" that Reyner Banham et al. had written about.<sup>11</sup> Bypassing statutory planning and policy frameworks, enterprise zones and urban development corporations were designed to set aside designated, deregulated areas in which business might flourish. Based on the work of geographer Peter Hall and first advanced in Britain, enterprise zones involve making selected

areas attractive to businesses by combining as many concessions as possible—tax breaks, subsidized factory space, and so on—with a relaxation of government controls and regulations. Urban development corporations were less accountable, with powers to acquire, clear, and develop land, provide key services, enhance access, and undertake environmental improvement and urban design.<sup>12</sup>

The most dramatic example of deregulation was the reform of UK financial markets in 1986, seen by the Thatcher government as essential to London's status as a world banking capital. Long-standing rules that had barred foreign companies from operating in the city were scrapped, and face-to-face dealing on the floor of the stock exchange was replaced with screen-based trading. The result was the so-called "Big Bang": a restructuring and realignment of firms in stock and bond markets. London's role as the preeminent financial hub of the global economy was indeed confirmed and consolidated, with enormous consequences for architecture, building, and social change.

The two districts whose physical fabric was most affected were the square mile of the City of London and the Docklands. The boom in banking and financial services created a seemingly insatiable demand for high-tech, large-floor-plate offices that the building stock in central London could not satisfy. This encouraged both the government and private investors in the development of a major new office district three miles to the east of the City on the site of the derelict quays of the Isle of Dogs. The Thatcher government took some 4,900 acres of land out of the hands of local governments and the Port Authority, established the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), and charged it with the regeneration of the Docklands.

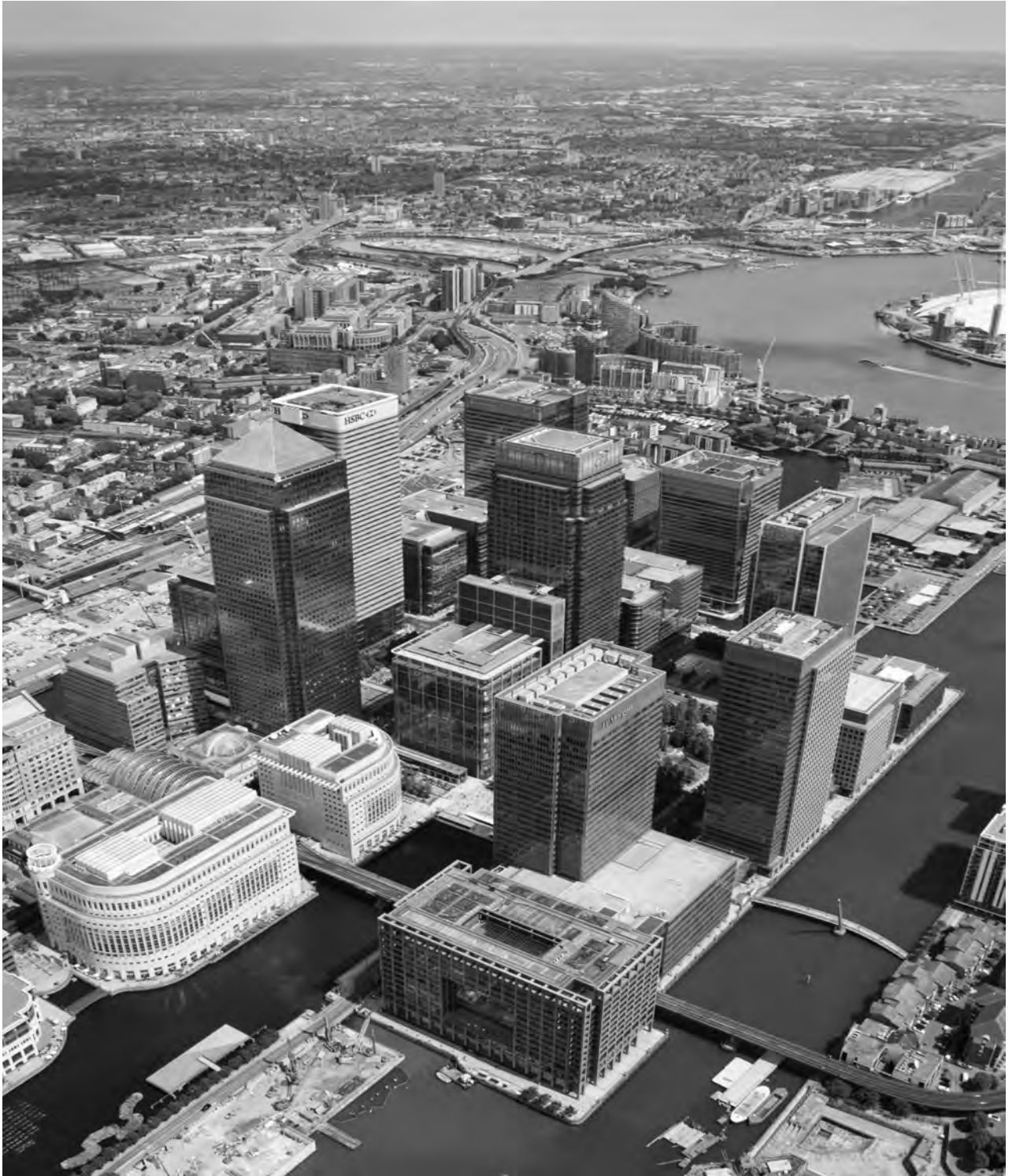
The regeneration of the Docklands was a deliberate attempt not simply to market this part of London to global investors but to sell the whole idea of the United Kingdom as a rejuvenated, postindustrial economy. The Docklands were to become the spatial expression of neoliberal enterprise culture, fostering the growth of London's advanced business services and replacing a "redundant"—both literally and figuratively—working-class population with a middle-class one. The LDDC promptly designated the area around the derelict West India and Millwall Docks as the Isle of Dogs Enterprise Zone, giving

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**9.1 Canary Wharf, London** (opposite). The growth of the financial services district on the Isle of Dogs in London's Docklands was driven by rising demand for deep floorplate, Grade A office accommodation and boosted by the opening of the Underground extension in 1999, with Norman Foster's signature-style Canary Wharf station. The core of the initial development around Canary Wharf unfortunately coincided with a fashion for postmodern styling, so that—Pelli's tower excepted—the big cornerstone corporate office buildings were dressed up with the vestigial columns and pediments and overscaled entrances of precast postmodern classicism. More recent developments on the regenerated Canary Wharf site, catering increasingly to international financial and publishing companies, have opted more for glassy, International Style towers.







developers freedom from local property taxes for a ten-year period, with no development land tax and a 100 percent capital allowance for new commercial and industrial buildings, to be offset against corporation and income taxes. The centerpiece of the development was Canary Wharf (fig. 9.1), its flagship structure a sleek fifty-story tower designed by the Argentine-American architect Cesar Pelli. Beneath the development was an underground shopping center and beneath that was a multilayered service spine for the whole development, including parking.

The LDDC, having been widely criticized for being unaccountable and for causing social polarization, was wound up in 1998. By 2005 the Isle of Dogs finally had the skyline that the Thatcher government had sought as a symbolic manifestation of the resilience of London's role in the global economy.<sup>13</sup> The subsequent incremental opportunism of developers and local government agencies has resulted in a mixture of residential, commercial, exhibition, and light industrial space that is the largest single urban regeneration scheme in the world. It is, however, fragmented and polarized, with no civic spaces, no public buildings, few parks, and an inadequate local transport infrastructure. The buildings are, for the most part, unremarkable. It is difficult to engage with either the architecture or the setting. Ironically, the LDDC had seen architecture and urban design as a means to establish a marketable sense of place for the Docklands. Landscaping and street furniture were deliberately designed to contrast as far as possible with the deindustrialized legacy of the district, but have served only to lend a generic sense of placelessness.

*Public-private  
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change*

### **Public-Private Partnerships**

The combination of deindustrialization and the neoliberal fiscal policies of central governments has meant that cities have had to rely on their own local fiscal capacity to sustain their economies. Increasingly dependent on local tax returns from real estate development, they also have to rely on public-private partnerships in contemplating larger development projects. "While cities started engaging in bidding wars with each other for investment capital from the private sector, business and property developers learned to rely on the public government for sweetheart deals and publicly funded financial incentives and tax benefits."<sup>14</sup> Public-private partnerships became the standard vehicle for achieving urban change, replacing the strategic role of city planning departments with piecemeal deal-making.<sup>15</sup> In the United States, the earliest versions of the approach came to be known as "Rousification," after private-sector developer-planner James Rouse. His successes in Baltimore's Inner Harbor, New York's South Street Seaport, Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace, New Orleans's Riverwalk, Jacksonville's (Florida) Jacksonville Landing, and Miami's Bayside have served as the models for countless other ventures.

Such set-piece developments create focal settings for integrated packages of upscale offices, tourist shops, "impulse" retailing, restaurants, concert halls, and art galleries. They provide settings for events such as

concerts, ethnic festivals, outdoor exhibits, and carefully planned “animation” (generated by farmers’ markets, street entertainment, and the like). They are important assets for entrepreneurial cities because of their scale and their consequent ability to stage—or merely to be—the spectacular. As such they have been described by David Harvey as the “carnival mask” of contemporary urbanization, their carefully designed and scripted spaces being a means to attract capital and people (of the right sort) while diverting attention from the continuing problems of urban decay and social deprivation in nearby (but unseen) neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, public-private partnerships have significantly reconfigured power relations within systems of building provision.

The shift in the roles of architects and designers from traditional procurement to PPPs is one that significantly diminishes their influence on the process of creating a facility. ... the big leap they have to make is from acting as the government’s agent to becoming a subcontractor to a private-sector actor. Architecture firms bear risks they never used to bear and are pressurized by their client to adhere to tight schedules, since the client’s financing is predicated on meeting strict deadlines.<sup>17</sup>

In Britain, the Conservative government had established the Private Finance Initiative in 1992 to leverage private sector capacity to deliver public sector infrastructure and services. It was expanded considerably by the New Labour Party and rebranded as the Public Private Partnership (PPP) in 1997 as a vehicle for kick-starting an “urban renaissance.”<sup>18</sup> New Labour’s approach was strongly influenced by Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate Richard Rogers, whose close affiliations with the Labour Party had funded a book advocating the key role of urban design, public spaces, and density in envisaging A New London.<sup>19</sup>

*“Successful urban regeneration,” it was asserted, “is design-led”*

In 1998 Rogers was appointed as head of an Urban Task Force charged with identifying the causes of urban decline and recommending practical solutions to bring people back into cities. Echoing the neoliberal rationale of the PPP, the Task Force asserted that, “One of the most efficient uses for public money in urban regeneration is to pave the way for investment of much larger sums by the private sector.”<sup>20</sup> The Task Force report was promptly followed by an urban white paper setting the agenda for the implementation of the anticipated “urban renaissance.”<sup>21</sup> Implicit in both was an emphasis on cities as sites for consumption and living and the need to get the “design and quality of the urban fabric right.” “Successful urban regeneration,” it was asserted, “is design-led.”<sup>22</sup> The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) was established in the hope of advancing the cause of well-designed buildings, spaces, and places. But with its cliquy membership (including a chairman who was also CEO of a major property developer) and no statutory powers it was no match for the uncompromising neoliberal political economy that had taken root.

In spite of the laudable goals of the Urban Task Force and the apparent social-democratic intentions of Rogers and others, the result in London was

to encourage a feverish spate of regeneration and mixed-use projects: “The Urban Task Force that he led, and the planning advice he gave ... [merely] entailed making neoliberalism look nicer.”<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, Rogers himself went on to design two of the most outrageously extravagant projects in the entire city: Neo Bankside and One Hyde Park, which effectively were vertical gated communities for the super-rich, unintentionally symbolic of both the neoliberal political economy of “global” London and of the hollowness of the rhetoric of superstar architects.

Both projects are aimed at City bonus-day millionaires and the internationally wealthy (the “guide price” for one-bedroom apartments in One Hyde Park in 2020 was \$US7.51 million; for a three-bedroom apartment, \$US39 million). As such, both projects are magnets for a special category of international real estate investment: “flight capital” from war zones and failed states and from the surplus capital of oligarchs and oil sheikhs. Following the financial crisis of 2008, Swiss banks were less willing to fulfil their traditional role of no-questions-asked banking. The property markets of central London, Manhattan, Los Angeles, Vancouver, and other world cities filled the gap—somewhere for the global superrich to park their money. Property in the “alpha districts” of these cities became a form of reserve currency for the “one percent” as rich foreigners paid large sums for properties in which they had no intention of living—except, perhaps, during one or two shopping binges each year.

### **Property Rights**

The free-enterprise, neoliberal political economy meanwhile encouraged landowners and developers to challenge the fundamental power of city governments to protect public health, safety, and welfare through planning regulations and public works, undoing past victories in the struggle for progressive reform. In the United States especially, libertarians and property-rights activists had long been unhappy with cities’ use of eminent domain to compel owners to accept buyouts to make room for new roads, electricity lines, urban renewal, and other projects that benefit public health, safety, and environmental protection. It was not enough that the power of public authorities was constrained by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution, which bar the “taking” private property for public use without just compensation.” Beginning in the 1980s, property-rights activists, backed by libertarian groups like the Reason Foundation, Americans for Limited Government, and the Cato Institute, advanced the notion that zoning and government regulations on real estate depress potential property values. Through ballot initiatives with titles like “Protect Our Homes,” “The Home Owners Protection Effort,” and “People’s Initiative to Stop the Taking of Our Land,” they lobbied for laws that would treat most zoning and land-use regulations as “takings.” Their first significant win came in 2004 when Oregon voters passed Measure 37, a ballot initiative that torpedoed what had been the strictest land-use system in the country.

### **Privatized Enclaves and Degenerate Utopias**

Others have voted with their feet, moving to privatized spaces that are exempt from municipal land-use planning regulations: the “secession of the successful”:

In many cities and towns, the wealthy have in effect withdrawn their dollars from the support of public spaces and institutions shared by all and dedicated the savings to their own private services. As public parks and playgrounds deteriorate, there is a proliferation of private health clubs, golf clubs, tennis clubs, skating clubs and every other type of recreational association in which costs are shared among members. Condominiums and the omnipresent residential communities dun their members to undertake work that financially strapped local governments can no longer afford to do well—maintaining roads, mending sidewalks, pruning trees, repairing street lights, cleaning swimming pools, paying for lifeguards and, notably, hiring security guards to protect life and property.<sup>24</sup>

In the suburbs, the everyone-for-themselves political economy invited an aesthetic dominated by showy consumerism. Encouraged by a banking industry that was increasingly competitive—and therefore increasingly lenient toward borrowers—it did not take long for suburban landscapes to reflect the result: a proliferation of monster homes, “starter castles” and the associated suburban bling of “Vulgaria” and “Privatopia.”<sup>25</sup>

Bigness and extravagance are hallmarks of Vulgaria—size for its own sake evidently bespeaks affluence and status in the minds of many consumers (fig. 9.2). But size is also a necessary precondition for the long list of features that affluent households desire in their homes. In Vulgaria, ostentation and simulation pass for style and taste, and affluence is confused with cosmopolitanism and urbanity. Vulgaria is characterized by tract mansions of four thousand square feet and upward, featuring two-story entrance halls, great rooms, three- or four-car garages, huge kitchens, spa-sized bathrooms, his-and-hers room-sized master closets, media rooms, fitness centers, home offices, high-tech security systems, and perhaps even an au pair suite. Vulgaria’s exterior residential styling deploys any kind of neotraditional motif as long as the street frontage is impressive, with high gabled roofs, unusually shaped windows, and “architectural” features such as turrets, bays, and portes-cochère. The overall effect is an outlandish, contrived spectacle of over-the-top pretension. Meanwhile, lot sizes have remained almost unchanged. The result is a marked bulking-up of suburban landscapes. In older existing suburbs, teardowns and scrape-offs are being replaced with monster homes that overshadow their neighbors. But it has provoked NIMBYism: many communities have enacted “mansionization” ordinances to limit the height and size of new homes.

The quintessential expressions of these trends are private master-planned developments in which “the dominant ideology is privatism; where contract law is the supreme authority; where property rights and property values are the focus of community life; and where homogeneity,

*An aesthetic dominated by showy consumerism*



9.2. McLean, VA. An exurb of monster homes and gated communities that, arguably, serve as manifestations of dictionary definitions of vulgarity: "showing a lack of taste or reasonable moderation," "ostentatious or excessive in expenditure or display; pretentious," "wealthy but tasteless or overly ostentatious." The landscapes of Vulgaria have become contagious, their bigness, bling, and ostentation filtering down into older suburbs as monster homes replace teardowns and scrapeoffs, and greenfield sites are smothered with new themed and packaged master-planned developments.





exclusiveness, and exclusion are the foundation of social organization.”<sup>26</sup> These developments rely on the legal framework inherent to homeowners’ associations (also known as common-interest communities). Effectively a form of private government, homeowner associations have become a hallmark of the neoliberal city. Through boards of directors elected by homeowners, they levy taxes (through assessments), control and regulate the physical environment [through “servitude regimes” of covenants, controls, and restrictions (CCRs) attached to each home’s deed], enact development controls, maintain commonly owned amenities (such as meeting rooms, exercise centers, racquetball courts, and picnic areas), and organize service delivery (such as garbage collection, water and sewer services, street maintenance, snow removal, and neighborhood security).

The earliest homeowners’ associations, from the first examples in the 1920s to the mid-1960s, were chiefly directed toward exclusionary segregation. They were “overwhelmingly concerned with the establishment of what Robert Fishman has called ‘bourgeois utopia’: that is, with the creation of racially and economically homogeneous residential enclaves glorifying the single-family home.”<sup>27</sup> Evan McKenzie suggests that it was Radburn, New Jersey, based on the progressive city manager model and with a set of CCRs drawn up by attorney and political scientist Charles Ascher, that became the progenitor of homeowner associations in the neoliberal city.<sup>28</sup> The Radburn model of community governance was refined and extended in the “new community” experiments of the 1960s—Irvine, California; Reston, Virginia; Columbia, Maryland; and others—and subsequent waves of suburbanization provided the platform for the proliferation of a new breed of highly codified associations.

The CCRs of neoliberal suburbia typically detail what is and what is not allowed in terms of everything from exterior trim and landscaping design to the length of time that vehicles can be left visible on the street, the type of holiday decorations, and long lists of proscribed behaviors: putting out the laundry, making loud noise, putting up TV antennas, displaying political or religious posters, leaving children’s toys and equipment in the yard, and so on. Most ban all signs except for real estate placards, and restrict what kind of vehicles can be parked outside, even in driveways; some even prescribe how long garage doors can be left open, the type of furniture that can be seen through front windows, the maximum length of stay for guests, and whether any sort of business can be conducted from the home.

For consumers, these servitude regimes offer a means of narrowing uncertainty, protecting property values, and, above all, establishing the physical framework for the material consumption that constitutes their lifestyle. Under US law, CCRs have to be taken very seriously: if homeowner associations don’t enforce them to the letter, they can be accused of being arbitrary and capricious—deadly in any court of law. So draconian measures have to be taken against even the smallest infringements (Repaint those garage doors! Relay that driveway! Take down that poster!) in order to

prevent the neighborhood from descending into a landscape of, well, normality. Homeowner associations routinely use their power to levy fines in order to bring transgressors into compliance. They also have the power to obtain a lien on the property of recalcitrant homeowners, and can even threaten foreclosure.<sup>29</sup> We are thus confronted with a breathtaking only-in-America irony: More and more people living and working in communities with a significant circumscription of individual rights.

With their servitude regimes of CCRs, private master-planned suburbs are culturally hermetic spaces, “purified” arenas of social reproduction, dominated by material consumption and social segregation. More broadly, they reflect and embody the design professions’ intellectual legacies of arcadian, utopian, and communitarian ideals. But they do so in a way that is radically transmuted by the materialism and exclusionary impulses of target markets and the conservatism and profit-driven competitiveness of developers. Accommodating these imperatives has drawn designers into the realm of Disney-style “imagineering,” which, observes Edward Relph, “has become one of the primary ways of making landscapes.”<sup>30</sup>

Tightly regulated through homeowners’ associations to provide privacy, autonomy, stability, security, and partition, private master-planned communities propagate a kind of “moral minimalism” in their residents: bound only by their contracted commitment to lead a private life, residents have little social contact with neighbors, virtually no social interaction beyond their workplace and, as a result, few bonds of mutual responsibility. Thatcher would have approved. Most are utterly indifferent to issues that go beyond their own property and lifestyle: perfect incubators for neoliberalism. David Harvey, borrowing from Louis Marin’s categorization of Disneyland,<sup>31</sup> has described the packaged landscapes of master-planned communities as paradigmatic “degenerate utopias.”<sup>32</sup> Like Disneyland, they are designed as harmonious and nonconflictual spaces, set aside from the “real” world. Like Disneyland, they incorporate spectacle and maintain security and exclusion through surveillance, walls, and gates; and, like Disneyland’s Main Street, they deploy a sanitized and mythologized past in invoking identity and community. All of this is “degenerate,” in Harvey’s view, because the oppositional force implicit in the progressive and utopian ideals embraced by the design professions has slid, in the course of materialization, into a perpetuation of the fetish of commodity culture.

*“Degenerate  
utopias”*

### **Regeneration and Revanchism**

Speculative development in central city districts took on an altogether different character. Driven mainly by investment capital, the imperatives of the international real estate industry and the discipline of money became dominant forces, especially in the world’s leading cities. It was kick-started by the surplus capital of the overaccumulation crisis of the mid-1970s: investors could not find enough reasonably safe, profitable investment opportunities in the “primary circuit” of productive enterprises, so they looked elsewhere.

As David Harvey pointed out, the built environment can serve as a kind of overflow “secondary circuit” of investment into which surplus capital can be switched; and safely parked until such time as it is once again profitable to reinvest it in the primary circuit.<sup>33</sup> Yet as major world cities like London and New York—and secondary world cities like Chicago, Boston, Dublin, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Toronto, and Vancouver—consolidated their roles in the globalizing economy, real estate became an investment channel in its own right, providing diversification for investment portfolios as well as attractive incomes. Unitized real estate became a key element in the global financial system. By 2017 real estate had become, in aggregate, a more valuable asset class than all stocks, shares, and securitized debt combined, with a total value of around \$228 trillion, the equivalent of three-and-a-half times global GDP.<sup>34</sup>

Real estate, “chunky, spatially fixed—has been turned into a (quasi-) financial asset—‘unitized’ and liquid—through a range of regulatory and socio-technical changes and constructions.”<sup>35</sup> Projects are increasingly developed with an investor rather than a user in mind, with commercial real estate increasingly owned by international real estate funds with large international portfolios of properties. The largest flows of investment in 2016 were transatlantic: Europe to North America, and vice versa, totaling \$58 billion. There were also big outflows of real estate investment from the Asia Pacific region: \$20 billion was invested in Europe and \$33 billion in North America.<sup>36</sup> The built environment can no longer be regarded simply as a secondary circuit of capital, the “assetization” of land and buildings as tradeable income streams having established them as significant elements in worldwide capital markets.

In this context, the leading cities of Europe and North America are at once attractive and challenging to investors. They are attractive because of their wealth, their business friendly policies, and the relative stability of their political regimes. But they are challenging because their central cities have long since been built out, along with the best suburban and exurban locations. Resolving this potential impasse has required writing off underperforming real estate and “regenerating” the consequent brownfield sites. It has been a boon to urban planning and design consultancies, while landscape architecture practices and educators also began to take an interest in degraded brownfield landscapes:

This explains why ... elected officials in successful global cities from London to New York, from San Francisco to Beijing, routinely adopt strikingly similar, ubiquitous policies, whose bottom line, apart from a few tweaks here and there, is always one and the same: the redevelopment of underperforming property markets (i.e., working-class or ex-manufacturing districts) into high-revenue urban land that can accommodate the most profitable uses (swanky residential enclaves, high-end retail rows) and attract the most profitable consumers (international companies and their employees, wealthy newcomers, tourists). In more technical terms: to create an environment that is capable of accommodating new cycles of capital investment and profit, a spatial arrangement that is suitable for the production, consumption, and reproduction of capital. <sup>37</sup>

*Projects are increasingly developed with an investor rather than a user in mind*

This in turn has involved new sets of actors—third-generation growth machines—with reconfigured communities of practice in which the “silent complicity” of the design fields<sup>38</sup> is more pronounced than ever. Regeneration and the mobilization of land as a financial asset has produced sophisticated mixed-use settings serving large sections of society; but it has also meant reclaiming urban spaces from the public realm, from low-profit enterprises, and low-income communities—what Sharon Zukin memorably described as “pacification by cappuccino.”<sup>39</sup> Neil Smith called the systemically dispossessive effects of neoliberal real estate dynamics “revanchism” (after the French word *revanche*, meaning revenge): a deliberate editing out of the infrastructure and institutions (and beneficiaries) of the social compact of the postwar era.<sup>40</sup>

### Third-Generation Growth Machines

The first-generation growth machines identified by Logan and Molotch<sup>41</sup> were essentially local in scope, involving a mostly homegrown rentier class of landowners, developers, realtors, bankers, and construction companies, along with auxiliary players in local utility companies, engineering and technical subcontractors, retailers, chambers of commerce, lawyers, title insurance and trust companies, transportation and utility companies, and local media. The second-generation growth machines that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s were more sophisticated and more aggressively competitive. They involved a property lobby that took advantage of the revolving doors between municipalities and development companies, a growing culture of hospitality and political donations, and innumerable loopholes and get-out clauses in planning laws and building regulations.<sup>42</sup> The bigger regional and national building and development companies acquired more political clout and had more personnel and resources to deploy. The elite social networks of big corporate developers and their top managers, especially their contacts with big-name planners and designers, senior civil servants, and influential politicians, helped them gain approvals, get regulations amended or waived, and get zoning variance requests approved for the extravagant, Rousified, mixed-use developments of the period.

Third-generation growth machines are framed within the transnational space of the Second Modernity—locally embedded but with national and transnational elements, each distinctive in terms of time- and place-specific relations. These sets of relations represent important new “systems of provision”<sup>43</sup> in urban development. Local actors like construction firms, local government agencies, elected officials, and local media remain important; but they all rely on the mobilization of capital and expertise by central governments and national or international level investment companies, property development companies, real estate companies, engineering conglomerates like AECOM, Blackstone, Bechtel, CBRE, Savills, and Siemens, and international management consultants like McKinsey and Mercer.<sup>44</sup> The range of actors and agencies involved in such projects means that the outcomes are

*Third generation growth machines are framed within the transnational space of the Second Modernity*

typically mediated by way of a “post-politics” that stifles local conflict and dissent through carefully choreographed processes of technocratic management and orchestrated public participation<sup>45</sup> as well as relying on the willingness among architects, planners, and urban designers to serve the agendas of the politically and economically powerful.

### **Traveling Ideas and Global Designscapes**

This symbiotic relationship with capital is mobilized through (increasingly multidisciplinary) intrafirm and interfirm networks of architecture, engineering, planning, and urban design firms, along with marketing, branding, and property consultants. The increasing interlinkage among finance, business, and professional design services on a global scale is explicitly evident at the *Marché international des professionnels de l'immobilier* (MIPIM), a property fair held annually in Cannes, where the top real estate and architecture firms with global aspirations come together. MIPIM facilitates the dissemination of “traveling ideas”<sup>46</sup> about urban design and development, as do practitioner-oriented conferences like the LSE (London School of Economics) Urban Age series, the Moscow Urban Forum and the Marmara Urban Forum; ad hoc gatherings such as the London Brownfield Summit; international networks of cities such as the Metropolis Association, the Global Taskforce on Urban and Regional Governments, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (founded 1999 by the Council of Europe) and more than two hundred other city networks worldwide; and the armies of consultants from the likes of McKinsey and Mercer. They are a collective echo chamber in which “fast policy” transfer takes place, “common solutions for common problems”: “the pragmatic borrowing of ‘policies that work,’ by compressed reform horizons, by iterative constructions of best practice, by enlarged roles for intermediaries as ‘pushers’ of policy routines and technologies.”<sup>47</sup>

For the most part, the traveling ideas involved have been neoliberal in character, with little or no attention to working-class issues of poverty, hunger, literacy, economic mobility, or affordable housing. Caught up in these third-generation growth machines, the design professions have been realigned, adopting new professional orthodoxies, abandoning old ones, and executing the traveling ideas emerging from the echo chamber of international conferences, congresses, and trade shows.<sup>48</sup> The most seductive of all traveling ideas has been property-led redevelopment along the lines of London’s Docklands and La Défense in Paris,<sup>49</sup> resulting in the serial reproduction of “designscapes”: predictable ensembles of office buildings, retail space, condominium towers, cultural amenities, renovated spaces, landscaping, and street furniture.<sup>50</sup> Thus we get, among others, Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn, New York; Hudson Yards in New York City (fig. 9.3); Grand Avenue, Los Angeles; South Works, Chicago; the River District in Portland, Oregon; Salford Docks and New Islington, Manchester; Dublin Docklands; Birmingham’s Brindleyplace; and London’s Greenwich Peninsula, King’s Cross, Nine Elms, Olympic Park/Stratford Village, Paddington Waterside, and South Bank redevelopments.





### **The New Urban Affect**

The urban affect designed into these developments—with their plazas, “streets,” atria, food courts, sculptures, gardens, and parking decks—has blurred the traditional distinctions between public and private spaces.<sup>51</sup> There is a presumption that the spaces that are external to shops, offices, cinemas, and so on are part of the public realm, just like the streets, sidewalks, and parks of traditional urban form. But in reality, they are private, and the public is welcome only as long as they do not spoil or threaten the ambience of the spaces as “imagineered” by their developers, owners, and managers. In practice, this means that a good deal of normal urban activity and comportment is edited out of these settings.

All sorts of other activities that typically occur in genuinely public spaces—the distribution of leaflets, union picketing, demonstrations and rallies by activists, the solicitation for funds or signatures, the sale of home-baked cookies, and busking, for example—are likewise proscribed from new mixed-use developments. Desert Ridge, for example, a “town center” development on the edge of Phoenix, Arizona, has a rigorous code of conduct posted beneath its store directory. The list of forbidden activities includes “non-commercial expressive activity,” “excessive staring,” and “taking photos, video, or audio recording of any store, product, employee, customer or officer.”<sup>52</sup> It goes without saying that the mere presence of certain categories of individuals—the colorfully eccentric, the boisterously loud, the poor, knots of youths, shifty-looking individuals, the homeless, and so on—is also frequently seen as undesirable by the owners and operators of quasi-public spaces. Though they may not be formally proscribed, these unwanted groups will be deterred through clever design features and, if necessary, removed by private security personnel.

Mike Davis has described the “forting up” of urban settings with “hostile design”—convex “bum-proof” benches, skate-stopper studs, spikes, anticlimb paint, antigraffiti barricades, overhead sprinkler systems, motion detectors, CCTV, and facial recognition technology—as a “new class war ... at the level of the built environment.”<sup>53</sup> Others have invoked the concept of the right to the city: “vital not just politically, but to the kind of social life we have come to signify by the shorthand term ‘urban.’”<sup>54</sup>

### **Third-Wave Gentrification**

Gentrification is often cited as another aspect of “class war at the level of the built environment.” First-wave gentrification was focused on renovating the urban fabric of declining inner-city districts through sweat equity of

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**9.3 Hudson Yards, New York City** (opposite). A twenty-eight-acre mixed-use development on a plinth above railyards in Manhattan’s far West Side. The complex of residential and commercial skyscrapers, public gardens, a massive shopping mall, and a cultural center includes signature architecture by the likes of Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill, and Diller Scofidio + Renfro. It stands at the northern end of the High Line elevated linear park and rail trail created on the former New York Central Railroad spur.

“pioneer” households seeking the character and convenience of less-expensive but well-located residences. Second-wave gentrification involved an intensification of the process through neoliberal policies designed to facilitate and encourage the process. Third-wave gentrification is a product of property-led redevelopment projects instigated by third-generation growth machines.

First-wave gentrifiers were foundational to the whole process. They were, in Bourdieu’s terms, typically rich in cultural capital but limited in economic capital. Their arrival gradually displaced poorer households through evictions, escalating rents, house prices, and property taxes, and prompted the closure of stores specializing in inexpensive goods and produce. The incoming gentrifiers, meanwhile, contributed to the physical renovation or rehabilitation of the older and usually rather deteriorated housing stock while supporting new businesses such as upscale restaurants, coffee shops, delicatessens, wine bars, galleries, clothing boutiques, and bookstores. The resulting new social ecology, as Sharon Zukin observed,<sup>55</sup> functioned as a “critical infrastructure” of cultural change, part of the aestheticization of the city. The habits and tastes of gentrifiers helped to define “good taste” and urban fashionability that were commodified via Sunday newspaper supplements, lifestyle magazines, and television programs on food and home improvements. The buzz of gentrifying neighborhoods, meanwhile, added to their attraction, drawing in more (and more affluent) households, and more capital investment in businesses. In some of the gentrified districts in global cities the process was so intense that first-wave gentrifiers were priced out and displaced by financial-sector bonus-day millionaires—a process of “super-gentrification.”<sup>56</sup>

Property developers and policymakers were quick to understand the implications and potential of what had begun as a grassroots process. Real estate agents and developers spotted the “rent gaps” that have resulted from the “devalorization” of inner-city neighborhoods.<sup>57</sup> Politicians, speculators, and developers also came to see the edgy art and culture of pioneer gentrifiers as an attractive element in marketing reconditioned properties to newly affluent and design-aware professional service workers of the new economy.<sup>58</sup> The second wave of gentrification was led by landlords renting to tenants after rehabilitating their properties, and by developers who purchased property, redeveloped it, and resold it for profit. Their efforts were supported by the neoliberal initiatives of city governments, who welcomed the consequent expansion of the local tax base and recognized that the increased average incomes in gentrified districts helped keep the economy vibrant, increased equity for property owners, and increased order, cleanliness, and safety in neighborhoods that were once underserved and in disrepair. Catering to the emergent lifestyle and cultural choices of a mobile and expansive creative class, it was believed, would salvage the fortunes of struggling cities and declining inner-city districts.<sup>59</sup>

Gentrification became the leading edge of neoliberal urbanism as governments liberalized housing policy (making it much easier for landlords to evict long-term tenants and make older properties available for sale, and expanding availability of mortgage credit), loosening strict zoning regulations, incentivizing private real estate development, and strategically designating business improvement districts and conservation and historic preservation areas. Gentrification is never articulated explicitly as policy because of its obvious negative consequences—that is, breaking up established communities and displacing vulnerable and disadvantaged households who then face higher rents and longer commutes. Rather, gentrification strategies are typically described in terms of euphemisms like “urban renaissance” and buzzwords like “livability” and “sustainability.”

The third wave of gentrification brought these elements together with public-private partnerships to facilitate new-build projects that have “evolved into a vehicle for transforming whole areas into new landscape complexes that pioneer a comprehensive class-inflected urban remake.”<sup>60</sup> It has been the bread-and-butter of third-generation growth machines: “gentrification as urban strategy weaves global financial markets together with large- and medium-sized real-estate developers, local merchants, and property agents with brand-name retailers, all lubricated by city and local governments for whom beneficent social outcomes are now assumed to derive from the market rather than from its regulation.”<sup>61</sup> The outcome has been a spate of new-build gentrification projects—“islands of exclusion”—in the form of riverside and harborside condominium complexes, clusters of luxury high-rise apartment buildings, and “urban villages.”<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the most symbolically potent example of property-led, third-generation gentrification is in Manchester, England. The Ancoats district (figs. 9.4) of cotton mills and working-class terraces that Friedrich Engels famously described in the mid-nineteenth century, and that so influenced the theoretical writings of Karl Marx, having been partially pioneer-gentrified, was entirely reduced to a brownfield site before being redeveloped as “New Islington” through a public-private partnership using a master plan by architect Will Alsop.

*Gentrification  
became the leading  
edge of neoliberal  
urbanism*

### **State-led Gentrification**

Low-income neighborhoods that have proven resistant to gentrification—mostly tracts of run-down social housing, in other words—have required a more targeted neoliberal policy. The US Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development’s HOPE VI (Home Ownership and Opportunities for People Everywhere) program is a good example.<sup>63</sup> Since the introduction of the policy in the early 1990s more than \$6 billion has been allocated to HOPE VI Revitalization grants. Most involved mixed-finance partnerships among the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Between 2000 and 2008 alone, more than ninety-nine thousand public housing units were lost—a rate of eleven thousand per year—primarily as a result of the HOPE VI program. The



The Continuing Struggle





rhetoric of “social mix” that had been championed by the likes of Ebenezer Howard, Clarence Perry, and Raymond Unwin provided euphemistic cover for displacing low-income households and introducing middle-class residents by demolishing whole sections of social housing and replacing them with profitable private housing.<sup>64</sup> Like Victorian reformers, neoliberal planners and policymakers wanted to create a new moral order around the presence of respectable and well-behaved middle-class residents.

In Britain also, the idea of mixed communities was promoted as a key objective of regeneration and a solution to large concentrations of the poor on troublesome social housing estates. Social mix duly became a priority criterion for public-private partnerships with any residential component.<sup>65</sup> The presumption that communities needed to be socially mixed or “balanced” was promoted by the Urban Task Force and reinforced by the government’s Sustainable Communities Plan of 2003 (sustainable communities being defined rather myopically as “places where people want to live—that promote opportunity and a better quality of life for all”) and by the Mixed Community Initiative of 2005. Rhetorical prominence was given to the interdependence of civility, citizenship, good urban design (and, in particular, the imagery of “urban villages”).

The impact on the everyday modernism of British cityscapes has been significant. In London alone more than fifty social housing estates have undergone renewal.<sup>66</sup> The common pattern has been for developers to deliver an agreed number of homes, including a specified number of “affordable” homes, cross-subsidizing them by constructing luxury apartments in towers and midrise blocks. Woodberry Down, one of London County Council’s first postwar estates, with 2,500 homes in fifty-seven blocks on just sixty-four acres of land, provides a good example (fig. 8.3).<sup>67</sup> Described as “luxury flats” in the 1948 LCC press release announcing the opening of the first blocks, they were subsequently heralded as “the estate of the future” by one national newspaper. The layout of the estate was based on Clarence Perry’s neighborhood unit concept, with schools, a community center, public library, and

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**9.4 Ancoats, Manchester** (opposite). Ancoats was the world’s first industrial suburb, a direct product of the Industrial Revolution. Ancoats acquired notoriety not only for its revolutionary economic base but also for its new industrial architecture. Ancoats also became famous as a site of class struggle and an exemplar of the social deprivation consequent to unregulated industrial urbanism. Having gone full cycle through processes of deindustrialization, it is now the focus of urban regeneration efforts, branded as New Islington.

Clockwise from top left: **(9.4a)** Anita Street. Part of a small development of model housing, built by Manchester Corporation in the 1890s. Originally called Sanitary Street, a few letters were dropped from the name in the 1960s; **(9.4b)** Royal Mills complex and the Rochdale Canal. Now part of the Ancoats Urban Village regeneration project, the factories remodeled to provide apartments, shops, and office space; **(9.4c)** Quantum Waterside Apartments, on Ashton Canal; **(9.4d)** Chips, a New Islington apartment building designed by Will Alsop that also offers studio and commercial space; **(9.4e)** Islington Square, the first scheme to be built in New Islington.

health clinic. The clinic was the first to be built under the National Health Service and was publicized as the most advanced health center in the world. Woodberry Down School, opened in 1955, was one of the first purpose-built comprehensive schools in the country.

After a 2002 Structural Evaluation Report concluded that thirty-one out of the fifty-seven blocks on the estate were beyond economic repair, the area was targeted for regeneration. Hackney Council duly partnered with Berkeley Homes.<sup>68</sup> The renewal of the estate (rebranded as “Woodberry Park,” fig. 9.5) is self-funded, with 2,700 private homes cross-subsidizing replacement affordable housing while securing an agreed 21 percent profit for Berkeley. The tenure mix has shifted from 67 percent social rented to 41 percent. The brochures for Woodberry Park are targeted in part toward overseas buyers and are full of smart models sipping champagne.<sup>69</sup> With offices in Singapore, Hong Kong and Beijing, Berkeley sells many of its new homes “off-plan” to overseas investors who rent them out in the open market for a combination of income and eventual capital gain.

Other cases of regenerated social housing have been successful to varying degrees, especially where “soft regeneration” has combined the refurbishment of existing housing units with landscaping and improvements to security and estate management. Nevertheless, in many cases there is a net loss of affordable housing. The Heygate Estate in Southwark provided an early example of what can go wrong.<sup>70</sup> In the late 1990s the council stopped all but minimal maintenance of the 1,212 homes on the estate and began preparations for “decanting” more than three thousand residents prior to the regeneration of the estate. The council had to spend several million pounds on demolition and clearance before transferring ownership of the land to its private-sector partner, Lend Lease. The initial agreement with Lend Lease was for 35 percent of the 2,535 new units on the new estate—now called Elephant Park—to be affordable housing (with rents that are allowed to be up to 80 percent of London’s superheated market rate). This was renegotiated by Lend Lease to 25 percent. The final tally of social rented units in Elephant Park was 74—just 3 percent. Former leaseholders did not have the right to return and some had to accept below-market compensation for the flat they had been encouraged to purchase under the Thatcher administration’s right-to-buy legislation.

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**9.5 Woodberry Park** (opposite). A regeneration scheme on the site of Woodberry Down, a postwar public housing estate in northeast London. The product of a public-private partnership between Hackney Council and Berkeley Homes, the regeneration of the estate is nominally self-funded, with private apartments cross-subsidizing the replacement of some affordable housing. Like many other big developers, Berkeley is attentive to international investors. With offices in Singapore, Hong Kong and Beijing, it sold more than half of the first phase of buildings to overseas investors buying the new-build properties with the aim of renting them out in the open market for a combination of income and eventual capital gain. (9.5a, top): “City Riverside,” (9.5b, bottom): “The Residence,” “Skyline Tower” and New River Gardens.



The Heygate and Woodberry Down are not isolated examples. The Aylesbury Estate near the Heygate has a similar history of displacement and lost capacity.<sup>71</sup> In Liverpool, the sixteen-story Mill View Tower, having been sold off by the city council to offset municipal budget cuts, was refurbished and sold to international investors. By 2020, 80 percent of the apartments were held by overseas owners, their tenants' rents subsidized by UK housing benefits. In Sheffield, the Park Hill complex, with its "streets in the sky" listed by Historic England as Grade II\* ("particularly important buildings of more than special interest"), has been gutted by developer Urban Splash and refurbished to provide a mix of social housing (30 percent), private apartments, and student housing. Its first phase was shortlisted for the prestigious Stirling Prize in architecture, with all of its municipal tenants already expelled and forgotten. The Lewisham City Council, meanwhile, moved out all of the tenants of the 144 flats in Aragon Tower on its riverside Pepys Estate in order to sell it to Berkeley Homes, who required vacant possession. Berkeley refurbished the tower inside and out, added a new podium and five penthouse floors and turned it into a luxury gated development called "Z Apartments." The remaining social housing tenants on the estate were either displaced or rehoused by the Hyde Housing Association that took over from the council. It is examples such as these that have led to regeneration being described in terms of "social cleansing" and "state-led gentrification";<sup>72</sup> a process of "enclosure,"<sup>73</sup> of accumulation by dispossession. The displaced residents of regenerated districts not only lose their homes but also the "commons" of place-based identity and distinctiveness that they have been part of.<sup>74</sup>

# 10

## The Aestheticized City

Neoliberalism intensified economic inequality. For the beneficiaries—those with money—it was an invitation to competitive consumption that, in turn, brought an acute marketplace sensitivity to taste and affect. The driving force was the baby boomer generation, which had engaged briefly with radical progressivism at its coming-of-age in the late 1960s, only to form the bulk of voter support for neoliberal policies after the unpleasant shock of the economic recession of the mid-1970s, when they found themselves flooding labor and housing markets just as the economy was experiencing the worst recession since the 1930s. People began to save less, borrow more, defer parenthood, comfort themselves with the luxuries marketed as symbols of style and distinctiveness, and generally surrender to the hedonism of lives infused with extravagant details.

An entire generation shifted its focus from radical idealism to self-oriented materialism. Soon, bolstered by trends in financial markets and escalating salaries in growing digital technology, biotechnology, and advanced business services sectors, the more affluent middle classes moved on from small luxuries to big ones. The consumption binge was expanded by a credit industry that became increasingly indulgent about extending credit and increasingly generous in how much it would let consumers borrow. Credit gave so many consumers access to such a wide array of high-end goods that traditional markers of status lost much of their meaning.

In this supercharged economic and cultural climate, design came to assume an ever-more important role in the value chain. Commercial success became increasingly dependent on being able to design attractive products. The economy also became increasingly dependent on stylish spaces and places: the physical settings for shopping, recreation, living, and working. Product design, graphic design, and fashion—especially *prêt-à-porter* fashion—flourished, while postmodern design emerged as an expression of the hedonistic sensibilities of the affluent and creditworthy classes.

### **Art, Fashion, and Architecture**

The design of the built environment became intimately involved with many aspects of consumption, especially those involving an explicit design premium, such as fashion and luxury products.<sup>1</sup> Endorsement by association “is one of the things that architecture does best, and also one of the things



that fashion, the industry, needs most—the new car parked outside the manor house, the classical revival office building, the corporate headquarters campus, the view from the castle, the minimalist interior. ... All of them can be borrowed ... to make or remake a reputation.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, fashion and architecture use each other, not simply as backdrops or as settings for celebrity-laden events, but as guarantees of cultural acceptability. “By providing a memorable place, architecture enhances product identity, but is itself commodified.”<sup>3</sup> The spa designed by Peter Zumthor in Vals, Switzerland, to take just one example, has been used as a backdrop for multiple fashion shoots, music videos, and advertising in order to create a rarefied atmosphere and at the same time to appeal to a certain target group with architectural knowledge.

High-end architecture and high-end fashion also have an affinity for each other because both require great precision in fabrication and construction, high levels of finish quality, and carefully controlled lighting. Commodified, the relationship has produced a distinctive luxo-minimalism in interior design, with celebrity architects like Rem Koolhaas, Massimiliano Fuksas, and John Pawson designing interiors for contemporary fashion brands like Armani, Boss, Jigsaw, Calvin Klein, Mango, Issey Miyake, Prada, and Louis Vuitton. This is part of the emergence of an interdependence among fashion, retail, and architecture that was prompted in part by the acquisition of elite couture houses by retail conglomerates, which quickly realized the marketing and branding potential of celebrities from the design fields. A good illustration of the way that luxury goods producers seek to create a “brand universe” for consumers through art and architecture is the luxurious coffee table book *Louis Vuitton: Art, Fashion and Architecture* that features the firm’s collaborations with, among others, Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Anouska Hempel, and Peter Marino.<sup>4</sup>

“Name” architects have themselves been drawn into “brand extension,” lending their names to consumer product lines: Peter Zumthor’s and Aldo Rossi’s kitchen and tableware for Alessi; Renzo Piano’s flatware for Iittala; Rem Koolhaas’s and David Adjaye’s furniture for Knoll; David Chipperfield’s furniture for Driade, lighting for Artemide, and tableware for Alessi; Daniel Libeskind’s seating for Moroso; Frank Gehry’s chair and stool designs for Vitra; Massimiliano and Foriana Fuksas’s seating for Poltrona Frau and flatware for Alessi; Jean Nouvel’s seating for Ligne Roset and Emecofurniture for Molteni and lighting for Artemide; Mario Botta’s Caran D’Ache pencils and fountain pen (retail \$2,750); Norman Foster’s furniture for Molteni and Knoll, lighting for Artemide, kitchenware for Alessi, and desk accessories for Helit, ... and so on. In larger metropolitan centers, fashion retailing has also developed a synergy with commercial art galleries and public museums and galleries, emulating museum and gallery design in their stores (and sometimes even incorporating mini-exhibitions in their stores) and shadowing their geographical location in the city.

The aestheticization of consumption has also taken place down-market, though mostly without the benefit of licensing by “name” architects (exceptions include Michael Graves’s kitchenware designs and Philippe Starck’s consumer products for Target stores). Well before neoliberalism had begun to flourish, Debord had argued that spectacle was becoming the defining dimension of consumer society.<sup>5</sup> Baby boomers were coming of age and transforming the norms of consumption as well as politics and popular culture. Baudrillard wrote of “the need to need, the desire to desire.”<sup>6</sup> Ritzer, following Baudrillard, Debord, and others, pointed to the increasing importance, in contemporary material culture, of spectacle, extravaganzas, simulation, theming, and sheer size, and argues that they are all key to “enchantment” in the consumer world.<sup>7</sup> In Debord’s “society of the spectacle,” where the emphasis is on appearances, the symbolic properties of urban settings as well as material possessions have come to assume unprecedented importance. For Debord and others, spectacle is also a tool of pacification and depoliticization; a pervasive condition that stupefies social subjects.

### **Architecture, Urban Design, and the Experience Economy**

Similar outcomes can be imputed from what Pine and Gilmore identify as the contemporary “experience economy.”<sup>8</sup> As profitability has become more challenging in industrial and service enterprises, so businesses have come to orchestrate pleasant and memorable experiences for their customers, with memory itself becoming a significant element of the value proposition. It is not what is sold that characterizes the experience economy but, rather, the way it is sold. Experience and affect thus become competitive advantages for products and services. For architecture in the experience economy, “the relative success of a design lies in the sensation a consumer derives from it—in the enjoyment it offers and the resulting pleasure it evokes.”<sup>9</sup> In the experience economy it is more than ever possible to capitalize on places. “The experience economy is place bound, because of its particular characteristic of arousing feeling, forming identity and involving the customer in a more or less absorbing experience.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the best example in this context is the designerly affect of upscale shopping districts, where consumers can, in Bourdieu’s terms, leverage social distinction by deploying their cultural capital while “acting out” shopping—and perhaps engaging in a bit of modern-day *flânerie* in between.<sup>11</sup>

Some developments manage to combine the spectacular with the experiential, and here the salient example has to be Hudson Yards in New York City, a \$25 billion, twenty-eight-acre megaproject: the largest private (albeit with \$6 billion in state funding and tax breaks) real estate development in US history (fig. 9.3). Office towers and apartment buildings rise above a seven-story retail mall, all suspended above functioning train tracks. The theme of the development is grotesque luxury, from apartments priced at \$25 million and up to stores offering overpriced watches and a restaurant with a \$1,100



tasting menu. The centerpiece is The Vessel (fig. 10.1a), a fifteen-story, \$200 million piece of interactive public art “imagined” by Thomas Heatherwick.

Architecture, urban planning, and urban design provide the scripted and packaged spaces necessary for the experience economy and the society of the spectacle. On both sides of the Atlantic, the competitiveness of the real estate industry, combined with the increasing entrepreneurialism of city governments and the increasing materialism of popular culture, has meant a proliferation of mixed-use complexes offering integrated settings for mutually supporting, revenue- and tax-generating packages of retailing, offices, residences, hotels, and entertainment functions. It amounted to a new wave of Rousification, with miniature versions in the form of “lifestyle centers” such as Avalon (Alpharetta, Georgia), Santana Row (San Jose, California), CityPlace (West Palm Beach, Florida), Bethesda Row (Bethesda, Maryland), and Kierland Commons (Scottsdale, Arizona): “niche” retail concepts, smaller than traditional malls and without anchor department stores. Rather, they mimic old-fashioned Main Street settings, with tree-lined sidewalks, signature lampposts, manicured shrubbery, made-up street names, and plenty of free parking. Besides containing ubiquitous retail chains they offer cinemas, upscale restaurants, fitness clubs, outdoor cafés, and street entertainment. In Britain, meanwhile, the original Rouse formula provided examples such as Harbourside, Bristol, Dundee Waterfront, Queen’s Walk, London, Baltic Gallery, Gateshead, and Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth (fig. 10.1b), among others.

### The Bilbao Effect

But for a city to stand out in competition it needs more than scripted spaces. The Sydney Opera House had provided an early example (1973) of the ability of a high-profile building of radical design to put a city on the global map. Shortly afterward, the success of the Centre Georges Pompidou, built between 1971 and 1977 in the run-down Beaubourg area of Paris, created what Baudrillard called a “Beaubourg Effect”<sup>12</sup> of reinvestment in the district. Subsequently, metropolitan cityscapes began to be recast through urban megaprojects, flagship cultural sites, conference centers, big mixed-use developments, waterfront redevelopments, heritage sites, and major sports

*Architecture, planning, and urban design provide the scripted and packaged spaces necessary for the experience economy*

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**10.1 Scripted and Packaged Spaces** (opposite). Mixed-use developments anchored by spectacular structures are the successors to the *passages* and *gallerias* of the nineteenth century and the glamorous department stores of the twentieth. They are typically developed through public-private partnerships, located on brownfield sites, and heavily subsidized by local governments as magnets for economic regeneration. The centerpiece of the Hudson Yards complex in New York City is The Vessel (10.1a, top). Designed by Thomas Heatherwick, a spectacular folly—neither building, sculpture, artwork or viewing platform—and selfie setting. The centerpiece of the Gunwharf regeneration scheme in Portsmouth, England, is the iconic Spinnaker Tower (10.1b, bottom), a 558-foot observation tower whose sail-like form was designed to echo the maritime history of the city.

and entertainment complexes. Whereas in the past the quality of the built environment had been a by-product of economic development, it now came to be seen to be a prerequisite for it.<sup>13</sup> Evans describes this as “hard branding” and notes that without good urban design it can result in “a form of Karaoke architecture where it is not important how well you can sing, but that you do it with verve and gusto.”<sup>14</sup>

When a building is sufficiently dramatic and/or radical in design, it can rebrand an entire city and elevate its perceived status within the global economy. This is, famously, what happened in Bilbao. The city was one of the first to develop a strategy of featuring signature structures as symbols of modernity and an affect of economic revitalization. It began with Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum (fig. 10.2), part of a riverside redevelopment scheme, the master plan for which was devised by César Pelli, Diana Balmori, and Eugenio Aguinaga. Other notable developments included a thirty-five-story office tower (César Pelli), the Euskalduna Juaregia Conference Center and Concert Hall (Federico Soriano and Dolores Palacios); the Bilbao International Exhibition Center (César Azcárate); a new metro system with striking fan-shaped entrances (Norman Foster); a new airport (Santiago Calatrava); a footbridge spanning Nervión River (also Calatrava); and the “Gateway” project, a mixed-use quayside development containing luxury flats, cinemas, and restaurants (Arata Isozaki).

Financed with support from the European Union and the Spanish and Basque governments, the Guggenheim itself cost US\$110 million. It opened in 1997 and drew 1.36 million visitors in its first year, generating US\$160 million in revenue. The numbers began to decline after three years but by then Bilbao had already become one of the leading weekend tourist destinations in Europe and the building itself had been featured in countless books, magazine articles, photo shoots, and movie scenes, including the opening sequence of the James Bond film *The World Is Not Enough*. This success has become widely referred to as “the Bilbao Effect” (or, alternatively, “the Guggenheim Effect”). As Anna Klingman observes, “The building compounds use value, sign exchange value, and transformational value, converting the building into a piece of brand equity.”<sup>15</sup>

Before long, every city wanted a “McGuggenheim.”<sup>16</sup> For brand-name architects the belief of policymakers in the Bilbao effect of urban design and architectural icons was a godsend. Corporations as well as municipalities took note, commodifying world-famous sites and ensembles of signature structures into corporate “brandsapes.”<sup>17</sup> A prominent example is Times Square in New York City, redeveloped through a public-private partnership in the early 1990s. Master-planned by Robert A. M. Stern, Times Square is now strongly linked to the identity of the Disney corporation, which has orchestrated a setting that draws—in an edited and sanitized way—on the history of the locality as a vibrant entertainment district with a themed shopping area split among three properties owned by the Disney, Warner Brothers, and Ford corporations.



In Bilbao itself, however, the strategy of high-design revitalization meanwhile failed to attract international capital and advanced business services to the city. A more general criticism of the strategy of upscale physical revitalization is that it ignores and even compounds issues of social inequality. Similarly, while the strategy provides prestigious cultural showcases, it contributes little or nothing to local cultural production while drawing public funds away from other cultural activities.<sup>18</sup> Finally, there is often a secondary “Guggenheim effect,” inducing a certain amount of gentrification and speculative commercial development that drives up land and housing prices and restricts the housing opportunities of younger and less affluent households.<sup>19</sup>

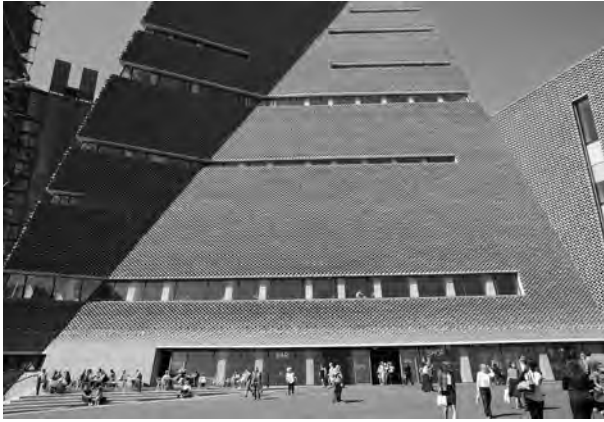
Nevertheless, flagship projects, iconic buildings, monumentality in urban design and the creation and marketing of trendy cultural quarters have all been seen as necessary for cities that want to compete in a globalized postindustrial service economy.<sup>20</sup> In many cases, municipal strategies based on the promotion of culture and design have been encouraged by the plausibility of Richard Florida’s prescriptive ideas about the importance of attracting and retaining a “creative class” that is held to be pivotal to innovation, economic vitality, and urban competitiveness. The implication is that if cities do not make strong efforts to establish the right “people climate” for creative workers, they will fall behind. Attracting the creative class means, in addition to promoting tolerant, diverse and open communities, having “authentic” historical buildings, converted lofts, walkable streets, plenty of coffee shops, street art, and a street culture with experiential intensity as well as vibrant cultural quarters with first-rate galleries and museums.<sup>21</sup>

*The growth of the  
experience economy  
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museum building*

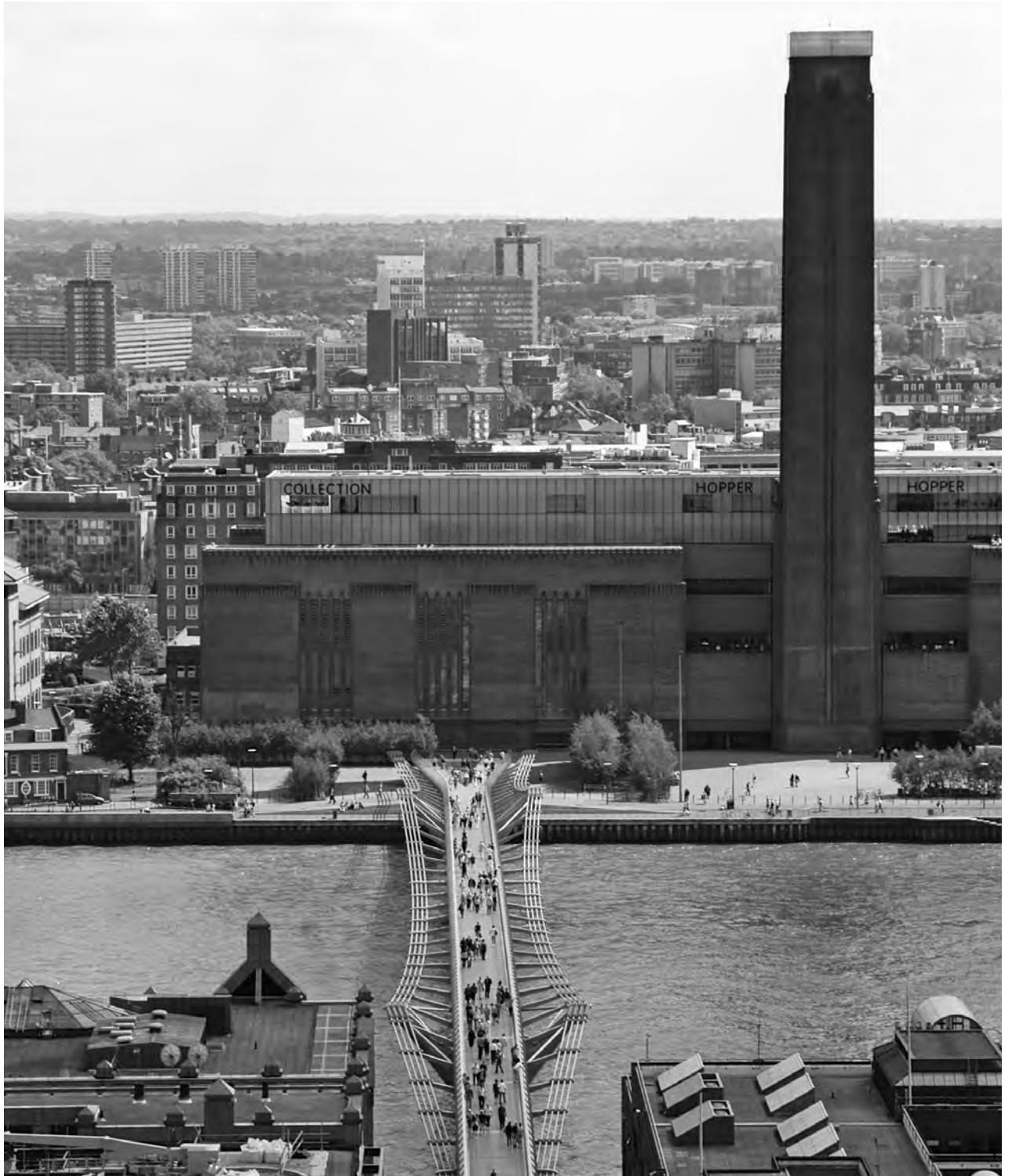
### **Museumization**

Museums have been a key element of municipal strategies, and not just because of the precedent of the Guggenheim in Bilbao. The growth of the experience economy has fueled a boom in museum building—“museumization”—while the potential cultural significance of museums means that they are ideal anchors for planned cultural quarters. Big museums (fig. 10.2) also have the capacity to combine spectacle with consumption. For architects, museums are especially sought-after commissions, since they often offer an opportunity to design a sculptural building with a high-quality finish: something that gives them a shot at producing an iconic, if not a canonical structure.<sup>22</sup> And as Elizabeth Wilson observes:

The museum ... has been transformed from educational instrument to something approaching, in some cases, a branch of Liberty’s. ... Today the trip to the museum – or the art exhibition – is quite definitely organized to lead up to the final stop of the shop, where, in buying coloured postcards of your favourite paintings (to be sent to equally aesthetically aware friends on suitable occasions) you set the seal on your own good taste. The museum café-restaurant, too, is by now a well established and lucrative branch of the catering industry (remember the Victoria and Albert Museum’s 1980s ad – ‘An ace caff with a rather good museum attached’).<sup>23</sup>



**10.2. Museumization.** Museums have become “cultural supermarkets” with the capacity to combine spectacle with consumption. They have been seen by cities as investments in their symbolic capital and brand equity, anchors of entire cultural districts. They are seen by architects as offering an opportunity to design a sculptural building with a high-quality finish. In the United States alone, more than six hundred new museum buildings were constructed in the 1980s and 1990s. In Britain, the success of the conversion of a disused power station into the Tate Gallery of Modern Art in London (10.2a, opposite) anchored the revitalization of the entire South Bank and spawned an extension, the Switch House, designed by Herzog & de Meuron (10.2b, above, top left). In Dundee, Scotland, waterfront regeneration is anchored by the V&A Museum of art and design (10.2c, top right), designed by Kengo Kuma. It was the success of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (10.2d, bottom), designed by Frank Gehry, that encouraged many cities to invest in high-profile museum complexes.



Thus museums become “cultural supermarkets,” with museum stores selling all kinds of designer products and souvenirs to crowds drawn in by big retrospective exhibits. The biggest shop in the world for art and design books is in the Tate Modern in London, while the Museum of Modern Art in New York can boast higher retail sales per square foot than an out-and-out retailer like Wal-Mart. As museums have proliferated, competition among them has intensified the importance of the experiential aspects of consumption. Visitors expect spectacle. As a result, the traditional core activities of large museums—the conservation and restoration of a permanent collection and the pursuit of scholarly research—have been displaced by the need to offer blockbuster themed shows that provide ticket and merchandise revenue.

The location of museums within cities is critical to their success. Graeme Evans has noted the association between location of museums and galleries and major city parks, suggesting that it links their dual recreational nature and also reinforces the privileged zones of the city. “These central parks are often located in the well-heeled residential, office, and shopping districts, and placing major museums there also enhances their symbolic and land value.”<sup>24</sup> In many cities, clusters of museums, often with interrelated themes, have become a key element of the tourism sector and an important contributor to the urban economy. The most celebrated cluster of museums is perhaps along “museum mile,” on 5th Avenue in New York between 82nd and 105th streets. It includes the Museum of the City of New York, The Jewish Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Neue Galerie, the Goethe-Institut, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Each year, these nine museums collectively open their doors for a day for a mile-long, traffic-free block party and arts festival that attracts more than fifty thousand visitors.

The role of urban planning and design practitioners has been to package all of this within a coherent branding strategy and coordinate the public-private partnerships involved. Shaping new consumer-oriented urban imaginaries involves not only striking architecture, cultural quarters, festivals, and event spectacles but also the more mundane business of below-the-line design: market research and interpretation, logos, slogans, and guidelines. Urban planning and urban design practitioners have become key to these below-the-line activities as well as their above-the-line contributions to the “placemaking” necessary to the new imaginaries of the “good city.”<sup>25</sup>

### **The Retreat to Affect and Image**

One of the broader consequences of supercapitalism has been a transformation of the structural composition of architectural practice. Chasing an increasingly international clientele, more and more firms have developed a global portfolio of design work. Some of them are transnational corporations in their own right, huge architecture and engineering (“A&E”) firms

*The role of planning and urban design practitioners has been to package all of this within a coherent branding strategy*



like Gensler, AECOM, Aedas, and Nikken Sakkei that have grown from what Robert Gutman, in his pioneering study of the sociology of architecture, called “strong delivery firms” that rarely win awards but build a great deal.<sup>26</sup> Others have grown from what he called “strong-service firms” like Kohn Pederson Fox and Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM), practices that are design-oriented but business-centered, managing complex projects to meet the needs of demanding corporate clients.

A third group of global practices consists of what Gutman called “strong-idea firms.” These are the global brand names of contemporary architecture, the “starchitect” practices that are known for their signature buildings around the world, iconic manifestations of Debord’s “society of the spectacle.”<sup>27</sup> By selecting distinctive designs from celebrity architects, cities competing for global status acquire signature buildings and the affect of celebrity. The symbolic capital of architectural design is transformed into other forms of capital in the process.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, media-wise architects “become ‘brands’ in their own right, competing in a parallel symbolic economy for major commissions, column inches and the more institutionalised awards and prizes.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Starchitects and Starchitecture**

Donald McNeill notes that brand-name architects like Frank Gehry, Renzo Piano, Rem Koolhaas, Daniel Libeskind, Norman Foster, Richard Rogers, Mario Botta, Jean Nouvel, David Chipperfield, Santiago Calatrava, Jacques Herzog, and Pierre de Meuron share certain characteristics.<sup>30</sup> The first of these is an identifiable persona, whether through book authorship, television appearances, or simply personal style: just looking the part. But with many run-of-the-mill design professionals keen to demonstrate a personal sense of style, celebrity architects have to go a little further in order to stand out. McNeill quotes Adam Mornement’s satirical characterization of different “breeds” of global architect, including the “thirty to forty-five-year-old ‘visionary,’ a manifesto-writing, loft-dwelling centre-leftie wearing miniature glasses and ‘anything tight-fitting and black’; and the ‘contender’ with a practice name of ‘Me and Partners,’ a pragmatic balance between promoting the name of the dominant design partner, and acknowledging the contribution/presence of colleagues,’ who appears ‘50% academic/50% business guru—black linen suit (no tie), gracefully greying hair and a subscription to Fortune.’”<sup>31</sup>

A second common characteristic is an ability to develop a distinctive oeuvre or “look” to their work, whether based on striking shapes, surfaces, or concepts. As Roth and Clark observe, the challenge is also to make each building within the oeuvre unique and identifiable. “With Gehry, and scores of other architects, we have moved away from an architecture embodying a gradually defined personal or office style and the unconscious expression of a national architectural identity, toward an architecture expressing distinct personalities through constantly reinvented form.”<sup>32</sup> As a result,



starchitecture does not consciously reflect commonly held cultural values beyond that of a perpetual quest for distinction.

The third common characteristic is a flair for self-promotion. In this, starchitects are enabled by trade magazines, the architectural press, and the nexus of critics and editors whose profits and livelihood depend, in part, on sustaining the international star system. Juhani Pallasmaa, in a critique of the work produced by starchitects, has asserted that, “Today’s forcefully publicised architecture is that of personality cult and the myth of the unique, creative individual. These projects often exude an air of arrogance, self-centredness and indifference to the prevailing realities of the world.”<sup>33</sup> Celebrity is nevertheless propagated through international professional awards like the Pritzker Prize, while the pervasive emphasis on the cult of the individual in architectural education, with its almost unquestioned reverence for big names and emphasis on great exemplars and heroic architecture, also plays to the advantage of contemporary signature architects with a global brand.

Garry Stevens adds a fourth characteristic:

... one of the great puzzles of the architectural persona, the extraordinary lack of humour and priggish self-righteousness ... the more eminent the architects, the more they regard themselves and their works with the most sober solemnity. An innocent quip about their work will be met with a maiming glare from the cooler patricians or a tirade of abuse from the more mercurial; for to attack one’s taste, one’s aesthetic judgment, is to attack the whole person, one’s entire embodied cultural capital.<sup>34</sup>

For every architect with one or more of these stereotypical characteristics, there are of course many others with a more muted personal affect. Indeed, the rank-and-file salariat of the field would find it hard to claim a distinctive oeuvre or to get away with the egocentric behavior of some starchitects. Nevertheless, it is the affect associated with starchitects that dominates the persona of the field as a whole, as perceived from both inside and beyond.

Based in world cities, starchitects can meanwhile aspire to become public intellectuals, involved in discourse on a wide range of topics, contributing to influential cultural ideas and trends, and fueling and reinforcing economic and cultural globalization. This, in turn, reinforces the role of celebrity architects as ideological warrants and professional role models, for better or worse, for the profession as a whole. Meanwhile, just as starchitects derive some of their standing from the visible presence of their built work in major cities, so the potency of the symbolic capital of world cities is derived in part from their association with starchitects, starchitecture (fig. 10.3), and

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**10.3. “Starchitecture.”** The importance of starchitecture intensified as cities have competed for global status through the promotion of signature buildings and the affect of celebrity. Clockwise from top left: **(10.3a)** Pencil skyscraper (1,396 feet tall), 432 Park Avenue, New York City (Rafael Viñoly); **(10.3b)** Quadracci Pavilion, Milwaukee Art Museum (Santiago Calatrava); **(10.3c)** Seattle Public Library (Rem Koolhaas); **(10.3d)** The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (Daniel Libeskind); **(10.3e)** The Hearst Tower, New York City (Norman Foster).



the associated nexus of fashion, design, and luxury consumption. Stardom and city branding have become mutually reinforcing as real estate developers realize that celebrity architects can add value to their projects, world-city leaders compete to retain the services of the top names to design signature buildings that will keep their city on the map, and the signature buildings of star architects provide the backdrop for fashion shoots, movie scenes, TV commercials, music videos, and satellite news broadcasts.

Starchitecture and iconic buildings are thus known mostly for their façades; they are, more than anything, images, “traps for the gaze.” This has amplified a long-standing issue: the “overaestheticization” of the field as a result of the quest for media attention, generating a “succession of stylistic tropes that leave no image unconsumed, so that the entire field becomes flooded with an endless proliferation of images ... increasingly designed for their photogenic effect.”<sup>35</sup> As Paul Jones points out, this is part of a “force field” effect that leads to buildings being designed from the outside in, from the vantage of an external gaze.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Neo Avant-garde: Adventures in Appearance**

While the figure of the “hero designer” lingers and circulates through the popular media and educational curricula, the historical avant-garde—whose aim was to insinuate art into everyday life as a counter to the instrumental rationality of capitalism—has all but disappeared. It still exists, but only in a marginalized and somewhat romanticized way. It has been superseded by neo avant-gardes who, as Bürger notes, have merely recycled the forms and strategies devised by their predecessors, reaping professional and commercial success without any real struggle for change.<sup>37</sup> The neo avant-garde seeks only to overturn the hierarchy within the field, not to prompt any broader questioning. “The avant-garde tries to disrupt the capital at stake in a particular cultural field by challenging the fixity and seeming legitimacy of meanings and values ... architecture’s [avant-garde] disrupts the relationship between form and function or challenges conventions of beauty, or what is possible with scale or materials etc.”<sup>38</sup> The neo avant-garde has focused on the semiotics of architecture and the use of form to generate atmospheres and moods.<sup>39</sup> The retreat from broader societal ambitions means turning their backs on any real commitment to contributing to the good city—or indeed to any dimension of it. It has also revived the conceit of architecture as a field that transcends history, social circumstance, and politics; but only, of course, by excluding such matters from consideration.

Peter Eisenman became an early member of the neo-avant-garde by parlaying a very modest design portfolio and a wide range of influential acquaintances into a career as a critical theorist. Spotting the opportunity to dress up experiments with shape and geometry with the language of deconstructivist philosophy, Eisenman was able, for a while, to remain one step ahead of the ability of his audience to understand and critique his work. Eisenman’s deconstructivism involved playing around with forms and

*Stardom and city branding have become mutually reinforcing*

volumes to produce buildings featuring nonrectilinear shapes, improbably intersecting volumes, and geometric imbalance. It coincided with interest in the humanities and social sciences in deconstructivist philosophy, but had no real connection except that the opaque writings of Jacques Derrida were handy in lending an apparent intellectual weight to what was essentially architecture-as-sculptural-art, wholly abstracted from context or function. As such, deconstructivism lasted long enough for a few buildings to find their way into arthouse books but did not leave any significant imprint on urbanism. Eiseman's "adventures in appearance" were decisively skewered by Diane Ghirardo. His "critical" theory, she noted, was "inscribed in such a narrow circle of formal choices that it loses any capacity to challenge all but the most banal of issues."<sup>40</sup>

Rem Koolhaas, a neo avant-garde crossover to starchitect, embodies many of the field's characteristic traits. His fame came quickly as a result of his book, *Delirious New York*.<sup>41</sup> Koolhaas had spent a year in New York and his book was in some ways a classic of architectural determinism: New York's vitality and metropolitan lifestyle, according to Koolhaas, are part of a "culture of congestion" resulting from the city's high-density grid layout. But what was new was the style: breathless, iconoclastic, and atheoretical, filled with fascinating (but often disconnected) facts and striking and unusual images, and studded with catchy new labels ("architectural mutations," "utopian fragments") for the established landmarks of New York's built environment. With a reputation for radical chic, he secured some important commissions and produced a decent amount of acclaimed and award-winning architecture, including the 2000 Pritzker Prize.

This success coincided with an unprecedented amount of branding and self-promotion, allowing Koolhaas to claim intellectual territory and expertise in areas well beyond the boundaries of architecture. A series of publications raised his own profile and contributed to his image as both a designer and insightful cultural intermediary. *S, M, L, XL*<sup>42</sup> was a series of stories, declarations, and justifications of the first decade of his firm's work. His contribution to *Mutations*<sup>43</sup> was a result of his engagement with the Harvard Project on the City, aimed at explicating the visual outcomes of contemporary urbanization. Koolhaas took a teaching position at Harvard on the condition of not having to teach design, so that he could focus on broad topics like shopping and on the condition of contemporary shock-cities of Lagos and the Pearl River Delta. These projects led to *The Great Leap Forward* and *The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*.<sup>44</sup> These books all built on the successful affect of *Delirious New York*, with garish, splashy graphics, grainy photoreportage, an assortment of demographic and economic statistics, and essays that pivot around catchy labels ("Generica," "Junkspace"), and would-be profundities ("World Equals City"). Meanwhile, and in similar vein, his own office published *Content*, part book, part magazine, part 544-page Koolhaas fanzine.

*Deconstructivism  
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arthouse books*

### **Hedonism and Libertarianism in Design: Postmodernism and Parametricism**

Amid the aestheticization of everyday life in the 1980s and 1990s, architecture became unmoored from the canon of modernist design. Postmodern architecture, well suited to the cultural sensibilities of neoliberalism, began to flourish. David Harvey argues that although aspects of this transition and the critique of modernism had been under way for some time, it was not until the international economic crisis of 1973 that the relationship between art and society was sufficiently shaken to allow postmodernism to become both accepted and institutionalized as the “cultural clothing” of neoliberalism.<sup>45</sup> Whereas Modern architecture had been attuned to the ascetic, future-oriented, universalistic, and utopian sensibilities of the postwar settlement, postmodern architecture played on the hedonistic, impulsive, and narcissistic sensibilities of increasingly materialistic societies. Postmodern design sat comfortably within the “society of the spectacle” in which the symbolic properties of places and material possessions took on unprecedented importance.

As the critique of Modern architecture grew, the field found itself at a loss for a dominant movement. While some practitioners began simply to cater to the demand for luxury and spectacle, others began to revisit architecture’s Dressing Up Box to see what could be (re)done with vernacular styles, classicism, Arts and Crafts, Picturesque, art nouveau, Streamline Moderne, and so on. Robert Venturi gained a lot of attention by turning the modernist aphorism “less is more” on its head. “Less is a bore,” he argued. Hybrid elements should replace modernism’s pure ones, “witty” and “ironic” references should be included in design, and complexity and contradiction should have a place (fig. 10.4). In short, architects should “learn from Las Vegas.”<sup>46</sup> Above all, Venturi was arguing for an architecture for a new social context. As Wolfe put it:

In the Venturi cosmology, the people could no longer be thought of in terms of the industrial proletariat, the workers with raised fists, engorged brachial arteries, and necks wider than their heads. Marx’s downtrodden masses in their slums. The people were now the ‘middle-middle’ class, as Venturi called them. They lived in suburban developments, like Levittown, shopped at the A & P over in the shopping center, and went to Las Vegas on their vacations the way they used to go to Coney Island. They were the ‘sprawling’ masses, as opposed to the huddled ones.<sup>47</sup>

What the “sprawling masses” wanted most, it was suggested, were human scale and decorative detail.<sup>48</sup> Once the argument had been worked out that a new movement could be conjured up by balancing or counterposing “historic references” against “Modern elements” (and thus avoiding the fatal charge of backsliding into secondhand themes and ideas), there occurred what architecture professor Geoffrey Broadbent interpreted as a Kuhnian paradigm shift.<sup>49</sup> Charles Jencks, an influential critic, argued, manifesto-style, that postmodernism would henceforth occupy the position of the dominant design paradigm, displacing modernism altogether.<sup>50</sup>



It helped that postmodernism was a hot topic in literature, cultural anthropology, music, cinema, and sociology; although the intellectual basis of postmodern architecture bore little relation to that of postmodernism in the social sciences and humanities. Rather, it was another case of borrowed clothing, the theorizing and philosophizing of the likes of Lyotard, Jameson, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, and Rorty providing pseudo-intellectual cover for what was essentially an indulgent aesthetic playfulness that was post-Modern only in the literal, chronological sense. The closest that architectural discourse came to any kind of intellectual framework of its own was to devise retrospective taxonomies of various subgenres of postmodern design, or to catalog common (but evolving) propositions about what was and was not appropriate.<sup>51</sup>

Among these propositions were that postmodern architecture is characterized by the self-conscious and ironic use of historical styles and imagery, and that it emphasizes the scenographic and the decorative (as opposed to the compositional) properties of the built environment. In contrast to the purity and order of modernism, postmodern design sought to express the exact opposite: messy vitality, hybridity, and ambiguity. This allowed the deployment of everything from historicism and revivalism to kitschy pastiche: a self-conscious stylishness that lent itself easily to commodification.



**10.4a. Postmodern architecture.** One of the common characteristics of postmodern architecture is the contrasting, layering, or intermixing of angular and curved forms. **10.4a**, above, is the Beatley Library, Alexandria, Virginia, designed by Michael Graves.



Developers soon realized that postmodern style facilitated product differentiation for the consumption-oriented market of the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, commercial and residential townscapes were suffused with the mutations and superfluties of postmodern design. In another Silly Season, this one lasting into the early 2000s, new shops and offices and apartment buildings were plastered with arches, atria, columns, keystones, semicircular windows, and cornices. For the most part it was “lite” architecture, the built environment’s equivalent of easy-listening music. An indifference to the radical progressivism and social objectives of modernism was equally characteristic of postmodernism, along with its inherent relativism.

As the novelty of postmodernism wore off, some of its leading exponents moved on to explore new interpretations of neoclassical approaches. Others slid into what architecture critic Owen Hatherley has described as “Pulp Modernism”: a techno-lux version of modernism, shorn of its progressive social intent, its formerly clean lines embellished with balconies, terraces, and sundecks with extensive use of stainless steel, glass, colored concrete, and cladding in a variety of materials.<sup>52</sup>

It was not long before the field was offered new “-isms.” The current contender is parametricism, enabled by computer software capable of handling complex curvilinear shapes and the engineering solutions required to sustain them (fig. 10.5). Parametricism is fundamentally a combination of technique (computational modeling based on parametric equations that express the coordinates of the points that make up a curve or surface) and aesthetics (sinuous, biomorphic, and expressive forms: no straight lines, no axes, no right angles, no symmetry), exemplified in the exotic and original work of Zaha Hadid Architects.

The software can be a powerfully useful tool in expressing creativity, and some of the results certainly grant access to the beautiful and inspiring—indispensable elements of any holistic conception of the good city. But with eye-popping hubristic ambition, parametricism has been advanced by Patrik Schumacher, principal of Zaha Hadid Architects, as the basis for a totalizing philosophy and methodology that he claims will be as relevant to the Second Modernity as modernism was to the First.<sup>53</sup> Not satisfied with mere commercial success and artistic acclaim, Schumacher has linked parametricism to his own libertarianism, elevating it to movement status, with its (or, rather, his) own manifesto, complete with aphorisms (“Social order requires spatial order”), outrageous claims, feverish zealotry, and pretensions to theory-led discourse (Niklas Luhmann, Ludwig von Mises, and Friedrich Hayek, in this case): “a vision of architectural outcomes that find their social meaning as avatars of the irresistible wisdom of the market.”<sup>54</sup> For Schumacher Adam Smith’s “hidden hand” is translated as the self-organizing and self-generating capacities (“autopoiesis”) of urbanism, a perspective that presumes deregulated and privatized cities, with no place at all for

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10.4b. Postmodern architecture. No. 1 Poultry, London, designed by James Stirling.





10.5. **Parametricism.** Enabled by software, parametric shapes lend themselves especially to big commercial and institutional projects, in part because of their eye-catching form and in part because of the high cost of building them. Clockwise from top left: 10.5a, Oculus Transportation Hub, New York City, by Santiago Calatrava; 10.5b, detail of Aqua Tower, Chicago, by Jeanne Gang; 10.5c, London Aquatics Centre, by Zaha Hadid Architects.

urban planning or policy.<sup>55</sup> Schumacher himself, in a keynote how-to-get-yourself-noticed address at the 2106 World Architecture Festival in Berlin, called for the abolition of all social housing and the privatization of all public services and infrastructure, including public spaces.

The latest in a long history of architectural overreach, parametricism is very much in tune with the political economy of neoliberalism. But, as architecture critic Peter Buchanan observes, “The style can neither adequately frame nor address public space, with façades whose composition and elements allow us to identify and relate to them. Nor do parametric buildings relate to each other (beyond establishing superficial formal contiguities), nor to other architecture. ... To offer, ... a supposedly comprehensive architectural theory to supplant modernism without a single mention of sustainability, the challenge of our times, beggars belief.”<sup>56</sup>



## A New Realism

If the design fields were not entirely prepared for the significance they acquired with the emergence of welfare states, they were certainly not prepared for the sudden change of circumstances brought about by neoliberal political economies. Planners generally failed to confront the reality that their principal task under neoliberalism is to incentivize private real estate development, and they have struggled to retrieve any broader social relevance. As a field, urban planning has sacrificed its roles as visionary and idealist and abandoned its responsibility “to be a source of inspiration and to produce ideas about what might be and what ought to be.”<sup>1</sup> Architecture, meanwhile, had always relied on its relationship with the politically and economically powerful.<sup>2</sup> For the bulk of the field, the retreat from engagement with social issues has been accompanied by a long, slow collapse of the collective imagination: “the proprietorship of anticipation has been almost completely ceded” and “visionary roles have been either coopted or renounced.”<sup>3</sup> As David Pinder has noted, architectural critic Paul Goldberger advocated settling for a “new realism” more than thirty years ago, having concluded that “there is no utopia.”<sup>4</sup>

While this begs the question of the design fields’ commitment and ability to contribute to the good city, it doesn’t mean that the issue has gone away, or that the fields have relinquished their claims to serve society in the cause of healthier, safer, more efficient, sustainable, attractive, and inspiring places. Allan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard floated an urban design manifesto framed around “livability; identity and control; access to opportunity, imagination, and joy; authenticity and meaning; open communities and public life; self-reliance; and justice.” Susan Fainstein has written about the “Just City” in terms of democracy, equity, diversity, growth, and sustainability, while John Friedmann identified decent housing, affordable health care, reasonably remunerated work, and adequate social provision as the four pillars of the good city.<sup>5</sup> The precondition for progress toward these attributes, suggested Friedmann (somewhat nostalgically), is a self-organizing civil society that is active in making claims, resisting, and struggling on behalf of the ideal of the good city.

In similar vein, the ideal of the good city for Ash Amin poses the challenge to generate a “progressive politics of well-being and emancipation out of multiplicity and difference and from the particularities of the urban experience.”<sup>6</sup> This, he argues, requires a framework of solidarity that has four dimensions. First is the “machinic order” of the city—the urban “technological unconscious”<sup>7</sup>—that provides the physical and legal infrastructure that makes

modern urban life possible. Second is a sense of inclusivity and social justice; third is the right of all citizens to shape urban life and to benefit from it (as famously advocated by Henri Lefebvre);<sup>8</sup> and fourth, the sociality that can come from the vitality of public spaces.

Others take a more limited approach, perhaps reflecting a new realism that acknowledges the constraints of the contemporary political economy. Talen and Ellis, noting that “The telos of urban and regional planning as a profession is the making of good cities,”<sup>9</sup> sought to make the case for “beauty” as a central concept, resurrecting the notion that there are durable, time-tested truths about what constitutes good urban form. Their argument has echoes of Alexander’s search for a “pattern language,” Kevin Lynch’s emphasis on legibility, and Jane Jacobs’ on the benefits of fine-grained morphology and streets with mixed uses and high densities. In a similar vein, Barry Sherman<sup>10</sup> and John Montgomery have supplied normative checklists of the most desirable attributes of urban form.<sup>11</sup>

## **New Directions**

With their technocratic claims now something of a lost cause, planners have narrowed and redefined their contribution to the good city in terms of communication and negotiation. Dressed up with references to Jürgen Habermas’s critical theory on communicative rationality and ethical discourse, the approach came to be known as “communicative planning,” and it has occupied a central position in urban planning literature since the 1990s.<sup>12</sup> According to this perspective, planners’ expert knowledge should be just part of a broader process of dialog and discourse on urban development. Planners thus become educators, furnishing access to information, and consensus builders, bridging diverse and sometimes competing interests. It is well-intentioned, but easily subverted and outflanked by the carefully stage-managed processes of public participation and consultation on the part of developers and other actors in third-generation growth machines.<sup>13</sup> Private sector prodevelopment interests get legitimized as conflict is depoliticized and dissent neutralized. Communities “are now supposed to unite and fight for scarce regeneration [or other] resources, leave ‘old’ antagonisms behind and become reasonable, rational, sensible, communicative, responsible agents with smooth relations with central government and its funding bodies.”<sup>14</sup>

But neoliberalism has also helped create the conditions for planners and urban designers—as well as architects and landscape architects—to pursue new roles in response to the concerns of more prosperous middle-class households; that is, the good city for the reasonably affluent. In particular, concerns about sprawl, placelessness, and urban livability that had been accelerated and intensified by deregulation and libertarianism gave designers in both public and private sectors the opportunity to carve out roles in pursuit of placemaking and historic preservation; and to repackage old roles in terms of “smart growth.”

## Reclaiming “place”

It was a briefcase bestseller, *The Geography of Nowhere*, by James Howard Kunstler, that first captured popular disenchantment with the placelessness of suburbia: the “Nowhere” of the book’s title.<sup>15</sup> Kunstler portrayed suburbia as a cartoon landscape of tract houses, car-clogged highways, parking lots, strip malls, and franchise food, with no sense of place. The *genius loci* of towns and cities had been eclipsed by the *genius loco* of suburban sprawl. Lamenting the decline of “real” urban settings, Kunstler pointed out that fewer and fewer people have any experience of good cities, or indeed of any town or city at all. Middle-class anxieties about urbanization were also encapsulated by Robert Putnam in his 2000 book *Bowling Alone*<sup>16</sup>—the growing separation of home and work, the increasing segregation and homogeneity of suburbia, and the attenuation of civic engagement in a mean-spirited, neoliberal political economy. David Brooks, in his essay on “Patio Man and the Sprawl People,”<sup>17</sup> lampooned the way that contemporary suburbia had become dominated by a politics of identity in which consumption has become the focus of competition: a comfortable but somewhat vacuous realm of unreality: consumerist, wasteful, complacent, materialistic, and self-absorbed.<sup>18</sup>

It did not take long for academics, architects, planners, and social commentators to document the nexus of negative attributes of sprawl. Unplanned and unregulated urban development, it was pointed out, destroys millions of acres of wildlife habitat and agricultural land every year. The economics of private subdivision lead inevitably to a lack of public open space, urban infrastructure, and civic amenities. The low densities inherent to single-family suburban development result in increased traffic, long commutes, and a chronic dependence on automobiles. The environmental costs of automobile dependency include air pollution and polluted run-off from roads and parking lots. The automobile-dependent lifestyles associated with sprawl, meanwhile, lead to increases in rates of asthma, lung cancer, and heart problems; stress resulting from commuting leads to adverse effects on marriages and family life, and so on.

Meanwhile, the more universal the diffusion of material culture and lifestyles, the more local and traditional identities are valued. The faster the information highway takes people into cyberspace, the more they feel the need for a subjective setting—a specific place or community—they can call their own. The faster their neighborhoods and towns acquire the same generic supermarkets, gas stations, shopping malls, industrial estates, office parks, and suburban subdivisions, the more people feel the need for enclaves of familiarity, centeredness, and identity, and the more value they attach to cultural heritage.

## Preservation and Conservation

The roots of such feelings are deep. In the mid-nineteenth century John Ruskin campaigned for the conservation of ancient buildings; in

the early twentieth century Lewis Mumford followed Patrick Geddes in arguing for the preservation of regional architectural traditions; and in the early twentieth century civic societies began to articulate a concern for ensuring high standards in urban planning and architecture, the preservation of historically or aesthetically significant buildings, and the education of the public in the history, geography and architecture of their localities.<sup>19</sup>

Later in the twentieth century historic preservation and conservation legislation was enacted in both Britain and North America in response to public resistance to the “bureaucratic offensives” of urban renewal and highway construction. The flat-lining of real incomes in the decades after the economic system-shock of the mid-1970s called into question the long-standing assumption that the future would bring an upward trajectory in social well-being. An attenuation of faith in the future coincided with a revaluation of the past and the growth of nostalgia as a strong element in the contemporary political economy.

Local designation of historic districts had become commonplace by the early 1980s, along with the protection of individual properties of historic interest. In the United States, the number of properties and districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places increased from fifteen hundred to thirty-seven thousand between 1970 and 1985; by 2020 the number had reached ninety-five thousand. The US Conference of Mayors, meanwhile, endorsed historic preservation as a key element in the creation of vibrant and walkable live-work-play neighborhoods that they envisaged as key to the “New American City.”<sup>20</sup>

At a time when neoliberalism had diminished the significance of urban planning as a field, historic preservation and conservation was one area where planners could assert some relevance, pointing to the beneficent effects in terms of housing rehabilitation, new housing construction, tourism, and downtown development (but prudently not drawing attention to the gentrification effects).<sup>21</sup>

As Neil Smith observed, historic preservation is a process through which depreciated use values are restored. But:

It is in this context that we must understand community fears that historic preservation can be a powerful stimulant for gentrification. Within the larger cycle of disinvestment and reinvestment that marks gentrification, historic preservation provides a means by which disinvested properties and neighborhoods can be made economically attractive for new infusions of capital. It lubricates the cycle of reinvestment.<sup>22</sup>

As a powerful stimulant for gentrification, therefore, historic preservation fits comfortably within neoliberal political regimes. Conservation and heritage protection shifted from being a marginal activity in urban planning to being a central element of the field, and from being conceived as a restraint on development to a catalyst for economic development.<sup>23</sup>

*The attenuation of faith in the future coincided with the growth of nostalgia*

### Life in the Past Lane

The imprint of collective nostalgia was also inscribed into suburban settings, especially in the United States. Framed squarely within the consolidating political economy of neoliberalism, it allowed the design fields to reclaim at least some their relevancy to urban development. It found expression at first in what was branded as Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND; fig. 11.1), the idea of codifying tract development in such a way as to ensure the look and feel of small-town, pre–World War II settings. Architects Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Andres Duany are generally regarded as the progenitors of the idea. The details of domestic architecture and landscaping are an important element of the approach. A “traditional” small-town flavor is typically crafted through detailed design codes that result in housing that mimics early twentieth-century housing styles of the sort captured in Norman Rockwell illustrations, relegating garages to the back lot, restoring street-oriented front porches, and placing houses on small lots. In Europe, Léon Krier led the Movement for the Reconstruction of the European City—advocating architecture with the proportions, morphology, and craftsmanship of the preindustrial era along with overall urban designs featuring set-piece ensembles of buildings (as in neoclassical Bath, Berlin, and St Petersburg). He was influenced by Tönnies’s sociology and the conviction that small-scale towns provide the preconditions for *Gemeinschaft*, the most intense form of community.

Meanwhile, architect Peter Calthorpe developed the concept of the “pedestrian pocket.” Harking back to the days of streetcar suburbs, Calthorpe’s idea was for higher-density suburbs to be situated within a quarter-mile walking distance of a public transportation hub. Thus, pedestrian pockets would become part of a regional scheme of “Transit-Oriented Development,” or TOD. Inevitably, the enthusiasm of a small group of advocates and enablers of both TOD and TND was distilled into a declaration—in this case, the Ahwahnee Principles. Reasonable, and at face value mom-and-apple-pie virtuous, they were nevertheless rather myopic in that they took virtually no account of the imperatives of developers or the preferences of consumers. The principles do not explicitly refer to neotraditional design, but they had a significant impact within the design professions in that they provided a declarative platform and a vision that rekindled a spirit of evangelism.

### Drag and Drop Urbanism

Among the claims for TND were that historic references and vernacular form help to fill the emptiness of contemporary urban life, that they instill a moral landscape that is conducive to “community,” and that they provide a stable

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11.1 **Neotraditional design** (opposite). Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TND) generally avoid having culs-de-sac because they are thought to inhibit social contact. Front driveways and garages are avoided because they are felt to be ugly, to affirm the primacy of the automobile, and to be out of keeping with traditional and vernacular house types. 11.1a: Great Lakes Nautical Village, Pickering, Ontario; 11.1b: Aragon, Pensacola.





point of reference for residents whose pace of life is frenetic. Critics, on the other hand, characterize neotraditional settings as trading on a decontextualized past—culturally reductive costume drama. Nan Ellin refers to the nostalgic reflex to “drag and drop forms from other places and other times” as “form following fiction.”<sup>24</sup> At the heart of these critiques is the question of authenticity—a very slippery and contestable concept, open to abuse and misinterpretation. “Tradition,” as in TND, is equally elusive.

Echoing Edward Said, Janet Abu-Lughod has warned of the use and abuse of the notion of “tradition” to reinforce or maintain established forms of domination. In other words, the idea of tradition is a rhetorical device, and “traditions” themselves must be understood as being identified, manufactured, packaged, and deployed in pursuit of social inclusion and/or exclusion.<sup>25</sup> From this perspective, neotraditional design is inherently socially regressive. Richard Sennett describes them as “exercises in withdrawal from a complex world, deploying self-consciously ‘traditional’ architecture that bespeaks a mythic communal coherence and shared identity in the past ... socially poisonous and psychologically useless.”<sup>26</sup>

Undeterred by such critique, the adherents of neotraditional design sought to seize the initiative by rebranding their ideas and principles under the banner of “new urbanism” (The New Urbanism—capitalized—to its adherents). True to the conventions of the field, it was framed around a movement (the Congress for The New Urbanism). The congress quickly became a sort of politburo with its own new speak “in which subdivisions become towns, lots with smaller backyards are an antidote to sprawl, owners of real estate metamorphose into town fathers, homeowners associations supplant local governments, zoning is terrible but codes are good,”<sup>27</sup> and manifesto (the Charter for The New Urbanism). On the principle that the best defense is offense, the Congress for The New Urbanism generated a shamelessly self-referential literature founded on the credo that “good” urbanism is a definitive thing and that it can be propagated through the codification of design principles drawn from precedents in picturesque neighborhoods in places like Nantucket, Rhode Island; Alexandria, Virginia; Georgetown, District of Columbia; Charleston, South Carolina; and Savannah, Georgia.

Andres Duany—evidently a master of evangelical persuasiveness—became the principal spokesperson/salesman, enthusiastically assisted by naïve journalists and credulous practitioners.<sup>28</sup> Zealous, well-organized and media-savvy, “New Urbanists became a sort of Salvation Army for the built environment.”<sup>29</sup> Duany’s firm, DPZ, drew up a “lexicon of the New Urbanism” based on a formal typology that includes boulevards, perimeter blocks, plazas, monuments, the pedestrian scale of streets and public spaces, all accompanied by a great deal of prescriptive detail. New Urbanist developments are conceived as being made up of clearly identifiable neighborhoods and districts with pedestrian-oriented commercial enterprises and civic spaces like schools, parks, and community centers distributed throughout the neighborhoods, all bounded by boulevards that provide axes of orientation.

### *Form Follows Fiction*

All this is to be achieved, according to the Congress for The New Urbanism, through a sort of painting-by-numbers. Detailed codes and conventions, embedded in a series of regulatory documents—a regulating plan, urban regulations, architectural regulations, street types, and landscape regulations—provide the template. In addition, a “SmartCode,” developed (and copyrighted) by DPZ, allows them to be zoned incrementally along the lines of the urban-rural transect.<sup>30</sup>

The New Urbanism movement made allies in the press, provided developers with a highly marketable framework for packaging and branding, and provided planners with an opportunity to recover from their marginalized situation. The movement has helped to reinforce a sense of place, livability, sustainability, and quality of life as important policy issues, and helped to resurrect the idea of a definable public interest.<sup>31</sup> But there was almost nothing new about New Urbanism apart from its sophistication in organization, branding, and marketing. It was substantively a derivative hybrid of ideas and impulses that go back to the intellectuals’ utopias of the nineteenth century and that incorporate elements of the City Beautiful, Nolen’s association of urban design with the tenets of Athenian civic ideals, Geddes’s natural region and urban-rural transect, Perry’s neighborhood unit idea, Unwin and Parker’s assertion of traditional and vernacular design, the precedents of the garden suburbs of the late nineteenth century, the master suburbs of 1920s, USHC townships like Yorkshipp Village, the new communities of the 1960s and 1970s, the British Townscape movement, Christopher Alexander’s notion of pattern language, Kevin Lynch’s concept of legibility, and the prescriptions and inclinations of neo-rationalism, provincial urbanism, contextualism, and postmodernity. It was an architectural *derriere garde*, trading on antique truisms that have been combined across time and space to form a compound of conventional wisdom and suspect ideas—an encapsulation of all of the aspirations, assumptions, and mistakes of the design fields in one package. It was all served up, as Sorkin puts it, “with all the nuance of creationism.”<sup>32</sup>

More generally, the New Urbanism did not take into consideration how cities and regions actually function: that real urbanism emerges from city- or metropolitan-wide systems that include but do not necessarily follow from the design of individual development projects. From this perspective, New Urbanism, like many of its antecedents, is revealed as a fetishized, strapped-on kind of urbanism.<sup>33</sup> Segregated and isolated from the rest of the metropolitan fabric, its form-based codes preclude the close-grained diversity and unexpected encounters—both visual and social—that are the true glory of cities and a fundamental component of any real urbanism. The principal underlying weakness of New Urbanism is the privileging of spatial form over social process. Design codes become behavior codes.<sup>34</sup>

### **Landscape Urbanism**

The failings of New Urbanism “estranged it from all but the most conservative design schools, and it was into this vacuum that Landscape Urbanism

*An encapsulation of  
all of the mistakes of  
the design fields, in  
one package*

rushed at a moment when anxieties over climate change were just coming to the fore.”<sup>35</sup> The argument, echoing Patrick Geddes once again, was that urban design should take into account the complex overlap of ecological and social systems as well as the built environment. Landscape architects were having a moment. They brought Ian McHarg’s tradition of “designing with nature,” (that is, allowing the natural features of a city region and its carrying capacity to guide building), along with more recent systems-thinking from ecology and new digital visualization and rendering techniques.<sup>36</sup>

Designing with nature recognizes that urban development often occurs near sensitive areas such as wetlands, waterways, migration routes, and fragile habitats. These should be identified and mapped, argued McHarg, so as to fit development into natural landscapes without disrupting ecological systems irreparably.<sup>37</sup> Landscape urbanism added the language of complex adaptive systems, based on the work of ecologist C. S. Holling, recognizing that human as well as biological communities are complex adaptive systems that are able not only to recover from stress but also to absorb changes and incorporate feedback mechanisms to persist in an evolved state.<sup>38</sup> Landscape urbanists also advocated the assessment of biological, geological, hydrological, and other environmental features of previously developed sites for possible remediation: daylighting streams within built-up areas, for example. However, truly systems-level data are almost never available to landscape architects, and “in practice, their understanding of science has often been merely superficial.”<sup>39</sup>

### **Smart Growth**

Concurrent with The New Urbanism, the concept of “smart growth” provided planners with another opportunity to recover from their marginalized situation. The idea traded on the emergence of “smart” as a key word in the culture of the new digital economy. “Smart” has become a prefix to almost anything, but its origins were as acronyms in management and organizational behavior (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Trackable) and domestic systems technology (Self-Monitoring Analysis and Reporting Technology). Smart growth is a rather fuzzy and elastic concept that boils down to guiding growth to more efficient locations at higher densities. In that sense it can be seen as a stealthy euphemism for old-fashioned urban planning and growth management of the sort that could not be entertained in the lexicon of a neoliberal political economy.

The fundamental objective of smart growth is to limit sprawl.<sup>40</sup> The concept was endorsed by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, and the National Resources Defense Council, and gratefully embraced by an embattled planning profession that was under the cosh of neoliberalism. It was also endorsed by Andres Duany and his New Urbanists, who supported it because at face value it reinforces their platform.<sup>41</sup> A national coalition, Smart Growth America, attracted dozens of member organizations, including the American Farmland Trust,

the American Planning Association, 1000 Friends of Connecticut, 10,000 (not to be outdone) Friends of Pennsylvania, the Sierra Club, and the Trust for Public Land.

A Smart Growth Network, coordinated by the EPA's Division of Development, Community, and Environment, developed a set of ten basic goals (referred to as "principles") for smart growth: mixed land uses; taking advantage of compact (that is, higher density) neighborhood design; creating housing opportunities and choices; creating walkable communities; fostering distinctive communities with a strong sense of place; preserving open space, farmland, and critical environmental areas; strengthening and directing development toward existing communities; providing a variety of transportation choices; making development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective; and encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration in developer decisions.

It was blithely asserted that elements of this wish list "can be applied in various combinations to create smart, nonsprawling communities."<sup>42</sup> Parris Glendening, governor of Maryland between 1995 and 2003, believed it, and made smart growth the focus of his electoral platform. In office, he redirected state funding from highways to mass transit and to infrastructure in higher-density settings, and championed a policy under which developers paid for water, sewer, and other infrastructure in undeveloped areas, while developers building in designated higher-density areas benefited from streamlined approval processes and reduced fees. Other early adopters included the state of Washington, Sonoma County, California, and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and the cities of Durham, North Carolina, and Virginia Beach, Virginia, all of which instituted urban growth boundaries.

Naturally, policies like these were a rude and unwanted provocation to progrowth interests. Libertarian and neoliberal think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Reason Foundation cranked out essays warning of the anti-American implications of smart-growth "abuses" (sometimes portrayed as elitist, sometimes as socialistic), damage to free-market mechanisms, and constraints on individual choice. They provided lobbyists with lists of worrisome key points to use in speaking to legislators and fed talking points to op-ed writers in local newspapers.<sup>43</sup> Developers simply stepped up their campaign contributions to progrowth candidates in local elections. But the most effective challenges to smart-growth policies came from citizens themselves, in classic NIMBY responses. In Maryland, for example, residential and retail projects around metro stations—considered ideal locations for smart growth because they would encourage the use of mass transit—were stopped cold or scaled back because of neighborhood opposition.<sup>44</sup>

### **Livable, Sustainable, Smart, and Resilient?**

Each in their own way, TND, TOD, New Urbanism, landscape urbanism, and smart growth were aimed at the "good suburb": alternatives to the aesthetic, social, and environmental shortcomings of sprawl. Approaches, to the good



city as a whole have inevitably rested on higher-order concepts. Highest of all, arguably, are the multifaceted concepts of social well-being, quality of life, and level of living. All reflect a concern with the interdependence of health, housing, public amenities, education, employment, safety, security, environmental quality, community stability, and sense of identity.

The political and policy importance of the overall quality of life in cities has been steadily increasing, partly as cities compete across expanding geographic horizons in attracting talent and investment. The Mercer global consulting company, for example, uses a Quality of Living Survey to advise companies and key professionals on conditions in more than 460 cities, measuring ten dimensions: sociopolitical environment (crime, safety, and stability), economics (banking regulations and services), sociocultural environment (media, censorship, and personal freedom), health (health care services, air quality, sanitation, and waste disposal), education, utilities (transportation, traffic, and services), recreational facilities (restaurants, theaters, sports, and leisure), market (availability of goods), housing, and natural environment (climate, vulnerability to environmental hazards, and weather extremes).<sup>45</sup>

Architecture, urban planning, urban design, and landscape architecture all have legitimate and long-standing claims on contributing to quality of life, whether at citywide, district, or building scales. The contemporary framing of these claims is based variously on livability, sustainability, smart design, and resilience.

### **Livability**

Livability is the subset of quality of life concerned primarily with the quality of space and the built environment. For the design fields, it is essentially about designing and managing the places where people choose to live and work, and it can be a key competitive element among cities in terms of attracting both people and businesses. At the same time, it is acknowledged that livability is essentially local in character, with four overarching themes: environmental quality, the physical attributes of places, the functional effectiveness of places, and social behavior and public safety in places.<sup>46</sup>

It is all about “how easy a place is to use and how safe it feels. It is about creating—and maintaining—a sense of place by creating an environment that is both inviting and enjoyable.”<sup>47</sup> Livability has been implicit in a long and varied line of design discourse, including the townscape movement, the neo-rationalist movement, the Movement for the Reconstruction of the European City, Jane Jacobs’s advocacy of “close-grained diversity” in urban form, Kevin Lynch’s struggle to capture urban imagery and legibility, P. F. Smith’s work on spatial syntax, Christopher Alexander’s belief in a “pattern language,” and Edmund Bacon’s assertion of urban form as a collective act of will.

The American Planning Association (APA) designates “Great Neighborhoods” on the basis of having a “true sense of place” and “a

vision for tomorrow.” The APA’s checklist includes having mixed uses, multimodal transportation, “visually interesting” architectural features and a “memorable character,” and evidence of community involvement, human contact, and social activities. As a result, APA-accredited Great Neighborhoods tend to be somewhat stereotypical middle- and upper-middle class historic city districts. As Talen, Menozzi and Schaeffer point out, they tend not to be very affordable or socially or racially diverse. It is, they note, a central paradox in American urban planning: “The more planners try to promote good physical design, the less affordable and therefore less diverse the neighborhood seems to become. Good design is good for business, it seems, but not necessarily good for the goals of affordability, inclusiveness, and social diversity.”<sup>48</sup>

The Making Cities Livable movement frames livability as “True Urbanism,”<sup>49</sup> drawing heavily on the ideas of—surprise!—Geddes, Lynch, and Alexander. True urbanism, it is asserted, must be based on “time-tested principles” that reflect the importance of human-scale architecture, the quality of public spaces (especially squares and market places), mixed-use structures that accommodate both retail and residential functions, and a compact urban fabric sprinkled with outdoor cafés and restaurants, farmers’ markets, and community festivals. True Urbanism seeks to create “places of short distances,” where transportation planning makes possible commuting via pedestrian networks, bicycle networks, traffic-quietened streets, and public transit systems.

The design fields’ claims on their potential contributions to livability, then, are not simply based on form and morphology. They extend to content, context, and the capacity to foster conviviality, rhythm, and movement: the “happy city.”<sup>50</sup> Livable places should have plenty of opportunities for informal, casual meetings; street markets; comfortable places to sit, wait, and people-watch; friendly “third” places (cafés, pubs, bars, coffee houses, and so on);<sup>51</sup> and, above all, a sense of identity, belonging, authenticity, and vitality. Architectural theorist Nan Ellin has expressed this in terms of what she calls “Integral Urbanism” or, simply, “Good Urbanism.”<sup>52</sup> The key attributes of integral urbanism are hybridity, connectivity, porosity, authenticity, and vulnerability. Hybridity and connectivity depend on linking urban functions, connecting people and activities at key points of intensity and along thresholds between districts. Porosity involves the visual and physical integration of the historic and the contemporary, of nature and the built environment, and of the social, cultural, and physical dimensions of a town. Authenticity requires interventions that are rooted in local climate, topography, history, and culture. Vulnerability depends on a willingness on the part of urban planners and designers to relinquish control and allow for serendipity. The goal of integral urbanism is to ensure places that are “in flow,” where a city’s physical settings and people’s experiences of them are inseparable and reliant upon one another.

*The design fields’ contributions to livability are not simply based on form and morphology*

It is the capacity of the built environment to sustain animation, conviviality, and sociability in public spaces that is perhaps the design fields' most important potential contribution to livability. Alexander Garvin, whose career has spanned urban planning, real estate, and architecture, stresses the importance of the public realm in contributing to "great cities," while Allan Jacobs, whose career spanned urban planning and urban design, has emphasized the qualities of city streets.<sup>53</sup> Architect Jan Gehl argues that urban design can influence how many people use a city's public spaces, how long individual activities last, and which kinds of activities can flourish in different settings. In this context, he makes a distinction between necessary activities (such as shopping or going to work), optional activities (such as taking a stroll or stopping for a coffee at a sidewalk café), and social activities (such as chance encounters, gossiping, bantering, storytelling, joking, flirtation, and serious conversation).<sup>54</sup> Squares and market places are traditionally the loci of these activities, followed closely by pedestrianized streets and small parks. The High Line Park, in New York City (fig. 11.2), illustrates the capacity of the design fields to successfully add to animation, conviviality, and sociability in public spaces. Most new developments of any significance, however, are the product of public-private partnerships, their spaces not genuinely public: thereby circumscribing the ability of the design fields to contribute to the "happy city."

### **Tactical Urbanism**

With contributions to livability constrained by the dictates of property-led development strategies and a commodified culture, a minority within the design fields have embraced unsanctioned activist or community-led guerrilla tactics as their preferred approach. In practice, this involves a variety of opportunistic interventions designed to improve city life on a block-by-block, street-by-street basis. An example is the creation of "pop-up parks," claiming unused or little-used spaces by strategically placing potted plants, chairs, or pianos. Other examples include temporary community gardens, ad hoc markets, art installations, pop-up street cafés, community-led street pedestrianization, food trucks, and "chair bombing" (taking discarded materials to make seating that is then placed strategically in public places).

Such efforts have been described variously as participatory urbanism, open-source urbanism, pop-up urbanism, or DIY urbanism, but tactical urbanism has emerged as the label with the most currency.<sup>55</sup> The notion of tactical

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**11.2 The High Line, New York City** (opposite). An elevated rail structure that was built in the 1930s to move rail freight parallel to the docks along the western spine of Manhattan Island, the High Line was retrofitted in the late 2000s to function as a public promenade that offers a variety of spatial and recreational situations: narrow and wide paths, wider hang-out areas, decked and open-air routes, intimate views and panoramas of the city, conceptual artworks. The winning design team for the project was James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro.





urbanism has provided an opportunity for some in the design fields to mobilize the right-to-the-city spirit and reclaim at least some of their ideological affinity for crusading and the pursuit of social justice. The Museum of Modern Art in New York City played a significant role in anointing the term, just as it did with the International Style, mounting an exhibition (*Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities*) and sponsoring a colloquium featuring some of the star turns of contemporary urban studies, including David Harvey and Saskia Sassen.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, miscellaneous examples of opportunistic activist interventions had been brought together as the brand identity (tactical urbanism) of Mike Lydon's street plans urban design and planning practice and its associated collaborative<sup>57</sup>—reminiscent of the way that Duany and Plater-Zyberk scooped up a derivative set of ideas and impulses and commodified them into their practice with an attendant movement of their own design (*The New Urbanism*).

The small scale and ephemeral nature of tactical urbanism might be regarded as pinpricks in the broader scheme of things and a reflection of the marginalization of the design fields. Its advocates claim, rather glibly, that short-term actions will lead to long-term change. But in the context of contemporary urban dynamics the progressive change that they envisage—making cities more humane, authentic, and livable—is likely to be subverted. The creativity aesthetic and sense of cool hipsterism propagated by tactical urbanism plays directly into the neoliberal “creative city” discourse. In practical terms it amounts to an invitation to gentrification.

### *An invitation to gentrification*

#### **Sustainability and Green Design**

Public concern over environmental issues has grown steadily since the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962. It has been paralleled by the growth of green consumerism and by scientific studies of ecology and complex adaptive systems. Artists like Richard Long and Robert Smithson responded to this new sensibility with their work in the Earth Art (or Land Art) movement. “Complex adaptive systems thinking made its way into the design arts as landscape was being rediscovered as both model and medium for design.”<sup>58</sup>

In the design fields, landscape architect Ian McHarg was an early advocate of the idea that urban design should be based on ecological principles and the analysis and assessment of natural resources. By the 1980s the field had edged significantly toward environmental planning, and by the 1990s this had extended to the conservation and preservation of natural landscapes.<sup>59</sup> In architecture, Sanford Kwinter was among those who called for a reconceptualization of the broader project of urbanism to reflect the ecological forces and structures, “to tap, approximate, borrow, and transform morphogenetic processes from all aspects of wild nature, to invent artificial means of creating living artificial environments.”<sup>60</sup> Richard Register, channeling the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the utopian traditions of the field, speculated about eco-cities where development would respect



environmental limits and minimize waste and pollution.<sup>61</sup> If the original purpose of architecture was to protect humans from the destructive actions of nature, today it must protect nature from the damaging actions of humans.

In urban planning, Scott Campbell drew attention to the critical importance of the socio-economic dimensions of “green” design and planning, summarized in terms of the interdependence of the “three Es” of sustainable urban development: the environment, the economy, and equity.<sup>62</sup> These would become the underlying principles of the Green New Deal that was first proposed in the 2010s in the aftermath of the combination of economic recession, neoliberal austerity, and the increasingly obvious effects of climate change.

In architecture, green design began with the use of sustainably-produced, reused, or recycled building materials; alternative energy sources such as solar technology, geothermal heat pumps, and wind power; fenestration systems that automatically respond to changing light levels; ultra-low energy “Passivhaus” systems; and on-site waste management such as green roofs that filter and control stormwater runoff.<sup>63</sup> In the United Kingdom, the RIBA developed a Green Overlay to its Outline Plan of Work to provide information about such options at each stage of design and construction. In the United States, green design has been codified as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards by the U.S. Green Building Council.<sup>64</sup> Different levels of certification are awarded, based on a relatively straightforward checklist. A voluntary system, it has grown in popularity: partly as a result of market demand, and partly because it offers developers a means of product differentiation for more affluent and environmentally-conscious market segments.

Most commercial clients, however, decline to pay for the additional up-front costs that a green building requires. It was not surprising, therefore, that, for example, all ten of the green projects recognized in 2019 by the AIA Committee on the Environment were funded by universities, public agencies or philanthropic foundations. Most practitioners, meanwhile, still hew to a professional ideology that prioritizes the symbolic cultural capital of architecture-as-art. Aaron Betsky, for example, has asserted that awards should not be bestowed on buildings simply because they have features such as natural ventilation and design elements that reduce energy usage but lack “other design merits,” adding “You also have to wonder about the recovery cost of the energy embedded in making and transporting all those gizmos.”<sup>65</sup>

From the perspective of cities and urban development, green design is just part of a broader movement toward sustainability.<sup>66</sup> But while there is general agreement about the symptoms of unsustainable development (structural economic decline, environmental degradation, outmigration, segregation, exclusion, antisocial behavior, and loss of distinctiveness and sense of place), specifying just what is—or may be—sustainable is problematic. For many, the salience of environmental issues means that the very idea of sustainability implies a deep anti-urban sentiment, while the

*The idea of sustainability implies a deep anti-urban sentiment*

complexities and ambiguities involved in the interdependencies among the “three Es” within urban settings mean that the subject can be overwhelming. For local planners, urban designers, and policymakers this can lead to a kind of despairing inertia, especially in the face of opposition from established interests within local systems of building provision.

It is not easy to find compelling, comprehensive examples of sustainable urbanism. Portland, Oregon, acquired a reputation as a “people’s republic” as a result of a wave of urban planning initiatives and reforms (a light rail system, skyline and visual identity regulations, pedestrian prioritization, a bottle deposit law, an urban growth boundary, farmers’ markets, a network of green infrastructure, a climate action plan, etc.). But they have been uneven in their impact and effectiveness, with unintended consequences in terms of housing affordability and the displacement effects of gentrification.<sup>67</sup> They have also been variously resisted and co-opted by developers and others more disposed to a neoliberal, growth-machine approach.<sup>68</sup> Even in Europe, the likes of the French Quarter and Loretto in Tübingen and Vauban (fig. 11.3) and Rieselfeld in Freiburg im Breisgau,<sup>69</sup> Hammarby Sjöstad, in Stockholm, and the Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED) in suburban London (fig. 11.4) remain rare and isolated exemplars.

Nevertheless, elements of sustainable urbanism such as adaptive re-use, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly settings, transit-oriented development, cohousing (that is, housing clustered around a pedestrian-only common street or courtyard, with a common house where residents can meet, eat together, or organize collective activities such as child care), landscaping that preserves and enhances wetlands and natural habitat, and the inclusion of ecological goals and criteria in governance and policy have appeared piecemeal across many cities.<sup>70</sup> Master-planning for sustainable urbanism, integrating such features, has become a specialty of the “global intelligence corps” of international architecture, engineering and planning consultancies. Siemens, for example, has established a center dedicated to facilitating its business services related to urban sustainability. The building itself has Platinum LEED accreditation, the most stringent standard for sustainable design, and doubles as an educational center (fig. 11.5). Most consultancies simply tend, however, to “repeat a similar menu of options such as bicycle lanes, bus rapid transit, sustainable urban drainage systems, combined heat and power systems, and renewable energy.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Techno-Utopias: Smart Cities**

A very different narrative evolved from the systems-thinking and cybernetics of the 1970s, the computer modeling of the 1980s, and the internet of the 1990s. In architecture, computer-assisted design (CAD) and design software not only made routine tasks more efficient and easily delegated to cheaper—even offshore—labor but also supported the innovative designs of Gehry, Hadid, and others. In urban planning, urban design, and landscape architecture, Landsat imagery and geographic information systems (GIS) were



11.3. Vauban, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. The Quartier Vauban has become internationally famous for its innovative approaches to sustainable development. Built on the site of a former barracks, Vauban is a compact district of some five thousand people. Although cars are allowed in the Quartier Vauban, their use and ownership are sharply restricted. **11.3a**, top: Sonnenschiff ("sun ship"), the first positive-energy commercial building in the world, designed by Rolf Disch; **11.3b**, lower right: automobile-free interior street; **11.3c**, lower left: Vauban Allee, the central spine of the district. Members of the district's car-sharing organization receive a free pass for all public transportation within the city.



11.4. **Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED)**. The first large-scale development in the United Kingdom designed to support a sustainable community. The borough of Sutton sold land at below market value to make it economically viable. Architect: Bill Dunster.

11.5. **The Crystal, London Docklands**. Built to convene business meetings for clients and accommodate an exhibition space on urban sustainability and resilience. Electrical and mechanical systems in the building are controlled by Siemens' own energy management system, using data from an outdoor weather station and more than 3,500 data points within the structure itself.



among the first digital technologies to become fundamental to practice. The more recent blossoming of information and communication technologies (ICT) has generated many more applications with relevance to the fields.

The Internet of Things (IoT) has brought a new dimension to the “technological unconscious” that underpins urban life.<sup>72</sup> The IoT is comprised of interconnected networks of devices equipped with microcontrollers and transceivers. Linked to smartphone apps, surveillance cameras, and networked informatics, the IoT has application and potential in smart and interactive buildings, transit systems, bike sharing programs, drone delivery systems, infrastructure planning and management, and so on.<sup>73</sup> Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality (AR), and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies have provided design practitioners with new tools. Software packages such as Autodesk LIVE, Fuzor, and Enscape, for example, allow architects to develop and present their designs, while Microsoft’s HoloMaps allows planners and urban designers to display topography, infrastructure, and buildings in 3D while simultaneously overlaying real-time data.

Together, ICT and IoT have found expression in a narrative of smart cities that emphasize the potential efficiency, flexibility, and sustainability of urban environments, together with the prospect of making cities more competitive in the global market. A smart city is one in which urban infrastructure and services are managed through ICT and IoT, with networked instrumentation embedded into the urban fabric to provide continuous streams of data that dynamically feed into management systems. In theory, this facilitates new forms of governmentality, better-informed citizens, and an increased capacity for innovation, resilience, and sustainability.<sup>74</sup> This narrative mobilizes and recycles two long-standing tropes in urban planning and policy circles: the city conceived as a system of systems, and a utopian discourse framed around urban pathologies and their cure.<sup>75</sup> In many ways, “smart” is superseding “sustainable” as the principal prism through which the future of cities is viewed within neoliberal urban political economies, more immediately useful in attracting investment and key workers. New ways of imagining, organizing, and managing the city, according to the smart city narrative, not only increase economic efficiency and sustainability but also reduce political conflict and resistance. The result is a distinctly neoliberal vision of the good city: a “disciplined” city with new geometries of power and control.<sup>76</sup> One immediate impact of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, meanwhile, was the extension of the ICT infrastructure for many occupations to be home-based; another was the extension of public health-related, digital monitoring and surveillance.

The key agents in the systems of provision for smart buildings and smart cities are global technology, engineering, and consulting firms like Alphabet’s subsidiaries Google and Sidewalk Labs, Amazon, Arup, Cisco, Deloitte, Facebook, General Electric, Hitachi, Huawei, IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, Philips, SAP, and Siemens: collectively, a global corporate urban intelligence complex that is complementary to third-generation growth machines. Arup

*A global corporate  
urban intelligence  
complex*



frames smart cities in terms of the interaction of three networks: the energy grid, the communications network, and logistics systems. IBM has trademarked the term “smarter cities” and characterizes them as instrumented (using live data through the use of sensors, meters, and such), interconnected (integrating of these data in a citywide computing platform), and intelligent (using data analytics, computational modeling, and visualization).<sup>77</sup>

As with sustainable urbanism, it is not easy to find full-fledged examples of smart cities. Among the frequently cited developments are Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, Songdo International Business District in South Korea, Singapore’s deployment of bus routing algorithms and innovative digital technologies, the Jinshan District smart-building complex in Shanghai, the North Avenue Smart Corridor in Atlanta, and Alibaba’s “City Brain” software for traffic management in selected Chinese cities. A proposed smart district on the Toronto waterfront, conceived by Sidewalk Labs, was scrapped after community opposition. Most smart city developments, notably, are only fragments or layers within cities—disconnected and sealed-off technological enclaves of urban fabric that Federico Cugurullo has characterized as Frankenstein Urbanism: “unsuccessful experiments generated by the forced union of different, incongruous parts.”<sup>78</sup>

For some, it is the prospect of full-fledged smart cities that is monstrous. Promoted as an effective way to manage uncertainty and risks through the effective integration of information and services, smart technologies paradoxically create new vulnerabilities and threats, including making city infrastructure and services insecure, brittle, and open to extended forms of criminal activity.<sup>79</sup> A full-fledged smart city needs a free flow of data across sectors and systems that are normally separate, something that could only be built with a new kind of city government—a public-private partnership with one or more of the global corporate urban intelligence giants providing mass surveillance and data collection. It raises the deeply sinister prospect of the manipulation of a compliant and accommodating citizenry.

It also plays into what Shoshana Zuboff dubbed “surveillance capitalism,” the commodification and exploitation of personal information. Surveillance data are the latest focus of capitalism’s progression in extracting profit from the making of products to personal services, financial services, and consumer experiences.<sup>80</sup> Richard Sennett meanwhile reminds us of the criticisms of Corbusian urbanism, in which form and function mesh perfectly but where, as in idealized smart cities, there is little room for a distinctive sense of place or the messiness and serendipity that is key to livability.<sup>81</sup> More salient in terms of the ideal of the good city is that the smart city narrative carries little or no recognition that smart technologies might contribute to socioeconomic polarization, has little to say in terms of addressing serious urban problems like poverty, affordable housing, and discrimination, and nothing to say about the visual appeal of buildings and places.

## Resilience

One of the most prevalent themes in the application of smart technology is resilience. Like sustainability, resilience has become a “bridging concept” that allows multiple fields to interface with one another. As such, resilience has become an increasingly central organizing metaphor among urban policy-makers, community and nonprofit groups, development interests, granting agencies, and philanthropists, as well as academic disciplines and professional fields.<sup>82</sup> Time magazine’s buzzword of 2013, resilience has a particular appeal in context of increased awareness of risk and vulnerability.

Sociologist Ulrich Beck foresaw the emergence of a “risk society” in which class conflicts and political cleavages are increasingly defined in terms of exposure to hazards and risks as a result of the multiscale interdependence that characterizes the Second Modernity and the more open economies of globalized supercapitalism.<sup>83</sup> The 2008–2009 global financial meltdown underscored that, while capitalism has, overall, proven to be a remarkably resilient form of social and economic organization, it is inherently shock-prone. Risk and vulnerability have also been foregrounded by the extreme weather events, flooding, and wildfires associated with global warming; and, not least, by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and consequent economic depression.

This cocktail of risks and vulnerabilities—together with an increased awareness of systems-thinking within social science and engineering disciplines—has made resilience a compelling and provocative theme. Like its ideological twin, sustainability, it can be used and interpreted in very different ways. At the simplest level, increased resilience implies the ability to endure greater stresses or to bounce back faster after a disturbance: what has become known as “engineering” or “equilibrium” resilience. Thus the US National Academy of Sciences has defined resilience as “the ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from, and more successfully adapt to adverse events.”

A broader understanding of resilience includes the inherent conditions that allow a system to absorb impacts and cope with an event, as well as post-event adaptive processes that help the system to reorganize, change, and learn in response to the event.<sup>84</sup> The work of ecologist C. S. Holling was influential here (just as it had been with the short-lived landscape urbanism movement). From this perspective, urban resilience involves the behavior of a large, complex, adaptive system that is itself composed of smaller ones: buildings, utilities, governance, transportation networks, neighborhoods, communities of interest, sociocultural movements, and so on; all subject to the constraints of path dependency.

Addressing urban resilience requires the design fields to work together with one another as seamlessly as possible with other actors within contemporary systems of building provision, which is a significant challenge to entrenched divisions of competitive professional labor. Nevertheless, the design fields have been receptive to the idea of resilience as a basis for practice.<sup>85</sup> Apart from anything else, it resonates with long-standing habits of thought. The Newtonian idea of equilibrium inherent to engineering resilience,

for example, was explicit in the idea of a good city outlined in the Charter of Athens—a city with a “state of equilibrium among all its respective functions.”<sup>86</sup> Ecological perspectives on resilience, meanwhile, resonate with the fields’ persistent susceptibility to biological metaphors about urban growth and change.

Architects’ design thinking and problem-solving skills are clearly relevant to achieving a more resilient built environment. Adding functionality with regard to potential exposure to natural hazards or acts of terrorism is an obvious example. But the greatest potential contribution could be toward goals of carbon neutrality. Buildings and construction together account for an estimated 36 percent of global final energy use and 39 percent of energy-related carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions.<sup>87</sup> Resilience has also provided a new remit for planners, policymakers, and urban designers, not only in relation to physical design and strategic spatial planning but also in relation to building standards, development regulations, and zoning in response to potentially disruptive challenges.<sup>88</sup>

The potential for these approaches has drawn the attention of many of the same actors who have been key to both third-generation growth machines and the global corporate urban intelligence complex behind the idea of smart cities: property development companies, global consulting firms such as AECOM, Bechtel and McKinsey, ICT companies like Cisco and IBM, and global technology and engineering firms like Arup and Siemens. Together with supranational organizations such as UN Habitat, the World Bank, and the nonprofit Rockefeller Foundation, they constitute a “global urban resilience complex”<sup>89</sup> or “resilience machine”<sup>90</sup> that has come to dominate the urban resilience discourse with a technical, project-based rationality.

This commodification of resilience and its deployment as part of neoliberal “shock doctrine” (taking advantage of a major disaster to usher in policies such as privatization and surveillance)<sup>91</sup> is just one aspect of what has become a wide-ranging critique. Resilience has become adopted in the discourses and practices of neoliberalization because of its implicit appeal to supporting the status quo and promoting business as usual; that is, the need to manage and adapt to current shocks and stresses, rather than seeking to redress or rework the political and economic forces behind them.<sup>92</sup>

Meanwhile, as a bridging concept it has perhaps inevitably become overexposed, its inherited meanings from disparate disciplines—engineering, psychology, community studies, economics, ecology, management, and so on—making for ambiguity and confusion instead of mutual understanding. Because it tends to focus on system disturbances by external forces, it underplays the internal dynamics of the system. The most fundamental criticism, however, is the lack of attention to agency, conflict, knowledge, and power asymmetries.<sup>93</sup> This, of course, is what makes resilience a useful depoliticizing metaphor when used by political and commercial actors. More specifically, “the apparent scientific precision of risk analysis, and the (academic) glamour of complexity theory allow conversations that fail to confront the real issue of which groups of the population will actually benefit from the expenditure of public resources.”<sup>94</sup>

# 12

## Coda: Telos and Techne

Central to the telos of the design fields is a commitment to serve society in particular ways: offering vision, anticipation, innovation, enchantment, and inspiration in the cause of human flourishing; creating functional and efficient, pleasurable and compelling physical environments; and embodying or expressing the social, political, economic, and cultural imperatives of the times. Such claims are often underscored with reference to Vitruvius's three principles: *firmitas* (durability, strength, order), *utilitas* (convenience, purpose, practicality, function), and *venustas* (beauty, delight) or to some updated version of the same object-oriented attributes. Philosophical debates within the design fields turn largely on which of these attributes takes—or should take—precedence in given circumstances, and why. But together they can become a Bermuda Triangle in which many of the wider social and political questions attached to city building simply vanish. This is, perplexingly, despite the fact that many (if not most) individual practitioners, educators, and students sincerely assert that they are deeply committed to social, economic, and environmental justice; and despite the nominal commitment of professional organizations such as the AIA, the APA, the RIBA, and the RTPI to the public interest, social purpose, and sustainable development.

The heart of the problem is of course the limited autonomy of the fields. Architects and urban designers are constrained by all sorts of externally imposed requirements, not least the programs and budgets of clients. Planners are constrained by public policy and a generally subordinate role in public-private partnerships. Not entirely their fault then, when urban development is environmentally insensitive, aesthetically underwhelming, dysfunctional, or socially regressive. They have a living to make, careers to pursue.

### **Episteme and Doxa**

While the limited autonomy of the fields has always been a handicap in contributing to the good city, the disciplinary shortcomings of the fields have also been a chronic weakness. Although each field has evolved into a discipline in institutional terms, their epistemological position, as Davoudi and Pendlebury delicately put it in relation to urban planning, “has remained ambiguous.”<sup>1</sup> The distinctive knowledge, processes, and capacities of landscape architects and urban designers—central requirements of a recognizable

profession—are broad and largely undefined.<sup>2</sup> Architecture, with a stronger self-image, has nevertheless struggled to establish and defend a distinctive knowledge base.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, the relationship of design education to the professions is generally uncomfortable. As Jeremy Till notes in relation to architecture, “The relationship between the profession and education is complex. ... the actions of the academy do not directly influence the profession and the profession does not directly control education. It is ... like the clumsy embrace of two octopuses.”<sup>4</sup> Overall, design faculty in universities can too easily find themselves regarded as mildly irrelevant by practitioners while quietly tolerated as lightweights by the rest of academe. A sweeping generalization, and unfair on many, but easy to understand in context of the distinctive character of design scholarship and pedagogy.

To begin with, academia does not fulfil the consecrating role for design fields that it does for every other discipline. In most disciplines, valorization and authority is established through citations of publications that have been double-blind refereed, through peer-reviewed research grants, and, in some cases, through patents. In design fields the most authoritative voices are to be found in a discursive arena dominated by trade journals, the forums of practitioner associations, online magazines, and broadsheets with resident critics. This echo chamber is especially the case in architecture, where “Editors compete to obtain the rights to the most fashionable projects. ... They practice what is euphemistically called ‘access journalism,’ which simply means that a bankable architect allows his or her work to be published if nothing particularly critical is said of it. ... Some of the most widely read journals and presses are little more than vanity publishing houses, relying on their favorite architects to pay for photographs and to buy a couple hundred books or magazines for use in self-advertising.”<sup>5</sup>

This is not to say that design faculty do not publish in peer-reviewed journals or compete for research grants. But their collective impact and productivity is weak in relation to other disciplines. Most design academics are simply not trained in research methodologies and protocols or socialized in the expectations of advanced scholarship, since master’s degrees are officially considered “terminal” in Britain and North America; that is, the minimum formal qualification to be hired into tenure-track and tenured positions. With a limited feel for the game, they struggle to produce scholarly works on a scale considered normal among other university-based departments.

More important, having retreated in the past to self-referential academic worlds, the design fields have to deal with an intellectual legacy that resonates with design determinism, that is tinged with paternalism and evangelism (although now it is a despairing kind of evangelism rather than the more confident kind indulged by postwar modernists), that is still susceptible to the “Consecrated Genius/Great Buildings” narrative, and that is vulnerable to the distractions of the philosophical “-ism” du jour.



The seedbeds for the taken-for-granted ideology and precepts of the fields—their *doxa*—are the design studios that are central to university curricula. Studios are powerful settings where collaborative learning and problem solving can flourish. Studios facilitate experiential, hands-on learning and provide a holistic environment that is by far the best solution for project-based and problem-based work. Faculty can get to know students and vice versa, making for more effective teaching and learning. But the pedagogy of the design studio is often the source of the ongoing problematic distinction between “architecture” and “building,” as well as the misplaced perception of the autonomy of the architect or planner within systems of building provision.<sup>6</sup> The problem is that studio projects are typically presented to students as isolated exercises, innocent of any underpinning understanding of urban change. “The world is seen not as a dynamic social system there to be engaged with, open for transformation, but as a static abstraction, there only to receive mute form. ... A linear route from problem to solution is instigated, unaffected by external forces.”<sup>7</sup>

This false autonomy is compounded by the isolation of students from their peers in other disciplines. “Cloistered into the captivity of the studio, the studio commands an increasingly greater role as the center of students’ social lives, and consequently the world outside the studio becomes less important.”<sup>8</sup> Inside the studio, students are easily gaslit by faculty who are overly ardent followers of the *doxa*.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the studio inevitably propagates a distinctive habitus among students:

All the subtle signs of cultivation—accent, manners, deportment, dress, attitudes, tastes, dispositions—cannot be obtained second-hand. They must be slowly absorbed from those who are already cultivated. ... By saturating students with the objects of architectural culture, by presenting them with role models, living examples of embodied cultural capital (hence the insistence on the importance of having practicing architects as teachers); by displaying in all the slight ways of manner, dress, and taste that one is becoming what one wishes to be, students absorb cultural capital in the only possible way, by presenting to the studio master’s gaze their whole social being.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Jeremy Till notes that “by the end of the course, the students are fully assimilated into the social mores of the architectural world. Students enter as normal, situated, humans and come out as rather abnormal, detached, members of the tribe.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Ethos and Dogma**

The accumulation of ideas and dispositions that began with Vitruvius and extended to Geddes, Howard, Corbusier and beyond has left each of the design fields with a distinctive ethos—a set of beliefs, practices, values, and aspirations—that underpin both praxis and discourse. Conditioned by the ever-changing challenges and opportunities of urban development, sustained within internal discursive forums, and baked into accredited

university curricula, they amount, in Bourdieu's terminology, to "force fields" that shape behavior and determine professional success.

But each field has distinctive elements in terms of emphasis and content. Environmental sustainability, for example, is an especially strong element in the ethos of landscape architecture. Urban planning has a distinctive bureaucratic element to its collective personality, centered on a hierarchical managerial ethos while approaching problem-solving in a rational, positivistic way. Born a hybrid creature, dedicated on the one hand to social reform, but charged on the other with economic development and the management of urban land, planning also carries a legacy of aesthetics from its architectural roots. The cumulative outcome is an amalgam of concern with health, safety, order, and social harmony, civic beauty, social equity, and utility, functionalism, and proportion in the organization of space. Urban design, as a recent hybrid/offshoot of planning, architecture, and landscape architecture, has developed an ethos that is itself derivative of these fields, featuring aesthetics, spatial organization, and sustainability. Equity and social justice—not so much.

Architecture, meanwhile, has retained as part of its ethos the ideal of the architect not only as an artist and cultural transistor/condenser but also as a polymath and public intellectual whose skills extend beyond individual structures to the entire city and to current affairs. This is bound up with the cult of personality and the Consecrated Genius/Great Buildings narrative. In practice it privileges the extraordinary program (and commensurately extraordinary budget) over ordinary ones and foregrounds the types of buildings that can "properly" be considered as architecture—museums, theaters, stadia, institutional buildings, high-end custom residences, and such—and good enough even to merit criticism. The field's claims on taste and aesthetics are also linked with adherence to avant-garde transgressiveness in relation to generally accepted canons of "good" taste and "high" culture.

When it comes to the fields' susceptibility to design determinism and environmental determinism, ethos can congeal into dogma: the conviction that design has an independent role in shaping economic and social life and human flourishing. A resolute grasp of the mucky end of the determinist stick can easily feedback, in turn, into misplaced visionary confidence and a "good-design-can-save-us" element in the force fields of both architecture and urban planning. As we have seen, the field of architecture cherishes another dogmatic claim: that architecture is (or should be) an art form. This dogma is the most powerful driver of architecture's overall ethos, underpinning its emphasis on cultural capital, originality, giftedness, novelty, and connoisseurship. It is attached to an assertion of the field's right to judge itself, and to be the only judge of itself: If you "get it," no explanation is necessary; if you don't, no explanation is possible.

## Techne

If the telos, ethos, and episteme of the design fields shape and color their approach to creating and sustaining good cities, it is their techne—the application of their expertise—that counts most in determining their success. The techne of the design fields is dependent, as Magali Sarfatti Larson put it, on “heteronomous” social relations.<sup>12</sup> Historically, architects lost the capacity to be an independent force in the struggle for the good city with the centrifugal forces that created the modern system of building provision in the nineteenth century: splitting up the preindustrial idea of the architect into its component elements—builder, surveyor, designer, and engineer. Planners only acquired the capacity to be a significant force with the welfare capitalism of the interwar period but lost it between 1968 and 1973 when the critique articulated by Jane Jacobs was compounded by economic crisis and the emergence of a neoliberal political economy.

The techne of the design fields is embedded in networks of actors that have coevolved not only with the property development and construction industries, building and transportation technologies, and state regulatory frameworks but also in response to many other forces, including structural economic change, the agendas of progrowth coalitions, and changing patterns of land ownership, property law, tax policy, local politics, and consumer preferences. Architecture has increasingly become, as Jeremy Till emphasizes, a “dependent profession.”<sup>13</sup> Architecture critic Kenneth Frampton has argued that architecture is in fact the least autonomous of any form of cultural production, “conditioned not only by its own technical methods but also by productive forces lying outside itself.”<sup>14</sup>

An increasingly fast-paced and competitive business environment and the vastly increased complexity of almost all building projects has intensified centrifugal forces, resulting in a division of architectural labor around specialized building types, specialized styles, and specialized tasks, while some roles have been replaced by specialists such as project managers and quantity surveyors brought in to manage risk and costs. Architects’ autonomy is particularly closely circumscribed by calculative practices that tend to lock in routinized, interlocking systems of financing formulas, measures of market feasibility, and product types. As Michael Sorkin observes in relation to the billionaire’s row of hypertall apartments rising along West 57th Street in New York Cit

Although the names of famous architects are attached to these buildings, they’re actually designed by lawyers and accountants, their form the outcome of negotiating the arcana of the city’s zoning system to exploit its bonuses and breaks and assemble ‘air rights’ purchased from adjacent and nearby lots.<sup>15</sup>

There is thus an “institutional specification” that, in practice, “covers most aspects of design and construction, including (depending on the building type): layout, floor loading, floor plate (depth, planning grid), frame, cladding/fenestration, roof, floor-to-ceiling height, offices and toilets, lighting, heating services, loading doors, site coverage, forecourt, car parking and so on.”<sup>16</sup> The result is that, “Any building that departs from this specification to any significant degree will not be funded by an institution.”<sup>17</sup>

In broader context, architecture, urban design, and landscape architecture are also entwined in complex and temporary assemblages of expertise and interests that cramp their designerly autonomy. In addition to the calculative practices of clients, financiers, builders, and regulators, their work depends, project by project, on interactions among auxiliary actors in utility companies, engineering and technical subcontractors, surveyors, market analysts, appraisers, property managers, chambers of commerce, lawyers, title insurance and trust companies, federal, state, and local agencies, and transportation and utility companies.

Urban planning, meanwhile, has always been a dependent field, embedded within the apparatus of the state and therefore subordinate to both the budgets and the priorities of central and local governments. Like the other design fields, urban planning is also subject to the path-shaping moments of capitalism’s regular and recurrent crises and embedded in the evolutionary twists and turns of the overall political economy: continually shaped and reshaped by economic, social, and cultural trajectories and tensions of which it is a part. Even before the onset of neoliberalism curtailed planners’ autonomy, the “Jacobsian” critique of visionary, rational, planning had begun to eviscerate its professional authority and visionary capacity as well as its disciplinary identity. In response to the critique, as we saw in chapter 11, planners sought new approaches. But, as Thomas Campanella points out:

... Privileging the grassroots over plannerly authority and expertise meant a loss of professional agency. ... Tools and processes introduced to ensure popular participation ended up reducing the planner’s role to that of umpire or schoolyard monitor. ... This is what passes for planning today. We have become a caretaker profession—reactive rather than proactive, corrective instead of preemptive, rule bound and hamstrung and anything but visionary. ... Planning in America has been reduced to smallness and timidity, and largely by its own hand.<sup>18</sup>

### **Circumscribed Autonomy**

This much is taken for granted: that few would dispute that the telos of the design fields is centered around the material realization of societal aspirations of what it means to live well, shaping environments in ways that contribute to social well-being and livability, and proposing new possibilities for living. Nor would many challenge the fields’ capacity for anticipation and innovation, question the dedication and idealism of rank-and-file workers, dispute the talent of successful practitioners at every level, or deny the

inspirational effects of their best work. But all this exists within a political economy that generates conflict and contradiction and demands compromise. The fields' circumscribed autonomy within evolving political economies has driven much of their self-image and several of their key values and predispositions.

Circumscribed autonomy is the best explanation for solipsistic professional cultures and their intellectual involution. It is in this context that the phenomenon of consensual collective plagiarism takes place, sped up and amplified by the echo chamber of traveling ideas. Circumscribed autonomy and the consequent introversion of the fields surely helps explain the long-standing assertion among the avant-garde that the true medium of architecture is the drawing: building inevitably resulting in clumsy, compromised copies of the art. Circumscribed autonomy also helps explain some of the more distinctive individual responses and contributions. Eisenman's "adventures in appearance," for example, and his insistence on an architecture that would be free from external constraints. It helps explain the appeal of the idea of the self-organizing and self-generating capacities of urbanism ("auto-poiesis") to Patrik Schumacher and his fans, leaving them free to focus on ingenious parametric "solutions." It helps explain how Jacques Herzog, Rem Koolhaas, Jean Nouvel, Zaha Hadid, Bjarke Ingels, and others might rationalize commissions from repressive regimes using labor for starchitecture projects under appalling conditions. Accepting the inevitability of circumscribed autonomy might even, somehow, explain how successful and otherwise progressive, left-leaning practitioners like Richard Rogers might end up accepting commissions designed for the ultrawealthy, accommodating the surplus capital of oligarchs and oil sheikhs and "flight capital" from war zones and failed states.

With all this said and done, the most important aspect of the constrained autonomy of the design fields is that it is simply a consequence of what renowned planner Peter Hall argued should be "blindingly obvious"; that "finally, it is the technological-economic motor that drives the socio-economic system and, through it, the responses of the political safety-valve."<sup>19</sup> The ideals inherent to the good city are only embraced, in other words, when the system needs them.

Although "staggeringly self-evident" to Hall, it is nevertheless important to understand the responses of the design fields and their most original and intelligent practitioners to the challenges and opportunities of urbanization in context of the imperatives of (money) capital: the mutually constitutive dynamics of circulation and accumulation, social relations, and ideology. Design professionals add exchange value to the built environment, making design a key instrument in the commodification and formatting of the built environment. Design translates to product differentiation, with the neo avant-garde and the design press functioning as a research and development unit for capital, supporting both circulation and accumulation. Planners and urban designers meanwhile function as a special category of



wealth managers, directing the redevelopment of underperforming property markets and incentivizing private real estate development while maintaining the conditions for capital accumulation: ensuring predictable conditions for real estate development, designing effective infrastructure systems, and orchestrating the efficiency of urban settings as sites of production and consumption.

The design fields also serve as an “internal survival mechanism” for capitalism, legitimizing the dominant social order and allowing it to protect itself from opposing ideological forces through the symbolic and didactic dimensions of the built environment. While the compelling logic of the marketplace induces architects and planning consultants to indulge in a silent complicity with the agendas of the politically and economically powerful, city planners are simply helots, state-held functionaries, required to operate as a kind of synchromesh in the real estate development process while propagating an ideology of social mix that dilutes working class solidarity and defuses class conflict. Both architects and planners meanwhile influence the physical arrangement and appearance of the built environment in ways that can help to veil and obscure the realities of economic and social relations, to suggest stability amid change (or vice versa), to create order amid uncertainty, and to symbolize wealth, power, and national, local or corporate identity. Obviously.

All this might beg the question of whether the design fields can be considered an effective force in contributing to societal aspirations for the good city. Of course they can. They can not only make cities look nicer and feel inspirational but also make them safer, more efficient, healthier, and more sustainable. But their contributions are conditional, partial, often compromised, sometimes backfiring, occasionally misdirected; always limited by the circumstances of the prevailing political economy, and always dependent on networks of actors in ever-changing systems of building provision.

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## Chapter 9 The Neoliberal City

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## Chapter 10 The Aestheticized City

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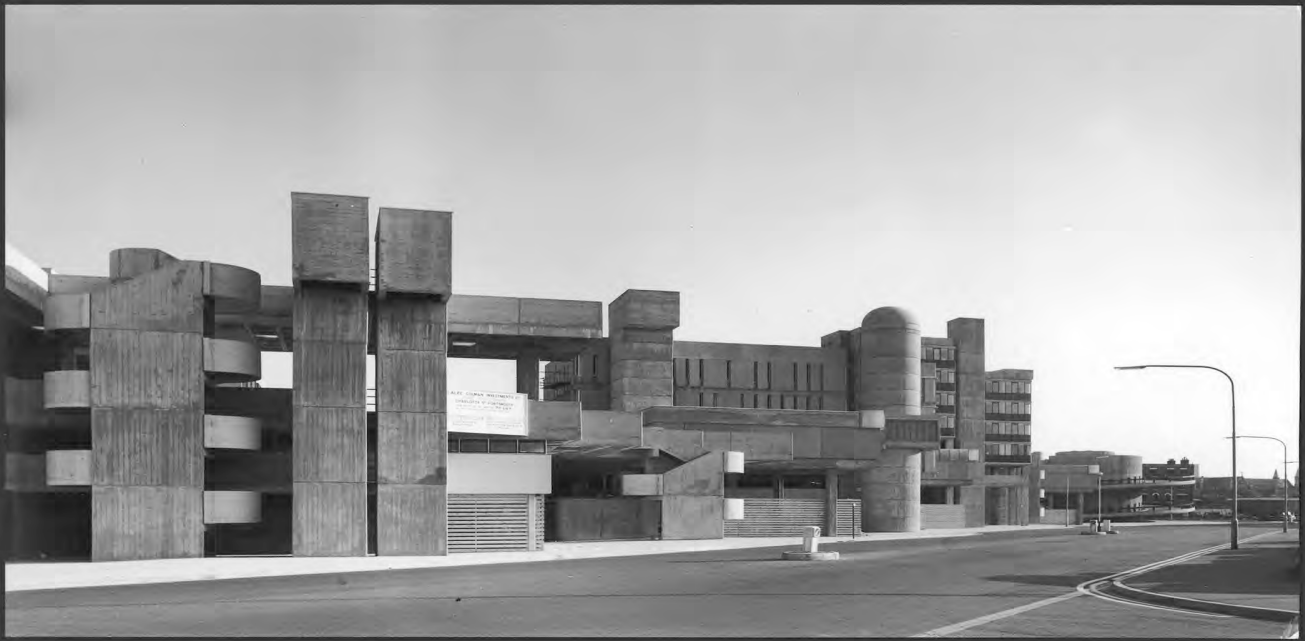
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The design professions—architecture, city planning, landscape architecture, and urban design—share a great deal in terms of intellectual antecedents, professional ideals, and praxis. In particular, they share a commitment to creating better cities—whether at the scale of buildings, neighborhoods, or city-regions. But who decides what constitutes a “good” city, and how should such an ideal be implemented?

In *Better by Design?* Paul Knox explores the intellectual roots of the design professions, showing how architects, planners, and other designers have traditionally interpreted their roles and implemented their ideas in cities across North America and the UK. Drawing on his long record of research and award-winning publications on the social production of the built environment, Knox offers a critical appraisal of their ultimate effectiveness in achieving the goal of creating and sustaining good cities.

**Cover image:** The Tricorn Centre, Portsmouth, UK, a mixed-use development planned as the city’s flagship of urban regeneration after the Blitz had flattened much of the central area of the city during the Second World War. It embodied, for a while, the promise of the Good City. Its mix of shops, pubs, social housing, and car parking added up to a megastructure the size of a city block that embodied all the latest thinking about Modernist urban design: pedestrian walkways, off-street car parking and Brutalist-style poured concrete. It photographed well, earned critical acclaim, and secured a Civic Trust Award for “exciting visual composition.” Architecture historian Nikolaus Pevsner found it “really exciting, ... a splendid composition ... romantic.” But the concrete began to stain and spall, the sun never reached its central square, rainwater collected on the decks and dripped onto parked cars, retail spaces remained unlet, and its apartments were unpopular. Its putative beneficiaries, the public, regularly voted for it as the ugliest development in the United Kingdom. It was demolished in 2004.

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