



“The Image of the Environment” and “The City Image and Its Elements”

from *The Image of the City* (1960)

Kevin Lynch

Editors' Introduction



These two chapters by Kevin Lynch (1918–1984) from *The Image of the City* highlight his early interest and research on the legibility and visual perception of cities. *The Image of the City* is by far the best known of his writings and has had a profound influence on how designers perceive cities and urban form. His underlying idea in “The Image of the Environment” is that people understand and mentally process the form of cities through the recognition of key physical elements. By utilizing visual elements, Lynch argues that urban designers have a toolkit for making more legible and psychologically satisfying places. Not only do these elements provide organizational clues and way-finding devices for people to orient themselves in space, but also they can help in engendering emotional security and a sense of place-based ownership that comes from one's ability to recognize familiar territory. Lynch defines “imageability” as:

that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment.

Imageability to Lynch combines both the ability of the physical object to project a strong distinctive image, as well as the ability of the observer to mentally select, process, store, organize, and endow the image with meaning. In the selection from “The City Image and Its Elements,” the author identifies five key elements that provide urban imageability: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. In the conclusion to the book, he suggests ways in which designers can process this information to provide visual plans for reinforcing the form, physical controls, and public image of cities.

The book is important not only for its findings on the visual form of cities, but also in highlighting Lynch's research methods in environmental psychology. These methods allowed researchers to “get into the heads” of research subjects to better understand how they perceived their everyday environments. His methods included cognitive mapping, in-depth oral interviews, travel maps, direct observation, field reconnaissance walks, random pedestrian interviews, aerial and ground-level photography and synthesis maps. Data from extensive use of cognitive maps (mental maps of their city that people were asked to draw from memory) was easily compiled to provide synthetic illustrations of those elements that were most recognized or remembered. The same was done with data culled from oral interviews, which was then correlated across the data pulled from the cognitive mapping. From these different methods, Lynch's research team was able to triangulate similar findings from a relatively small sample of interviewees, although he later notes the biases in these small

sample sets. Although this work has not been particularly fruitful in effecting public policy on a broad scale, it has been important to urban plan-making in some specific places, such as San Francisco (California), Ciudad Guyana (Venezuela), and Brookline (Massachusetts), as well as with research on childhood experience for UNESCO. Lynch's techniques have proven particularly valuable in environmental design research, in many types of urban design plan-making, within strategic SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats), in understanding public images of the city for marketing purposes, and for knowledge in place memorability.

With its publication in 1960, Lynch's contribution belongs to the first generation of works in environmental psychology and environmental behavior. This literature has burgeoned since then, including major influences on a generation of researchers such as Amos Rapoport, Clare Cooper Marcus, Oscar Newman, William H. Whyte, Kenneth Craik, and Donald Appleyard – as well as planning and design departments at several universities, MIT and UC Berkeley in particular. With regard to its lasting impacts, *The Image of the City* helped to highlight the importance of urban form-making at a time when city planners were looking to social science methods to replace what was perceived to be an underperforming physical planning tradition. And with respect to current planning interest in public participation, it was influential in consulting the substantive users and residents of the city, and bringing them back into the planning conversation at a time when decision-making and design relied primarily on expert elite knowledge. Following its publication, other authors tried to identify design methods to reinforce the “image of the city.” Notable among these is work by Jack Nasar, *The Evaluative Image of the City* (New York: Sage, 1997), where the author provides methods for designing and assessing city image in practice.

Even after his death, Kevin Lynch continued to be recognized as the United States' leading urban design educator and researcher. He began his design education at Yale prior to a fellowship at Taliesin under the tutelage of Frank Lloyd Wright. He taught for many years at MIT, in addition to professional consulting work in design and planning. He wrote exhaustively, including seven books and dozens of published articles and essays. His book *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960) is considered to be the most widely read book in the history of urban design. His other books include: *The View from the Road*, co-written with Donald Appleyard and John Myer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1964); *What Time is This Place?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972); *Managing the Sense of a Region* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976); *Growing Up in Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977); *Good City Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), a textbook on site-specific design, *Site Planning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962); and a later version co-authored with Gary Hack shortly before his death, *Site Planning, 3rd edn* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984); plus a book published posthumously with Michael Southworth (ed.), *Wasting Away* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1990).

In Tridib Banerjee and Michael Southworth's edited book of Lynch's shorter essays and articles, *City Sense and City Design: Writings and Projects of Kevin Lynch* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), one can find supplemental material by Lynch on environmental perception and the visual form of cities: “Environmental Perception: Research and Public Policy” (MIT Libraries' Institute Archives and Special Collections); “Reconsidering the Image of the City,” in Lloyd Rodwin and Robert Hollister (eds), *Cities in Mind* (New York: Plenum, 1984); “A Process of Community Visual Survey” (MIT Libraries' Institute Archives and Special Collections); and “The Visual Shape of the Shapeless Metropolis” (MIT Libraries' Institute Archives and Special Collections).

Additional material on research and practice in environmental psychology can be found in the following: Paul A. Bell, Thomas Greene, Jeffrey Fisher, and Andrew S. Baum, *Environmental Psychology* (London: Taylor & Francis/Psychology Press, 2005); Harold M. Proshansky, William Ittleson, and Leanne Rivlin (eds), *Environmental Psychology: Man and his Physical Setting* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970); Roger M. Downs and David Stea (eds), *Image and Environment: Cognitive Mapping and Spatial Behavior* (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1973); S. Kaplan and R. Kaplan, *Cognition and Environment: Functioning in an Uncertain World* (New York: Praeger, 1982); and Robert B. Bechtel and Arza Churchman (eds), *Handbook of Environmental Psychology* (New York: John Wiley, 2002).

For literature on the relationship between environmental psychology and design, or the emerging "psychology of design" field, see the following: David Alan Kopec, *Environmental Psychology for Design*, 2nd edn (New York: Fairchild Publications, 2012); Toby Israel, *Some Place Like Home: Using Design Psychology to Create Ideal Places* (New York: Wiley Academy, 2003); Gyorgy Kepes, *Language of Vision* (Chicago, IL: P. Theobald, 1944) and *Sign, Image, Symbol* (New York: George Braziller, 1966); D. De Jonge, "Images of Urban Areas: Their Structure and Psychological Foundations," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (vol. 28, 1962, 266–276); and M. Gottdiener and A. Lagopoulos, *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

THE IMAGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Looking at cities can give a special pleasure, however commonplace the sight may be. Like a piece of architecture, the city is a construction in space, but one of vast scale, a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time. City design is therefore a temporal art, but it can rarely use the controlled and limited sequences of other temporal arts like music. On different occasions and for different people, the sequences are reversed, interrupted, abandoned, cut across. It is seen in all lights and all weathers.

At every instant, there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored. Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences. Washington Street set in a farmer's field might look like the shopping street in the heart of Boston, and yet it would seem utterly different. Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings.

Moving elements in a city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with the other participants. Most often, our perception of the city is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns. Nearly every sense is in operation, and the image is the composite of them all.

Not only is the city an object which is perceived (and perhaps enjoyed) by millions of people of widely diverse class and character, but it is the product of many builders who are constantly modifying the structure for reasons of their own. While

it may be stable in general outlines for some time, it is ever changing in detail. Only partial control can be exercised over its growth and form. There is no final result, only a continuous succession of phases. No wonder, then, that the art of shaping cities for sensuous enjoyment is an art quite separate from architecture or music or literature. It may learn a great deal from these other arts, but it cannot imitate them.

A beautiful and delightful city environment is an oddity, some would say an impossibility. Not one American city larger than a village is of consistently fine quality, although a few towns have some pleasant fragments. It is hardly surprising, then, that most Americans have little idea of what it can mean to live in such an environment. They are clear enough about the ugliness of the world they live in, and they are quite vocal about the dirt, the smoke, the heat, and the congestion, the chaos and yet the monotony of it. But they are hardly aware of the potential value of harmonious surroundings, a world which they may have briefly glimpsed only as tourists or as escaped vacationers. They can have little sense of what a setting can mean in terms of daily delight, or as a continuous anchor for their lives, or as an extension of the meaningfulness and richness of the world.

LEGIBILITY

This book will consider the visual quality of the American city by studying the mental image of that city which is held by its citizens. It will concentrate especially on one particular visual quality: the apparent clarity or "legibility" of the cityscape. By this we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern.

Just as this printed page, if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related pattern of recognizable symbols, so a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern.

This book will assert that legibility is crucial in the city setting, will analyze it in some detail, and will try to show how this concept might be used today in rebuilding our cities. As will quickly become apparent to the reader, this study is a preliminary exploration, a first word not a last word, an attempt to capture ideas and to suggest how they might be developed and tested. Its tone will be speculative and perhaps a little irresponsible: at once tentative and presumptuous. This first chapter will develop some of the basic ideas; later chapters will apply them to several American cities and discuss their consequences for urban design.

Although clarity or legibility is by no means the only important property of a beautiful city, it is of special importance when considering environments at the urban scale of size, time, and complexity. To understand this, we must consider not just the city as a thing in itself, but the city being perceived by its inhabitants.

Structuring and identifying the environment is a vital ability among all mobile animals. Many kinds of cues are used: the visual sensations of color, shape, motion, or polarization of light, as well as other senses such as smell, sound, touch, kinesthesia, sense of gravity, and perhaps of electric or magnetic fields. These techniques of orientation, from the polar flight of a tern to the path-finding of a limpet over the micro-topography of a rock, are described and their importance underscored in an extensive literature (Casamajor 1927; Fischer 1931; Griffin 1953; Rabaud 1927). Psychologists have also studied this ability in man, although rather sketchily or under limited laboratory conditions (Angyal 1930; Binet 1894; Brown 1932; Claparède 1943; Jaccard 1932; Ryan 1940; Sandström 1951; Trowbridge 1913; Witkin 1949). Despite a few remaining puzzles, it now seems unlikely that there is any mystic "instinct" of way-finding. Rather there is a consistent use and organization of definite sensory cues from the external environment. This organization is fundamental to the efficiency and to the very survival of free-moving life.

To become completely lost is perhaps a rather rare experience for most people in the modern city.

We are supported by the presence of others and by special way-finding devices: maps, street numbers, route signs, bus placards. But let the mishap of disorientation once occur, and the sense of anxiety and even terror that accompanies it reveals to us how closely it is linked to our sense of balance and well-being. The very word "lost" in our language means much more than simple geographical uncertainty; it carries overtones of utter disaster.

In the process of way-finding, the strategic link is the environmental image, the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual. This image is the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action. The need to recognize and pattern our surroundings is so crucial, and has such long roots in the past, that this image has wide practical and emotional importance to the individual.

Obviously a clear image enables one to move about easily and quickly: to find a friend's house or a policeman or a button store. But an ordered environment can do more than this; it may serve as a broad frame of reference, an organizer of activity or belief or knowledge. On the basis of a structural understanding of Manhattan, for example, one can order a substantial quantity of facts and fancies about the nature of the world we live in. Like any good framework, such a structure gives the individual a possibility of choice and a starting-point for the acquisition of further information. A clear image of the surroundings is thus a useful basis for individual growth.

A vivid and integrated physical setting, capable of producing a sharp image, plays a social role as well. It can furnish the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication. A striking landscape is the skeleton upon which many primitive races erect their socially important myths. Common memories of the "home town" were often the first and easiest point of contact between lonely soldiers during the war.

A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security. He can establish a harmonious relationship between himself and the outside world. This is the obverse of the fear that comes with disorientation; it means that the sweet sense of home is strongest when home is not only familiar but distinctive as well.

Indeed, a distinctive and legible environment not only offers security but also heightens the potential depth and intensity of human experience. Although life is far from impossible in the visual chaos of the modern city, the same daily action could take on new meaning if carried out in a more vivid setting. Potentially, the city is in itself the powerful symbol of a complex society. If visually well set forth, it can also have strong expressive meaning.

It may be argued against the importance of physical legibility that the human brain is marvelously adaptable, that with some experience one can learn to pick one's way through the most disordered or featureless surroundings. There are abundant examples of precise navigation over the "trackless" wastes of sea, sand, or ice, or through a tangled maze of jungle.

Yet even the sea has the sun and stars, the winds, currents, birds, and sea-colors without which unaided navigation would be impossible. The fact that only skilled professionals could navigate among the Polynesian Islands, and this only after extensive training, indicates the difficulties imposed by this particular environment. Strain and anxiety accompanied even the best-prepared expeditions.

In our own world, we might say that almost everyone can, if attentive, learn to navigate in Jersey City, but only at the cost of some effort and uncertainty. Moreover, the positive values of legible surroundings are missing: the emotional satisfaction, the framework for communication or conceptual organization, the new depths that it may bring to everyday experience. These are pleasures we lack, even if our present city environment is not so disordered as to impose an intolerable strain on those who are familiar with it.

It must be granted that there is some value in mystification, labyrinth, or surprise in the environment. Many of us enjoy the House of Mirrors, and there is a certain charm in the crooked streets of Boston. This is so, however, only under two conditions. First, there must be no danger of losing basic form or orientation, of never coming out. The surprise must occur in an over-all framework; the confusions must be small regions in a visible whole. Furthermore, the labyrinth or mystery must in itself have some form that can be explored and in time be apprehended. Complete chaos without hint of connection is never pleasurable.

But these second thoughts point to an important qualification. The observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image. He should have the power to change that image to fit changing needs. An environment which is ordered in precise and final detail may inhibit new patterns of activity. A landscape whose every rock tells a story may make difficult the creation of fresh stories. Although this may not seem to be a critical issue in our present urban chaos, yet it indicates that what we seek is not a final but an open-ended order, capable of continuous further development.

BUILDING THE IMAGE

Environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer – with great adaptability and in the light of his own purposes – selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees. The image so developed now limits and emphasizes what is seen, while the image itself is being tested against the filtered perceptual input in a constant interacting process. Thus the image of a given reality may vary significantly between different observers.

The coherence of the image may arise in several ways. There may be little in the real object that is ordered or remarkable, and yet its mental picture has gained identity and organization through long familiarity. One man may find objects easily on what seems to anyone else to be a totally disordered work table. Alternatively, an object seen for the first time may be identified and related not because it is individually familiar but because it conforms to a stereotype already constructed by the observer. An American can always spot the corner drugstore, however indistinguishable it might be to a Bushman. Again, a new object may seem to have strong structure or identity because of striking physical features which suggest or impose their own pattern. Thus the sea or a great mountain can rivet the attention of one coming from the flat plains of the interior, even if he is so young or so parochial as to have no name for these great phenomena.

As manipulators of the physical environment, city planners are primarily interested in the external

agent in the interaction which produces the environmental image. Different environments resist or facilitate the process of image-making. Any given form, a fine vase or a lump of clay, will have a high or a low probability of evoking a strong image among various observers. Presumably this probability can be stated with greater and greater precision as the observers are grouped in more and more homogeneous classes of age, sex, culture, occupation, temperament, or familiarity. Each individual creates and bears his own image, but there seems to be substantial agreement among members of the same group. It is these group images, exhibiting consensus among significant numbers, that interest city planners who aspire to model an environment that will be used by many people.

Therefore this study will tend to pass over individual differences, interesting as they might be to a psychologist. The first order of business will be what might be called the "public images," the common mental pictures carried by large numbers of a city's inhabitants: areas of agreement which might be expected to appear in the interaction of a single physical reality, a common culture, and a basic physiological nature.

The systems of orientation which have been used vary widely throughout the world, changing from culture to culture, and from landscape to landscape. [. . .] The world may be organized around a set of focal points, or be broken into named regions, or be linked by remembered routes. Varied as these methods are, and inexhaustible as seem to be the potential clues which a man may pick out to differentiate his world, they cast interesting side-lights on the means that we use today to locate ourselves in our own city world. For the most part these examples seem to echo, curiously enough, the formal types of image elements into which we can conveniently divide the city image: path, landmark, edge, node, and district.

STRUCTURE AND IDENTITY

An environmental image may be analyzed into three components: identity, structure, and meaning. It is useful to abstract these for analysis, if it is remembered that in reality they always appear together. A workable image requires first the identification of an object, which implies its distinction from other

things, its recognition as a separable entity. This is called identity, not in the sense of equality with something else, but with the meaning of individuality or oneness. Second, the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects. Finally, this object must have some meaning for the observer, whether practical or emotional. Meaning is also a relation, but quite a different one from spatial or pattern relation.

Thus an image useful for making an exit requires the recognition of a door as a distinct entity, of its spatial relation to the observer, and its meaning as a hole for getting out. These are not truly separable. The visual recognition of a door is matted together with its meaning as a door. It is possible, however, to analyze the door in terms of its identity of form and clarity of position, considered as if they were prior to its meaning.

Such an analytic feat might be pointless in the study of a door, but not in the study of the urban environment. To begin with, the question of meaning in the city is a complicated one. Group images of meaning are less likely to be consistent at this level than are the perceptions of entity and relationship. Meaning, moreover, is not so easily influenced by physical manipulation as are these other two components. If it is our purpose to build cities for the enjoyment of vast numbers of people of widely diverse background – and cities which will also be adaptable to future purposes – we may even be wise to concentrate on the physical clarity of the image and to allow meaning to develop without our direct guidance. The image of the Manhattan skyline may stand for vitality, power, decadence, mystery, congestion, greatness, or what you will, but in each case that sharp picture crystallizes and reinforces the meaning. So various are the individual meanings of a city, even while its form may be easily communicable, that it appears possible to separate meaning from form, at least in the early stages of analysis. This study will therefore concentrate on the identity and structure of city images.

If an image is to have value for orientation in the living space, it must have several qualities. It must be sufficient, true in a pragmatic sense, allowing the individual to operate within his environment to the extent desired. The map, whether exact or not, must be good enough to get one home.

It must be sufficiently clear and well integrated to be economical of mental effort: the map must be readable. It should be safe, with a surplus of clues so that alternative actions are possible and the risk of failure is not too high. If a blinking light is the only sign for a critical turn, a power failure may cause disaster. The image should preferably be open-ended, adaptable to change, allowing the individual to continue to investigate and organize reality: there should be blank spaces where he can extend the drawing for himself. Finally, it should in some measure be communicable to other individuals. The relative importance of these criteria for a "good" image will vary with different persons in different situations; one will prize an economical and sufficient system, another an open-ended and communicable one.

IMAGEABILITY

Since the emphasis here will be on the physical environment as the independent variable, this study will look for physical qualities which relate to the attributes of identity and structure in the mental image. This leads to the definition of what might be called *imageability*: that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment. It might also be called *legibility*, or perhaps *visibility* in a heightened sense, where objects are not only able to be seen, but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses.

Half a century ago, Stern discussed this attribute of an artistic object and called it *apparency* (Stern 1914–1915). While art is not limited to this single end, he felt that one of its two basic functions was "to create images which by clarity and harmony of form fulfill the need for vividly comprehensible appearance." In his mind, this was an essential first step toward the expression of inner meaning.

A highly imageable (apparent, legible, or visible) city in this peculiar sense would seem well formed, distinct, remarkable; it would invite the eye and the ear to greater attention and participation. The sensuous grasp upon such surroundings would not merely be simplified, but also extended and

deepened. Such a city would be one that could be apprehended over time as a pattern of high continuity with many distinctive parts clearly interconnected. The perceptive and familiar observer could absorb new sensuous impacts without disruption of his basic image, and each new impact would touch upon many previous elements. He would be well oriented, and he could move easily. He would be highly aware of his environment. The city of Venice might be an example of such a highly imageable environment. In the United States, one is tempted to cite parts of Manhattan, San Francisco, Boston, or perhaps the lake front of Chicago.

These are characterizations that flow from our definitions. The concept of imageability does not necessarily connote something fixed, limited, precise, unified, or regularly ordered, although it may sometimes have these qualities. Nor does it mean apparent at a glance, obvious, patent, or plain. The total environment to be patterned is highly complex, while the obvious image is soon boring, and can point to only a few features of the living world.

The imageability of city form will be the center of the study to follow. There are other basic properties in a beautiful environment: meaning or expressiveness, sensuous delight, rhythm, stimulus, choice. Our concentration on imageability does not deny their importance. Our purpose is simply to consider the need for identity and structure in our perceptual world, and to illustrate the special relevance of this quality to the particular case of the complex, shifting urban environment.

Since image development is a two-way process between observer and observed, it is possible to strengthen the image either by symbolic devices, by the retraining of the perceiver, or by reshaping one's surroundings. You can provide the viewer with a symbolic diagram of how the world fits together: a map or a set of written instructions. As long as he can fit reality to the diagram, he has a clue to the relatedness of things. You can even install a machine for giving directions, as has recently been done in New York (*New York Times* 1957). While such devices are extremely useful for providing condensed data on interconnections, they are also precarious, since orientation fails if the device is lost, and the device itself must constantly be referred and fitted to reality. [. . .] Moreover, the complete experience of interconnection, the full depth of a vivid image, is lacking.

You may also train the observer. Brown remarks that a maze through which subjects were asked to move blindfolded seemed to them at first to be one unbroken problem. On repetition, parts of the pattern, particularly the beginning and end, became familiar and assumed the character of localities. Finally, when they could tread the maze without error, the whole system seemed to have become one locality (Brown 1932). DeSilva describes the case of a boy who seemed to have “automatic” directional orientation, but proved to have been trained from infancy (by a mother who could not distinguish right from left) to respond to “the east side of the porch” or “the south end of the dresser” (deSilva 1931).

Shipton’s account of the reconnaissance for the ascent of Everest offers a dramatic case of such learning. Approaching Everest from a new direction, Shipton immediately recognized the main peaks and saddles that he knew from the north side. But the Sherpa guide accompanying him, to whom both sides were long familiar, had never realized that these were the same features, and he greeted the revelation with surprise and delight (Shipton 1952).

Kilpatrick describes the process of perceptual learning forced on an observer by new stimuli that no longer fit into previous images (Kilpatrick 1954). It begins with hypothetical forms that explain the new stimuli conceptually, while the illusion of the old forms persists. The personal experience of most of us will testify to this persistence of an illusory image long after its inadequacy is conceptually realized. We stare into the jungle and see only the sunlight on the green leaves, but a warning noise tells us that an animal is hidden there. The observer then learns to interpret the scene by singling out “give-away” clues and by reweighting previous signals. The camouflaged animal may now be picked up by the reflection of his eyes. Finally by repeated experience the entire pattern of perception is changed, and the observer need no longer consciously search for give-aways, or add new data to an old framework. He has achieved an image which will operate successfully in the new situation, seeming natural and right. Quite suddenly the hidden animal appears among the leaves, “as plain as day.”

In the same way, we must learn to see the hidden forms in the vast sprawl of our cities. We are not accustomed to organizing and imaging an artificial environment on such a large scale; yet our activities are pushing us toward that end.

Curt Sachs gives an example of a failure to make connections beyond a certain level (Sachs 1953). The voice and drumbeat of the North American Indian follow entirely different tempos, the two being perceived independently. Searching for a musical analogy of our own, he mentions our church services, where we do not think of coordinating the choir inside with the bells above.

In our vast metropolitan areas we do not connect the choir and the bells; like the Sherpa, we see only the sides of Everest and not the mountain. To extend and deepen our perception of the environment would be to continue a long biological and cultural development which has gone from the contact senses to the distant senses and from the distant senses to symbolic communications. Our thesis is that we are now able to develop our image of the environment by operation on the external physical shape as well as by an internal learning process. Indeed, the complexity of our environment now compels us to do so.

Primitive man was forced to improve his environmental image by adapting his perception to the given landscape. He could effect minor changes in his environment with cairns, beacons, or tree blazes, but substantial modifications for visual clarity or visual interconnection were confined to house sites or religious enclosures. Only powerful civilizations can begin to act on their total environment at a significant scale. The conscious remolding of the large-scale physical environment has been possible only recently, and so the problem of environmental imageability is a new one. Technically, we can now make completely new landscapes in a brief time, as in the Dutch polders. Here the designers are already at grips with the question of how to form the total scene so that it is easy for the human observer to identify its parts and to structure the whole (Granpré-Molière 1955).

We are rapidly building a new functional unit, the metropolitan region, but we have yet to grasp that this unit, too, should have its corresponding image. Suzanne Langer sets the problem in her capsule definition of architecture: “It is the total environment made visible” (Langer 1953).

THE CITY IMAGE AND ITS ELEMENTS

There seems to be a public image of any given city which is the overlap of many individual images.

Or perhaps there is a series of public images, each held by some significant number of citizens. Such group images are necessary if an individual is to operate successfully within his environment and to cooperate with his fellows. Each individual picture is unique, with some content that is rarely or never communicated, yet it approximates the public image, which, in different environments, is more or less compelling, more or less embracing.

This analysis limits itself to the effects of physical, perceptible objects. There are other influences on imageability, such as the social meaning of an area, its function, its history, or even its name. These will be glossed over, since the objective here is to uncover the role of form itself. It is taken for granted that in actual design form should be used to reinforce meaning, and not to negate it.

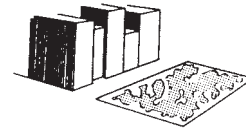
The contents of the city images so far studied, which are referable to physical forms, can conveniently be classified into five types of elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Indeed, these elements may be of more general application, since they seem to reappear in many types of environmental images. These elements may be defined as follows:

1. *Paths.* Paths are the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads. For many people, these are the predominant elements in their image. People observe the city while moving through it, and along these paths the other environmental elements are arranged and related.



2. *Edges.* Edges are the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls. They are lateral references rather than coordinate axes. Such edges may be barriers, more or less penetrable, which close one region off from another; or they may be seams, lines along which two regions are related and joined together. These edge elements, although probably not as dominant as paths, are for many people important organizing features, particularly in the role of hold-

ing together generalized areas, as in the outline of a city by water or wall.

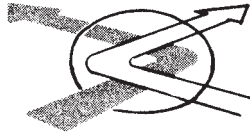


3. *Districts.* Districts are the medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters "inside of," and which are recognizable as having some common, identifying character. Always identifiable from the inside, they are also used for exterior reference if visible from the outside. Most people structure their city to some extent in this way, with individual differences as to whether paths or districts are the dominant elements. It seems to depend not only upon the individual but also upon the given city.

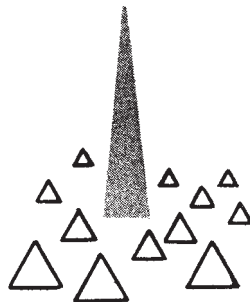


4. *Nodes.* Nodes are points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is traveling. They may be primarily junctions, places of a break in transportation, a crossing or convergence of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another. Or the nodes may be simply concentrations, which gain their importance from being the condensation of some use or physical character, as a street-corner hangout or an enclosed square. Some of these concentration nodes are the focus and epitome of a district, over which their influence radiates and of which they stand as a symbol. They may be called cores. Many nodes, of course, partake of the nature of both junctions and concentrations. The concept of node is related to the concept of path, since junctions are typically the convergence of paths, events on the journey. It is similarly related to the concept of district, since cores are typically the intensive foci of districts, their polarizing center. In any event, some

nodal points are to be found in almost every image, and in certain cases they may be the dominant feature.



5. *Landmarks.* Landmarks are another type of point-reference, but in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external. They are usually a rather simply defined physical object: building, sign, store, or mountain. Their use involves the singling out of one element from a host of possibilities. Some landmarks are distant ones, typically seen from many angles and distances, over the tops of smaller elements, and used as radial references. They may be within the city or at such a distance that for all practical purposes they symbolize a constant direction. Such are isolated towers, golden domes, great hills. Even a mobile point, like the sun, whose motion is sufficiently slow and regular, may be employed. Other landmarks are primarily local, being visible only in restricted localities and from certain approaches. These are the innumerable signs, store fronts, trees, doorknobs, and other urban detail, which fill in the image of most observers. They are frequently used clues of identity and even of structure, and seem to be increasingly relied upon as a journey becomes more and more familiar.



The image of a given physical reality may occasionally shift its type with different circumstances of viewing. Thus an expressway may be a path for the driver, and edge for the pedestrian. Or a central area may be a district when a city is organized on a medium scale, and a node when the entire metro-

politan area is considered. But the categories seem to have stability for a given observer when he is operating at a given level.

None of the element types isolated above exist in isolation in the real case. Districts are structured with nodes, defined by edges, penetrated by paths, and sprinkled with landmarks. Elements regularly overlap and pierce one another. If this analysis begins with the differentiation of the data into categories, it must end with their reintegration into the whole image. Our studies have furnished much information about the visual character of the element types. This will be discussed below. Only to a lesser extent, unfortunately, did the work make revelations about the interrelations between elements, or about image levels, image qualities, or the development of the image. These latter topics will be treated at the end of this chapter.

[...]

ELEMENT INTERRELATIONS

These elements are simply the raw material of the environmental image at the city scale. They must be patterned together to provide a satisfying form. The preceding discussions have gone as far as groups of similar elements (nets of paths, clusters of landmarks, mosaics of regions). The next logical step is to consider the interaction of pairs of unlike elements.

Such pairs may reinforce one another, resonate so that they enhance each other's power; or they may conflict and destroy themselves. A great landmark may dwarf and throw out of scale a small region at its base. Properly located, another landmark may fix and strengthen a core; placed off center, it may only mislead, as does the John Hancock Building in relation to Boston's Copley Square. A large street, with its ambiguous character of both edge and path, may penetrate and thus expose a region to view, while at the same time disrupting it. A landmark feature may be so alien to the character of a district as to dissolve the regional continuity, or it may, on the other hand, stand in just the contrast that intensifies that continuity.

Districts in particular, which tend to be of larger size than the other elements, contain within themselves, and are thus related to, various paths, nodes,

and landmarks. These other elements not only structure the region internally, they also intensify the identity of the whole by enriching and deepening its character. Beacon Hill in Boston is one example of this effect. In fact, the components of structure and identity (which are the parts of the image in which we are interested) seem to leapfrog as the observer moves up from level to level. The identity of a window may be structured into a pattern of windows, which is the cue for the identification of a building. The buildings themselves are interrelated so as to form an identifiable space, and so on.

Paths, which are dominant in many individual images, and which may be a principal resource in organization at the metropolitan scale, have intimate interrelations with other element types. Junction nodes occur automatically at major intersections and termini, and by their form should reinforce those critical moments in a journey. These nodes, in turn, are not only strengthened by the presence of landmarks (as is Copley Square) but provide a setting which almost guarantees attention for any such mark. The paths, again, are given identity and tempo not only by their own form, or by their nodal junctions, but by the regions they pass through, the edges they move along, and the landmarks distributed along their length.

All these elements operate together, in a context. It would be interesting to study the characteristics of various pairings: landmark-region, node-path, etc. Eventually, one should try to go beyond such pairings to consider total patterns.

Most observers seem to group their elements into intermediate organizations, which might be called complexes. The observer senses the complex as a whole whose parts are interdependent and are relatively fixed in relation to each other. Thus many Bostonians would be able to fit most of the major elements of the Back Bay, the Common, Beacon Hill, and the central shopping, into a single complex. This whole area, in the terms used by Brown (1932) in his experiments referred to earlier, has become one locality. For others, the size of their locality may be much smaller: the central shopping and the near edge of the Common alone, for example. Outside of this complex there are gaps of identity; the observer must run blind to the next whole, even if only momentarily. Although they are close together in physical reality, most people seem to feel

only a vague link between Boston's office and financial district and the central shopping district on Washington Street. This peculiar remoteness was also exemplified in the puzzling gap between Scollay Square and Dock Square which are only a block apart. The psychological distance between two localities may be much greater, or more difficult to surmount, than mere physical separation seems to warrant.

Our preoccupation here with parts rather than wholes is a necessary feature of an investigation in a primitive stage. After successful differentiation and understanding of parts, a study can move on to consideration of a total system. There were indications that the image may be a continuous field, the disturbance of one element in some way affecting all others. Even the recognition of an object is as much dependent on context as on the form of the object itself. One major distortion, such as a twisting of the shape of the Common, seemed to be reflected throughout the image of Boston. The disturbance of large-scale construction affected more than its immediate environs. But such field effects have hardly been studied here.

THE SHIFTING IMAGE

Rather than a single comprehensive image for the entire environment, there seemed to be sets of images, which more or less overlapped and interrelated. They were typically arranged in a series of levels, roughly by the scale of area involved, so that the observer moved as necessary from an image at street level to levels of a neighborhood, a city, or a metropolitan region.

This arrangement by levels is a necessity in a large and complex environment. Yet it imposes an extra burden of organization on the observer, especially if there is little relation between levels. If a tall building is unmistakable in the city-wide panorama yet unrecognizable from its base, then a chance has been lost to pin together the images at two different levels of organization. The State House on Beacon Hill, on the other hand, seems to pierce through several image levels. It holds a strategic place in the organization of the center.

Images may differ not only by the scale of area involved, but by viewpoint, time of day, or season. The image of Faneuil Hall as seen from the markets

should be related to its image from a car on the Artery. Washington-Street-by-night should have some continuity, some element of invariance, with Washington-Street-by-day. In order to accomplish this continuity in the face of sensuous confusion, many observers drained their images of visual content, using abstractions such as “restaurant” or “second street.” These will operate both day and night, driving or walking, rain or shine, albeit with some effort and loss.

The observer must also adjust his image to secular shifts in the physical reality around him. Los Angeles illustrated the practical and emotional strains induced as the image is confronted with constant physical changes. It would be important to know how to maintain continuity through these changes. Just as ties are needed between level and level of organization, so are continuities required which persist through a major change. This might be facilitated by the retention of an old tree, a path trace, or some regional character.

The sequence in which sketch maps were drawn seemed to indicate that the image develops, or grows, in different ways. This may perhaps have some relation to the way in which it first develops as an individual becomes familiar with his environment. Several types were apparent:

- a. Quite frequently, images were developed along, and then outward from, familiar lines of movement. Thus a map might be drawn as branching out from a point of entrance, or beginning from some base line such as Massachusetts Avenue.
- b. Other maps were begun by the construction of an enclosing outline, such as the Boston peninsula, which was then filled in toward the center.
- c. Still others, particularly in Los Angeles, began by laying down a basic repeating pattern (the path gridiron) and then adding detail.
- d. Somewhat fewer maps started as a set of adjacent regions, which were then detailed as to connections and interiors.
- e. A few Boston examples developed from a familiar kernel, a dense familiar element on which everything was ultimately hung.

The image itself was not a precise, miniaturized model of reality, reduced in scale and consistently abstracted. As a purposive simplification, it was

made by reducing, eliminating, or even adding elements to reality, by fusion and distortion, by relating and structuring the parts. It was sufficient, perhaps better, for its purpose if rearranged, distorted, “illogical.” It resembled that famous cartoon of the New Yorker’s view of the United States.

However distorted, there was a strong element of topological invariance with respect to reality. It was as if the map were drawn on an infinitely flexible rubber sheet; directions were twisted, distances stretched or compressed, large forms so changed from their accurate scale projection as to be at first unrecognizable. But the sequence was usually correct, the map was rarely torn and sewn back together in another order. This continuity is necessary if the image is to be of any value.

IMAGE QUALITY

Study of various individual images among the Bostonians revealed certain other distinctions between them. For example, images of an element differed between observers in terms of their relative density, i.e., the extent to which they were packed with detail. They might be relatively dense, as a picture of Newbury Street which identifies each building along its length, or relatively thin, when Newbury Street is characterized simply as a street bordered by old houses of mixed use.

Another distinction could be made between concrete, sensuously vivid images, and those which were highly abstract, generalized, and void of sensuous content. Thus the mental picture of a building might be vivid, involving its shape, color, texture, and detail, or be relatively abstract, the structure being identified as “a restaurant” or the “third building from the corner.”

Vivid does not necessarily equate with dense, nor thin with abstract. An image might be both dense and abstract, as in the case of the taxicab dispatcher’s knowledge of a city street, which related house numbers to uses along block after block, yet could not describe those buildings in any concrete sense.

Images could be further distinguished according to their structural quality: the manner in which their parts were arranged and interrelated. There were four stages along a continuum of increasing structural precision:

- a. The various elements were free; there was no structure or interrelation between parts. We found no pure cases of this type, but several images were definitely disjointed, with vast gaps and many unrelated elements. Here rational movement was impossible without outside help, unless a systematic coverage of the entire area were to be resorted to (which meant the building up of a new structure on the spot).
- b. In others, the structure became positional; the parts were roughly related in terms of their general direction and perhaps even relative distance from each other, while still remaining disconnected. One subject in particular always related herself to a few elements, without knowing definite connections between them. Movement was accomplished by searching, by moving out in the correct general direction, while weaving back and forth to cover a band and having an estimate of distance to correct overshooting.
- c. Most often, perhaps, the structure was flexible; parts were connected one to the other, but in a loose and flexible manner, as if by limp or elastic ties. The sequence of events was known, but the mental map might be quite distorted, and its distortion might shift at different moments. To quote one subject: "I like to think of a few focal points and how to get from one to another, and the rest I don't bother to learn." With a flexible structure, movement was easier, since it proceeded along known paths, through known sequences. Motion between pairs of elements not habitually connected, or along other than habitual paths, might still be very confusing, however.
- d. As connections multiplied, the structure tended to become rigid; parts were firmly interconnected in all dimensions; and any distortions became built in. The possessor of such a map can move much more freely, and can interconnect new points at will. As the density of the image builds up, it begins to take on the characteristics of a total field, in which interaction is possible in any direction and at any distance.

These characteristics of structure might apply in different ways at different levels. For example, two city regions may each possess rigid internal structures, and both connect at some seam or node. But this connection may fail to interlock with the internal structures, so that the connection itself is

simply flexible. This effect seemed to occur for many Bostonians at Scollay Square, for example.

Total structure may also be distinguished in a still different way. For some, their images were organized rather instantaneously, as a series of wholes and parts descending from the general to the particular. This organization had the quality of a static map. Connection was made by moving up to the necessary bridging generality, and back down to the desired particular. To go from City Hospital to the Old North Church, for example, one might first consider that the hospital was in the South End and that the South End was in central Boston, then locate the North End in Boston and the church within the North End. This type of image might be called hierarchical.

For others, the image was put together in a more dynamic way, parts being interconnected by a sequence over time (even if the time was quite brief), and pictured as though seen by a motion picture camera. It was more closely related to the actual experience of moving through the city. This might be called a continuous organization, employing unrolling interconnections instead of static hierarchies.

One might infer from this that the images of greatest value are those which most closely approach a strong total field: dense, rigid, and vivid; which make use of all element types and form characteristics without narrow concentration; and which can be put together either hierarchically or continuously, as occasion demands. We may find, of course, that such an image is rare or impossible, that there are strong individual or cultural types which cannot transcend their basic abilities. In this case, an environment should be geared to the appropriate cultural type, or shaped in many ways so as to satisfy the varying demands of the individuals who inhabit it.

We are continuously engaged in the attempt to organize our surroundings, to structure and identify them. Various environments are more or less amenable to such treatment. When reshaping cities it should be possible to give them a form which facilitates these organizing efforts rather than frustrates them.

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“Author’s Introduction” and “The Uses of Sidewalks: Contact”

from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)

Jane Jacobs

Editors’ Introduction



By the 1950s, the well-intentioned but misguided efforts of American city planners to create more healthful and efficient living environments was manifesting itself in large-scale urban renewal schemes and central city freeway construction projects. In 1961, Jane Jacobs’ book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was published and immediately shocked the world of city planning. Jacobs (1916–2006) lived in Greenwich Village, where she was raising three children and engaging in neighborhood protests against local renewal projects and freeways. She wrote for the magazine *Architectural Forum*, where to her surprise and with no training she had been quickly elevated to the status of planning and urban development “expert.” This experience gave her a lifelong skepticism of credentialed expertise. The book railed against abstract “drawing board” planning, and celebrated the dynamic qualities of cities and urban life.

Jacobs was fascinated by cities, how they worked and supported daily life. She learned about cities through close looking, and developed her theories through inductive analysis, generalizing from the particulars that she directly experienced. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she describes the four necessary physical conditions for dynamic urban life: multifunctional neighborhoods, short blocks and connected street systems, varied age residential areas, and a high concentration of people. These conditions help sustain a diversity of people and provide the critical mass to support urban amenities and services. To Jacobs, cities are living organisms in which streets are the “lifeblood.” She describes the wealth of everyday life happening there as a “sidewalk ballet.” Dense, street-oriented residential buildings mixed with small-scale local commercial shops provide “eyes on the street” that keep the city safe.

The two readings from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* reprinted here summarize Jane Jacobs’ attack on the planning establishment and present some of Jacobs’ most important ideas regarding the social life of streets. In “The Uses of Sidewalks: Contact” Jacobs describes how casual interaction with others on everyday urban streets leads to social cohesion and a sense of belonging. The exquisitely articulated arguments she presents, along with the arguments presented in several other chapters on streets, began the rehabilitation of city streets as public spaces.

When *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was published, Jacobs was disparaged by some of the most established planning professionals and academics, most particularly Lewis Mumford, on the grounds that since she had no professional training, she had no right to theorize about planning. Her methods were deemed unscientific, anecdotal, and arbitrary. But to those dismayed by the destruction of inner city neighborhoods and disaffected by the sterility of modern developments, Jacobs’ celebration of the “messy” street life of vibrant cities struck home. She has inspired and continues to inspire generations of urban planners and architects, many of whom hold *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* to be the seminal book of the urban design field. Her revaluing of city streets as important public social spaces was a major influence on

the later work of Allan B. Jacobs, Donald Appleyard, Peter Bosselmann, and a host of other urban design researchers and practitioners. Her ideas about the important qualities of urban streets and neighborhoods have been implemented in cities across North America and elsewhere, in the form of design guidelines that attempt to shape urban forms so as to achieve “eyes on the street,” small blocks, and connected street patterns. The design guidelines prepared during the 1990s for Vancouver’s False Creek North neighborhood are notable examples of this practice.

In the 1960s, Jane Jacobs moved with her family to Toronto, where she led the successful fight against the Spadina Expressway. She was a strong activist voice within Toronto and Canada until her death in 2006.

Jane Jacobs’ other writings include *The Economy of Cities* (New York: Random House, 1969); *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House, 1984); *Systems of Survival* (New York: Random House, 1992); *The Nature of Economies* (New York: Random House, 1998); and *Dark Age Ahead* (New York: Random House, 2004). These books place the city in larger historical and economic contexts and explore fundamental human values. A biography of her life and ideas by Max Allen is *Ideas that Matter: The Worlds of Jane Jacobs* (Owen Sound, Ont.: Ginger Press, 1997).

Works that offer perspectives on Jane Jacobs’ early activism in New York City include Roberta Brandes Gratz, *The Battle for Gotham: New York in the Shadow of Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs* (New York: Nation Books, 2010) and Anthony Flint, *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York’s Master Builder and Transformed the American City* (New York: Random House, 2009). Other books that offer insights into her life and work are Glenna Lang, *Genius of Common Sense: Jane Jacobs and the Story of The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 2009) and Alice Sparberg Alexiou, *Jane Jacobs: Urban Visionary* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).



AUTHOR’S INTRODUCTION

This book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding. It is also, and mostly, an attempt to introduce new principles of city planning and rebuilding, different and even opposite from those now taught in everything from schools of architecture and planning to the Sunday supplements and women’s magazines. My attack is not based on quibbles about rebuilding methods or hairsplitting about fashions in design. It is an attack, rather, on the principles and aims that have shaped modern, orthodox city planning and rebuilding.

In setting forth different principles, I shall mainly be writing about common, ordinary things: for instance, what kinds of city streets are safe and what kinds are not; why some city parks are marvelous and others are vice traps and death traps; why some slums stay slums and other slums regenerate themselves even against financial and official opposition; what makes downtowns shift their centers; what, if anything, is a city neighborhood, and what jobs, if any, neighborhoods in great cities do. In short, I shall be writing about how cities work in real life, because this is the only way to learn what

principles of planning and what practices in rebuilding can promote social and economic vitality in cities, and what practices and principles will deaden these attributes.

There is a wistful myth that if only we had enough money to spend – the figure is usually put at a hundred billion dollars – we could wipe out all our slums in ten years, reverse decay in the great, dull, gray belts that were yesterday’s and day-before-yesterday’s suburbs, anchor the wandering middle class and its wandering tax money, and perhaps even solve the traffic problem.

But look what we have built with the first several billions. Low-income projects that become worse centers of delinquency, vandalism and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace. Middle-income housing projects which are truly marvels of dullness and regimentation, sealed against any buoyancy or vitality of city life. Luxury housing projects that mitigate their inanity, or try to, with a vapid vulgarity. Cultural centers that are unable to support a good bookstore. Civic centers that are avoided by everyone but bums, who have fewer choices of loitering place than others. Commercial centers that are

lackluster imitations of standardized suburban chain-store shopping. Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders. Expressways that eviscerate great cities. This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities.

Under the surface, these accomplishments prove even poorer than their poor pretenses. They seldom aid the city areas around them, as in theory they are supposed to. These amputated areas typically develop galloping gangrene. To house people in this planned fashion, price tags are fastened on the population, and each sorted-out chunk of price-tagged populace lives in growing suspicion and tension against the surrounding city. When two or more such hostile islands are juxtaposed the result is called "a balanced neighborhood". Monopolistic shopping centers and monumental cultural centers cloak, under the public relations hooahaw, the subtraction of commerce, and of culture too, from the intimate and casual life of cities.

That such wonders may be accomplished, people who get marked with the planners' hex signs are pushed about, expropriated, and uprooted much as if they were the subjects of a conquering power. Thousands upon thousands of small businesses are destroyed, and their proprietors ruined, with hardly a gesture at compensation. Whole communities are torn apart and sown to the winds, with a reaping of cynicism, resentment and despair that must be heard and seen to be believed. A group of clergymen in Chicago, appalled at the fruits of planned city rebuilding there, asked,

Could Job have been thinking of Chicago when he wrote:

Here are men that alter their neighbor's landmark . . . shoulder the poor aside, conspire to oppress the friendless.

Reap they the field that is none of theirs, strip they the vineyard wrongfully seized from its owner . . .

A cry goes up from the city streets, where wounded men lie groaning . . .

If so, he was also thinking of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, St. Louis, San Francisco and a number of other places. The economic rationale of current city rebuilding is a hoax. The economics of city rebuilding do not rest soundly on reasoned

investment of public tax subsidies, as urban renewal theory proclaims, but also on vast, involuntary subsidies wrung out of helpless site victims. And the increased tax returns from such sites, accruing to the cities as a result of this "investment," are a mirage, a pitiful gesture against the ever increasing sums of public money needed to combat disintegration and instability that flow from the cruelly shaken-up city. The means to planned city rebuilding are as deplorable as the ends.

Meantime, all the art and science of city planning are helpless to stem decay – and the spiritlessness that precedes decay – in ever more massive swatches of cities. Nor can this decay be laid, reassuringly, to lack of opportunity to apply the arts of planning. It seems to matter little whether they are applied or not. Consider the Morningside Heights area in New York City. According to planning theory it should not be in trouble at all, for it enjoys a great abundance of parkland, campus, playground and other open spaces. It has plenty of grass. It occupies high and pleasant ground with magnificent river views. It is a famous educational center with splendid institutions – Columbia University, Union Theological Seminary, the Juilliard School of Music, and half a dozen others of eminent respectability. It is the beneficiary of good hospitals and churches. It has no industries. Its streets are zoned in the main against "incompatible uses" intruding into the preserves for solidly constructed, roomy, middle- and upper-class apartments. Yet by the early 1950's Morningside Heights was becoming a slum so swiftly, the surly kind of slum in which people fear to walk the streets, that the situation posed a crisis for the institutions. They and the planning arms of the city government got together, applied more planning theory, wiped out the most run-down part of the area and built in its stead a middle-income cooperative project complete with shopping center, and a public housing project, all interspersed with air, light, sunshine and landscaping. This was hailed as a great demonstration in city saving.

After that, Morningside Heights went downhill even faster.

Nor is this an unfair or irrelevant example. In city after city, precisely the wrong areas, in the light of planning theory, are decaying. Less noticed, but equally significant, in city after city the wrong areas, in the light of planning theory, are refusing to decay.

Cities are an immense laboratory of trial and error, failure and success, in city building and city design. This is the laboratory in which city planning should have been learning and forming and testing its theories. Instead the practitioners and teachers of this discipline (if such it can be called) have ignored the study of success and failure in real life, have been incurious about the reasons for unexpected success, and are guided instead by principles derived from the behavior and appearance of towns, suburbs, tuberculosis sanatoria, fairs, and imaginary dream cities – from anything but cities themselves.

If it appears that the rebuilt portions of cities and the endless new developments spreading beyond the cities are reducing city and countryside alike to a monotonous, unnourishing gruel, this is not strange. It all comes, first-, second-, third- or fourth-hand, out of the same intellectual dish of mush, a mush in which the qualities, necessities, advantages and behavior of great cities have been utterly confused with the qualities, necessities, advantages and behavior of other and more inert types of settlements.

There is nothing economically or socially inevitable about either the decay of old cities or the fresh-minted decadence of the new unurban urbanization. On the contrary, no other aspect of our economy and society has been more purposefully manipulated for a full quarter of a century to achieve precisely what we are getting. Extraordinary governmental financial incentives have been required to achieve this degree of monotony, sterility and vulgarity. Decades of preaching, writing and exhorting by experts have gone into convincing us and our legislators that mush like this must be good for us, as long as it comes bedded with grass.

Automobiles are often conveniently tagged as the villains responsible for the ills of cities and the disappointments and futilities of city planning. But the destructive effects of automobiles are much less a cause than a symptom of our incompetence at city building. Of course planners, including the highwaymen with fabulous sums of money and enormous powers at their disposal, are at a loss to make automobiles and cities compatible with one another. They do not know what to do with automobiles in cities because they do not know how to plan for workable and vital cities anyhow – with or without automobiles.

The simple needs of automobiles are more easily understood and satisfied than the complex needs of cities, and a growing number of planners and designers have come to believe that if they can only solve the problems of traffic, they will thereby have solved the major problem of cities. Cities have much more intricate economic and social concerns than automobile traffic. How can you know what to try with traffic until you know how the city itself works, and what else it needs to do with its streets? You can't.

[...]

THE USES OF SIDEWALKS: CONTACT

Reformers have long observed city people loitering on busy corners, hanging around in candy stores and bars and drinking soda pop on stoops, and have passed a judgment, the gist of which is: "This is deplorable! If these people had decent homes and a more private or bosky outdoor place, they wouldn't be on the street!"

This judgment represents a profound misunderstanding of cities. It makes no more sense than to drop in at a testimonial banquet in a hotel and conclude that if these people had wives who could cook, they would give their parties at home.

The point of both the testimonial banquet and the social life of city sidewalks is precisely that they are public. They bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion.

Nobody can keep open house in a great city. Nobody wants to. And yet if interesting, useful and significant contacts among the people of cities are confined to acquaintanceships suitable for private life, the city becomes stultified. Cities are full of people with whom, from your viewpoint, or mine, or any other individual's, a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either.

In speaking about city sidewalk safety, I mentioned how necessary it is that there should be, in the brains behind the eyes on the street, an almost unconscious assumption of general street support when the chips are down – when a citizen has to choose, for instance, whether he will take

responsibility, or abdicate it, in combating barbarism or protecting strangers. There is a short word for this assumption of support: trust. The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts. It grows out of people stopping by at the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man, comparing opinions with other customers at the bakery and nodding hello to the two boys drinking pop on the stoop, eying the girls while waiting to be called for dinner, admonishing the children, hearing about a job from the hardware man and borrowing a dollar from the druggist, admiring the new babies and sympathizing over the way a coat faded. Customs vary: in some neighborhoods people compare notes on their dogs; in others they compare notes on their landlords.

Most of it is ostensibly utterly trivial but the sum is not trivial at all. The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level – most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone – is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need. The absence of this trust is a disaster to a city street. Its cultivation cannot be institutionalized. And above all, *it implies no private commitments.*

I have seen a striking difference between presence and absence of casual public trust on two sides of the same wide street in East Harlem, composed of residents of roughly the same incomes and same races. On the old-city side, which was full of public places and the sidewalk loitering so deplored by Utopian minders of other people's leisure, the children were being kept well in hand. On the project side of the street across the way, the children, who had a fire hydrant open beside their play area, were behaving destructively, drenching the open windows of houses with water, squirting it on adults who ignorantly walked on the project side of the street, throwing it into the windows of cars as they went by. Nobody dared to stop them. These were anonymous children, and the identities behind them were an unknown. What if you scolded or stopped them? Who would back you up over there in the blind-eyed Turf? Would you get, instead, revenge? Better to keep out of it. Impersonal city streets make anonymous people, and this is not a matter of esthetic quality nor of

a mystical emotional effect in architectural scale. It is a matter of what kinds of tangible enterprises sidewalks have, and therefore of how people use the sidewalks in practical, everyday life.

The casual public sidewalk life of cities ties directly into other types of public life, of which I shall mention one as illustrative, although there is no end to their variety.

Formal types of local city organizations are frequently assumed by planners and even by some social workers to grow in direct, common-sense fashion out of announcements of meetings, the presence of meeting rooms, and the existence of problems of obvious public concern. Perhaps they grow so in suburbs and towns. They do not grow so in cities.

Formal public organizations in cities require an informal public life underlying them, mediating between them and the privacy of the people of the city. We catch a hint of what happens by contrasting, again, a city area possessing a public sidewalk life with a city area lacking it, as told about in the report of a settlement-house social researcher who was studying problems relating to public schools in a section of New York City:

Mr. W— (principal of an elementary school) was questioned on the effect of J— Houses on the school, and the uprooting of the community around the school. He felt that there had been many effects and of these most were negative. He mentioned that the project had torn out numerous institutions for socializing. The present atmosphere of the project was in no way similar to the gaiety of the streets before the project was built. He noted that in general there seemed fewer people on the streets because there were fewer places for people to gather. He also contended that before the projects were built the Parents Association had been very strong, and now there were only very few active members.

Mr. W— was wrong in one respect. There were not fewer places (or at any rate there was not less space) for people to gather in the project, if we count places deliberately planned for constructive socializing. Of course there were no bars, no candy stores, no hole-in-the-wall *bodegas*, no restaurants in the project. But the project under discussion was equipped with a model complement

of meeting rooms, craft, art and game rooms, outdoor benches, malls, etc., enough to gladden the heart of even the Garden City advocates.

Why are such places dead and useless without the most determined efforts and expense to inveigle users – and then to maintain control over the users? What services do the public sidewalk and its enterprises fulfill that these planned gathering places do not? And why? How does an informal public sidewalk life bolster a more formal, organizational public life?

To understand such problems – to understand why drinking pop on the stoop differs from drinking pop in the game room, and why getting advice from the grocer or the bartender differs from getting advice from either your next-door neighbor or from an institutional lady who may be hand-in-glove with an institutional landlord – we must look into the matter of city privacy.

Privacy is precious in cities. It is indispensable. Perhaps it is precious and indispensable everywhere, but most places you cannot get it. In small settlements everyone knows your affairs. In the city everyone does not. Only those you choose to tell will know much about you. This is one of the attributes of cities that is precious to most city people, whether their incomes are high or their incomes are low, whether they are white or colored, whether they are old inhabitants or new, and it is a gift of great-city life deeply cherished and jealously guarded.

Architectural and planning literature deals with privacy in terms of windows, overlooks, sight lines. The idea is that if no one from outside can peek into where you live – behold, privacy. This is simple-minded. Window privacy is the easiest commodity in the world to get. You just pull down the shades or adjust the blinds. The privacy of keeping one's personal affairs to those selected to know them, and the privacy of having reasonable control over who shall make inroads on your time and when, are rare commodities in most of this world, however, and they have nothing to do with the orientation of windows.

Anthropologist Elena Padilla, author of *Up from Puerto Rico*, describing Puerto Rican life in a poor and squalid district of New York, tells how much people know about each other – who is to be trusted and who not, who is defiant of the law and who upholds it, who is competent and well

informed and who is inept and ignorant – and how these things are known from the public life of the sidewalk and its associated enterprises. These are matters of public character. But she also tells how select are those permitted to drop into the kitchen for a cup of coffee, how strong are the ties, and how limited the number of a person's genuine confidants, those who share in a person's private life and private affairs. She tells how it is not considered dignified for everyone to know one's affairs. Nor is it considered dignified to snoop on others beyond the face presented in public. It does violence to a person's privacy and rights. In this, the people she describes are essentially the same as the people of the mixed, Americanized city street on which I live, and essentially the same as the people who live in high-income apartments or fine town houses, too.

A good city street neighborhood achieves a marvel of balance between its people's determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact, enjoyment or help from the people around. This balance is largely made up of small, sensitively managed details, practiced and accepted so casually that they are normally taken for granted.

Perhaps I can best explain this subtle but all-important balance in terms of the stores where people leave keys for their friends, a common custom in New York. In our family, for example, when a friend wants to use our place while we are away for a weekend or everyone happens to be out during the day, or a visitor for whom we do not wish to wait up is spending the night, we tell such a friend that he can pick up the key at the delicatessen across the street. Joe Cornacchia, who keeps the delicatessen, usually has a dozen or so keys at a time for handing out like this. He has a special drawer for them.

Now why do I, and many others, select Joe as a logical custodian for keys? Because we trust him, first, to be a responsible custodian, but equally important because we know that he combines a feeling of good will with a feeling of no personal responsibility about our private affairs. Joe considers it no concern of his whom we choose to permit in our places and why.

Around on the other side of our block, people leave their keys at a Spanish grocery. On the other side of Joe's block, people leave them at the candy

store. Down a block they leave them at the coffee shop, and a few hundred feet around the corner from that, in a barber shop. Around one corner from two fashionable blocks of town houses and apartments in the Upper East Side, people leave their keys in a butcher shop and a bookshop; around another corner they leave them in a cleaner's and a drug store. In unfashionable East Harlem keys are left with at least one florist, in bakeries, in luncheonettes, in Spanish and Italian groceries.

The point, wherever they are left, is not the kind of ostensible service that the enterprise offers, but the kind of proprietor it has.

A service like this cannot be formalized. Identifications . . . questions . . . insurance against mishaps. The all-essential line between public service and privacy would be transgressed by institutionalization. Nobody in his right mind would leave his key in such a place. The service must be given as a favor by someone with an unshakable understanding of the difference between a person's key and a person's private life, or it cannot be given at all.

Or consider the line drawn by Mr. Jaffe at the candy store around our corner – a line so well understood by his customers and by other storekeepers too that they can spend their whole lives in its presence and never think about it consciously. One ordinary morning last winter, Mr. Jaffe, whose formal business name is Bernie, and his wife, whose formal business name is Ann, supervised the small children crossing at the corner on the way to P.S. 41, as Bernie always does because he sees the need; lent an umbrella to one customer and a dollar to another; took custody of two keys; took in some packages for people in the next building who were away; lectured two youngsters who asked for cigarettes; gave street directions; took custody of a watch to give the repair man across the street when he opened later; gave out information on the range of rents in the neighborhood to an apartment seeker; listened to a tale of domestic difficulty and offered reassurance; told some rowdies they could not come in unless they behaved and then defined (and got) good behavior; provided an incidental forum for half a dozen conversations among customers who dropped in for oddments; set aside certain newly arrived papers and magazines for regular customers who would depend on getting them; advised a mother who came for a birthday present not to get the ship-model kit because

another child going to the same birthday party was giving that; and got a back copy (this was for me) of the previous day's newspaper out of the deliverer's surplus returns when he came by.

After considering this multiplicity of extramercialising services I asked Bernie, "Do you ever introduce your customers to each other?"

He looked startled at the idea, even dismayed. "No," he said thoughtfully.

"That would just not be advisable. Sometimes, if I know two customers who are in at the same time have an interest in common, I bring up the subject in conversation and let them carry it on from there if they want to. But oh no, I wouldn't introduce them."

When I told this to an acquaintance in a suburb, she promptly assumed that Mr. Jaffe felt that to make an introduction would be to step above his social class. Not at all. In our neighborhood, storekeepers like the Jaffes enjoy an excellent social status, that of businessmen. In income they are apt to be the peers of the general run of customers and in independence they are the superiors. Their advice, as men or women of common sense and experience, is sought and respected. They are well known as individuals, rather than unknown as class symbols. No; this is that almost unconsciously enforced, well-balanced line showing, the line between the city public world and the world of privacy.

This line can be maintained, without awkwardness to anyone, because of the great plenty of opportunities for public contact in the enterprises along the sidewalks, or on the sidewalks themselves as people move to and fro or deliberately loiter when they feel like it, and also because of the presence of many public hosts, so to speak, proprietors of meeting-places like Bernie's where one is free either to hang around or dash in and out, no strings attached.

Under this system, it is possible in a city street neighborhood to know all kinds of people without unwelcome entanglements, without boredom, necessity for excuses, explanations, fears of giving offense, embarrassments respecting impositions or commitments, and all such paraphernalia of obligations which can accompany less limited relationships. It is possible to be on excellent sidewalk terms with people who are very different from

oneself, and even, as time passes, on familiar public terms with them. Such relationships can, and do, endure for many years, for decades; they could never have formed without that line, much less endured. They form precisely because they are by-the-way to people's normal public sorties.

"Togetherness" is a fittingly nauseating name for an old ideal in planning theory. This ideal is that if anything is shared among people, much should be shared. "Togetherness," apparently a spiritual resource of the new suburbs, works destructively in cities. The requirement that much shall be shared drives city people apart.

When an area of a city lacks a sidewalk life, the people of the place must enlarge their private lives if they are to have anything approaching equivalent contact with their neighbors. They must settle for some form of "togetherness," in which more is shared with one another than in the life of the sidewalks, or else they must settle for lack of contact. Inevitably the outcome is one or the other; it has to be; and either has distressing results.

In the case of the first outcome, where people do share much, they become exceedingly choosy as to who their neighbors are, or with whom they associate at all. They have to become so. A friend of mine, Penny Kostritsky, is unwittingly and unwillingly in this fix on a street in Baltimore. Her street of nothing but residences, embedded in an area of almost nothing but residences, has been experimentally equipped with a charming sidewalk park. The sidewalk has been widened and attractively paved, wheeled traffic discouraged from the narrow street roadbed, trees and flowers planted, and a piece of play sculpture is to go in. All these are splendid ideas so far as they go.

However, there are no stores. The mothers from nearby blocks who bring small children here, and come here to find some contact with others themselves, perforce go into the houses of acquaintances along the street to warm up in winter, to make telephone calls, to take their children in emergencies to the bathroom. Their hostesses offer them coffee, for there is no other place to get coffee, and naturally considerable social life of this kind has arisen around the park. Much is shared.

Mrs. Kostritsky, who lives in one of the conveniently located houses, and who has two small children, is in the thick of this narrow and accidental social life. "I have lost the advantage of living

in the city," she says, "without getting the advantages of living in the suburbs." Still more distressing, when mothers of different income or color or educational background bring their children to the street park, they and their children are rudely and pointedly ostracized. They fit awkwardly into the suburbanlike sharing of private lives that has grown in default of city sidewalk life. The park lacks benches purposely; the "togetherness" people ruled them out because they might be interpreted as an invitation to people who cannot fit in.

"If only we had a couple of stores on the street," Mrs. Kostritsky laments.

"If only there were a grocery store or a drug store or a snack joint. Then the telephone calls and the warming up and the gathering could be done naturally in public, and then people would act more decent to each other because everybody would have a right to be here."

Much the same thing that happens in this sidewalk park without a city public life happens sometimes in middle-class projects and colonies, such as Chatham Village in Pittsburgh for example, a famous model of Garden City planning.

The houses here are grouped in colonies around shared interior lawns and play yards, and the whole development is equipped with other devices for close sharing, such as a residents' club which holds parties, dances, reunions, has ladies' activities like bridge and sewing parties, and holds dances and parties for the children. There is no public life here, in any city sense. There are differing degrees of extended private life.

Chatham Village's success as a "model" neighborhood where much is shared has required that the residents be similar to one another in their standards, interests and backgrounds. In the main they are middle-class professionals and their families.¹ It has also required that residents set themselves distinctly apart from the different people in the surrounding city; these are in the main also middle class, but lower middle class, and this is too different for the degree of chumminess that neighborliness in Chatham Village entails.

The inevitable insularity (and homogeneity) of Chatham Village has practical consequences. As one illustration, the junior high school serving the area has problems, as all schools do. Chatham

Village is large enough to dominate the elementary school to which its children go, and therefore to work at helping solve this school's problems. To deal with the junior high, however, Chatham Village's people must cooperate with entirely different neighborhoods. But there is no public acquaintanceship, no foundation of casual public trust, no cross-connections with the necessary people – and no practice or ease in applying the most ordinary techniques of city public life at lowly levels. Feeling helpless, as indeed they are, some Chatham Village families move away when their children reach junior high age; others contrive to send them to private high schools. Ironically, just such neighborhood islands as Chatham Village are encouraged in orthodox planning on the specific grounds that cities need the talents and stabilizing influence of the middle class. Presumably these qualities are to seep out by osmosis.

People who do not fit happily into such colonies eventually get out, and in time managements become sophisticated in knowing who among applicants will fit in. Along with basic similarities of standards, values and backgrounds, the arrangement seems to demand a formidable amount of forbearance and tact.

City residential planning that depends, for contact among neighbors, on personal sharing of this sort, and that cultivates it, often does work well socially, if rather narrowly, *for self-selected upper-middle-class people*. It solves easy problems for an easy kind of population. So far as I have been able to discover, it fails to work, however, even on its own terms, *with any other kind of population*.

The more common outcome in cities, where people are faced with the choice of sharing much or nothing, is nothing. In city areas that lack a natural and casual public life, it is common for residents to isolate themselves from each other to a fantastic degree. If mere contact with your neighbors threatens to entangle you in their private lives, or entangle them in yours, and if you cannot be so careful who your neighbors are as self-selected upper-middle-class people can be, the logical solution is absolutely to avoid friendliness or casual offers of help. Better to stay thoroughly distant. As a practical result, the ordinary public jobs – like keeping children in hand – for which people must take a little personal initiative, or those for which they must band together in limited common purposes,

go undone. The abysses this opens up can be almost unbelievable.

For example, in one New York City project which is designed – like all orthodox residential city planning – for sharing much or nothing, a remarkably outgoing woman prided herself that she had become acquainted, by making a deliberate effort, with the mothers of everyone of the ninety families in her building. She called on them. She buttonholed them at the door or in the hall. She struck up conversations if she sat beside them on a bench.

It so happened that her eight-year-old son, one day, got stuck in the elevator and was left there without help for more than two hours, although he screamed, cried and pounded. The next day the mother expressed her dismay to one of her ninety acquaintances. "Oh, was that *your* son?" said the other woman. "I didn't know whose boy he was. If I had realized he was *your* son I would have helped him."

This woman, who had not behaved in any such insanely calloused fashion on her old public street – to which she constantly returned, by the way, for public life – was afraid of a possible entanglement that might not be kept easily on a public plane.

Dozens of illustrations of this defense can be found wherever the choice is sharing much or nothing. A thorough and detailed report by Ellen Lurie, a social worker in East Harlem, on life in a low-income project there, has this to say:

It is . . . extremely important to recognize that for considerably complicated reasons, many adults either don't want to become involved in any friendship-relationships at all with their neighbors, or, if they do succumb to the need for some form of society, they strictly limit themselves to one or two friends, and no more. Over and over again, wives repeated their husband's warning:

"I'm not to get too friendly with anyone. My husband doesn't believe in it."

"People are too gossipy and they could get us in a lot of trouble."

"It's best to mind your own business."

One woman, Mrs. Abraham, always goes out the back door of the building because she doesn't want to interfere with the people standing around in the front. Another man, Mr. Colan . . . won't

let his wife make any friends in the project, because he doesn't trust the people here. They have four children, ranging from 8 years to 14, but they are not allowed downstairs alone, because the parents are afraid someone will hurt them.² What happens then is that all sorts of barriers to insure self-protection are being constructed by many families. To protect their children from a neighborhood they aren't sure of, they keep them upstairs in the apartment. To protect themselves, they make few, if any, friends. Some are afraid that friends will become angry or envious and make up a story to report to management, causing them great trouble. If the husband gets a bonus (which he decides not to report) and the wife buys new curtains, the visiting friends will see and might tell the management, who, in turn, investigates and issues a rent increase. Suspicion and fear of trouble often outweigh any need for neighborly advice and help. For these families the sense of privacy has already been extensively violated. The deepest secrets, all the family skeletons, are well known not only to management but often to other public agencies, such as the Welfare Department. To preserve any last remnants of privacy, they choose to avoid close relationships with others. This same phenomenon may be found to a much lesser degree in non-planned slum housing, for there too it is often necessary for other reasons to build up these forms of self-protection. But, it is surely true that this withdrawing from the society of others is much more extensive in planned housing. Even in England, this suspicion of the neighbors and the ensuing aloofness was found in studies of planned towns. Perhaps this pattern is nothing more than an elaborate group mechanism to protect and preserve inner dignity in the face of so many outside pressures to conform.

Along with nothingness, considerable "togetherness" can be found in such places, however. Mrs. Lurie reports on this type of relationship:

Often two women from two different buildings will meet in the laundry room, recognize each other; although they may never have spoken a single word to each other back on 99th Street, suddenly here they become "best friends." If

one of these two already has a friend or two in her own building, the other is likely to be drawn into that circle and begins to make her friendships, not with women on her floor, but rather on her friend's floor.

These friendships do not go into an ever-widening circle. There are certain definite well-traveled paths in the project, and after a while no new people are met.

Mrs. Lurie, who works at community organization in East Harlem, with remarkable success, has looked into the history of many past attempts at project tenant organization. She has told me that "togetherness," itself, is one of the factors that make this kind of organization so difficult. "These projects are not lacking in natural leaders," she says.

They contain people with real ability, wonderful people many of them, but the typical sequence is that in the course of organization leaders have found each other, gotten all involved in each others' social lives, and have ended up talking to nobody but each other. They have not found their followers. Everything tends to degenerate into ineffective cliques, as a natural course. There is no normal public life. Just the mechanics of people learning what is going on is so difficult. It all makes the simplest social gain extra hard for these people.

Residents of unplanned city residential areas that lack neighborhood commerce and sidewalk life seem sometimes to follow the same course as residents of public projects when faced with the choice of sharing much or nothing. Thus researchers hunting the secrets of the social structure in a dull gray-area district of Detroit came to the unexpected conclusion there was no social structure.

The social structure of sidewalk life hangs partly on what can be called self-appointed public characters. A public character is anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. A public character need have no special talents or wisdom to fulfill his function – although he often does. He just needs to be present, and there need to be enough of his counterparts. His main qualification is that he *is* public, that he talks

to lots of different people. In this way, news travels that is of sidewalk interest.

Most public sidewalk characters are steadily stationed in public places. They are storekeepers or barkeepers or the like. These are the basic public characters. All other public characters of city sidewalks depend on them – if only indirectly because of the presence of sidewalk routes to such enterprises and their proprietors.

Settlement-house workers and pastors, two more formalized kinds of public characters, typically depend on the street grapevine news systems that have their ganglia in the stores. The director of a settlement on New York's Lower East Side, as an example, makes a regular round of stores. He learns from the cleaner who does his suits about the presence of dope pushers in the neighborhood. He learns from the grocer that the Dragons are working up to something and need attention. He learns from the candy store that two girls are agitating the Sportsmen toward a rumble. One of his most important information spots is an unused breadbox on Rivington Street. That is, it is not used for bread. It stands outside a grocery and is used for sitting on and lounging beside, between the settlement house, a candy store and a pool parlor. A message spoken there for any teen-ager within many blocks will reach his ears unerringly and surprisingly quickly, and the opposite flow along the grapevine similarly brings news quickly in to the breadbox.

Blake Hobbs, the head of the Union Settlement music school in East Harlem, notes that when he gets a first student from one block of the old busy street neighborhoods, he rapidly gets at least three or four more and sometimes almost every child on the block. But when he gets a child from the nearby projects – perhaps through the public school or a playground conversation he has initiated – he almost never gets another as a direct sequence. Word does not move around where public characters and sidewalk life are lacking.

Besides the anchored public characters of the sidewalk, and the well-recognized roving public characters, there are apt to be various more specialized public characters on a city sidewalk. In a curious way, some of these help establish an identity not only for themselves but for others. Describing the everyday life of a retired tenor at such sidewalk establishments as the restaurant and the *bocce* court, a San Francisco news story notes, "It is said

of Meloni that because of his intensity, his dramatic manner and his lifelong interest in music, he transmits a feeling of vicarious importance to his many friends." Precisely.

One need not have either the artistry or the personality of such a man to become a specialized sidewalk character – but only a pertinent specialty of some sort. It is easy. I am a specialized public character of sorts along our street, owing of course to the fundamental presence of the basic, anchored public characters. The way I became one started with the fact that Greenwich Village, where I live, was waging an interminable and horrendous battle to save its main park from being bisected by a highway. During the course of battle I undertook, at the behest of a committee organizer away over on the other side of Greenwich Village, to deposit in stores on a few blocks of our street supplies of petition cards protesting the proposed roadway. Customers would sign the cards while in the stores, and from time to time I would make my pickups.³ As a result of engaging in this messenger work, I have since become automatically the sidewalk public character on petition strategy. Before long, for instance, Mr. Fox at the liquor store was consulting me, as he wrapped up my bottle, on how we could get the city to remove a long abandoned and dangerous eyesore, a closed-up comfort station near his corner. If I would undertake to compose the petitions and find the effective way of presenting them to City Hall, he proposed, he and his partners would undertake to have them printed, circulated and picked up. Soon the stores round about had comfort station removal petitions. Our street by now has many public experts on petition tactics, including the children.

Not only do public characters spread the news and learn the news at retail, so to speak. They connect with each other and thus spread word wholesale, in effect.

A sidewalk life, so far as I can observe, arises out of no mysterious qualities or talents for it in this or that type of population. It arises only when the concrete, tangible facilities it requires are present. These happen to be the same facilities, in the same abundance and ubiquity, that are required for cultivating sidewalk safety. If they are absent, public sidewalk contacts are absent too.

The well-off have many ways of assuaging needs for which poorer people may depend much on

sidewalk life – from hearing of jobs to being recognized by the headwaiter. But nevertheless, many of the rich or near-rich in cities appear to appreciate sidewalk life as much as anybody. At any rate, they pay enormous rents to move into areas with an exuberant and varied sidewalk life. They actually crowd out the middle class and the poor in lively areas like Yorkville or Greenwich Village in New York, or Telegraph Hill just off the North Beach streets of San Francisco. They capriciously desert, after only a few decades of fashion at most, the monotonous streets of “quiet residential areas” and leave them to the less fortunate. Talk to residents of Georgetown in the District of Columbia and by the second or third sentence at least you will begin to hear rhapsodies about the charming restaurants, “more good restaurants than in all the rest of the city put together,” the uniqueness and friendliness of the stores, the pleasures of running into people when doing errands at the next corner – and nothing but pride over the fact that Georgetown has become a specialty shopping district for its whole metropolitan area. The city area, rich or poor or in between, harmed by an interesting sidewalk life and plentiful sidewalk contacts has yet to be found.

Efficiency of public sidewalk characters declines drastically if too much burden is put upon them. A store, for example, can reach a turnover in its contacts, or potential contacts, which is so large and so superficial that it is socially useless. An example of this can be seen at the candy and newspaper store owned by the housing cooperative of Corlears Hook on New York’s Lower East Side. This planned project store replaces perhaps forty superficially similar stores which were wiped out (without compensation to their proprietors) on that project site and the adjoining sites. The place is a mill. Its clerks are so busy making change and screaming ineffectual imprecations at rowdies that they never hear anything except “I want that.” This, or utter disinterest, is the usual atmosphere where shopping center planning or repressive zoning artificially contrives commercial monopolies for city neighborhoods. A store like this would fail economically if it had competition. Meantime, although monopoly insures the financial success planned for it, it fails the city socially.

Sidewalk public contact and sidewalk public safety, taken together, bear directly on our country’s

most serious social problem – segregation and racial discrimination.

I do not mean to imply that a city’s planning and design, or its types of streets and street life, can automatically overcome segregation and discrimination. Too many other kinds of effort are also required to right these injustices.

But I do mean to say that to build and to rebuild big cities whose sidewalks are unsafe and whose people must settle for sharing much or nothing, *can* make it *much harder* for American cities to overcome discrimination no matter how much effort is expended.

Considering the amount of prejudice and fear that accompany discrimination and bolster it, overcoming residential discrimination is just that much harder if people feel unsafe on their sidewalks anyway. Overcoming residential discrimination comes hard where people have no means of keeping a civilized public life on a basically dignified public footing, and their private lives on a private footing.

To be sure, token model housing integration schemes here and there can be achieved in city areas handicapped by danger and by lack of public life – achieved by applying great effort and settling for abnormal (abnormal for cities) choosiness among new neighbors. This is an evasion of the size of the task and its urgency.

The tolerance, the room for great differences among neighbors – differences that often go far deeper than differences in color – which are possible and normal in intensely urban life, but which are so foreign to suburbs and pseudosuburbs, are possible and normal only when streets of great cities have built-in equipment allowing strangers to dwell in peace together on civilized but essentially dignified and reserved terms.

Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city’s wealth of public life may grow.

Los Angeles is an extreme example of a metropolis with little public life, depending mainly instead on contacts of a more private social nature.

On one plane, for instance, an acquaintance there comments that although she has lived in the city for ten years and knows it contains Mexicans, she has never laid eyes on a Mexican or an item of Mexican culture, much less ever exchanged any words with a Mexican.

On another plane, Orson Welles has written that Hollywood is the only theatrical center in the world that has failed to develop a theatrical bistro.

And on still another plane, one of Los Angeles' most powerful businessmen comes upon a blank in public relationships which would be inconceivable in other cities of this size. This businessman, volunteering that the city is "culturally behind," as he put it, told me that he for one was at work to remedy this. He was heading a committee to raise funds for a first-rate art museum. Later in our conversation, after he had told me about the businessmen's club life of Los Angeles, a life with which he is involved as one of its leaders, I asked him how or where Hollywood people gathered in corresponding fashion. He was unable to answer this. He then added that he knew no one at all connected with the film industry, nor did he know anyone who did have such acquaintanceship. "I know that must sound strange," he reflected. "We are glad to have the film industry here, but those connected with it are just not people one would know socially."

Here again is "togetherness" or nothing. Consider this man's handicap in his attempts to get a metropolitan art museum established. He has no way of reaching with any ease, practice or trust some of his committee's potentially best prospects.

In its upper economic, political and cultural echelons, Los Angeles operates according to the same provincial premises of social insularity as the street with the sidewalk park in Baltimore or as Chatham Village in Pittsburgh. Such a metropolis lacks means for bringing together necessary ideas, necessary enthusiasms, necessary money. Los Angeles is embarked on a strange experiment: trying to run not just projects, not just gray areas, but a whole metropolis, by dint of "togetherness" or nothing. I think this is an inevitable outcome for great cities whose people lack city public life in ordinary living and working.

NOTES

- 1 One representative court, for example, contains as this is written four lawyers, two doctors, two engineers, a dentist, a salesman, a banker, a railroad executive, a planning executive.
- 2 This is very common in public projects in New York.
- 3 This, by the way, is an efficient device, accomplishing with a fraction of the effort what would be a mountainous task door to door. It also makes more public conversation and opinion than door-to-door visits.