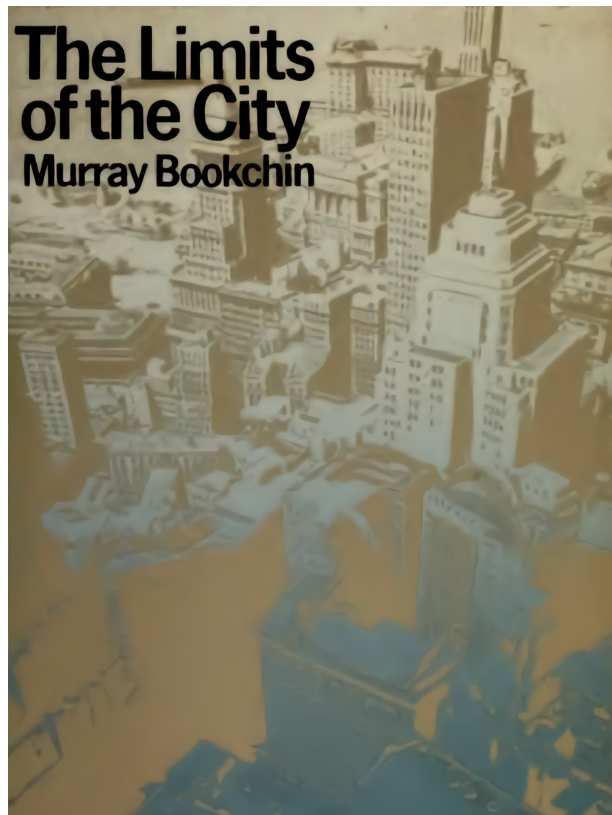


The Limits of the City

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1974

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Dedication

For my son Joey

Preface

This essay attempts to provide a meaningful perspective on the development of the city. It begins with a remote era when the land dominated the town and traces urban evolution in the present, when great metropolitan entities dominate the countryside. In the course of dealing with this historic development and its consequences for us, the book examines certain traditions of urbanism that have been virtually forgotten today. My purpose is to provide the reader with an idea of what the city was once like at its best, to recover high standards of urbanism all the more to question the present lack of standards in judging the modern metropolis and the society that fosters its growth.

This book is radically critical; it offers no recipes for urban revitalisation within the framework of the present social order, nor does it make those esthetically tender concessions to design projects that even radical urbanists offer as substitutes for meaningful social relations. If the modern metropolis is viewed against the larger background of urban history, it will be seen as the complete negation of city life as it was conceived during the more civilized eras, of the past. My purpose is to strengthen such a comparison, and to emphasize as strongly as I can that the roots of the urban crisis today lie not merely in poor designing, bad logistics, neglected neighborhoods, and inadequate material support, but in the social system which has created these problems in the first place — and produced the modern metropolis. This book tries to show that the city must be viewed not only as a special arena for human sociation called “urban” — one that has changed in character from one historical period to another — but also as the product of distinct social relations and modes of social development. Accordingly, to rescue urban life today would require a fundamental change in society, not just a new urban design. Important as design may be, it is a function of social life itself; and since modern society is basically irrational, it should not surprise us that the city reflects and even exaggerates the social irrationalities of our time.

To draw sharp contrasts between the degraded standards of contemporary urbanism and the high standards achieved by earlier cities seems especially important today if only to rescue the latter from oblivion. We are slowly losing a humanistic conception of the very meaning of the word “city.” Paradoxically, we live in a world marked by rampant urbanization — but one that lacks real cities. As the once clearly demarcated cities inherited from the past are devoured by the expanding metropolis, the city begins to lose its definition and specificity, as well as its function as an authentic arena for community and solidarity. The city disappears in the great urban belts which spread across the land. Even the countryside is transformed into urban parkland or a complex, of highly industrialized agricultural factories. Contemporary city planning, insofar as it hypostatizes the design or logistical aspects of urbanism at the expense of its human and communitarian goals, becomes truly atavistic. If the priests of the ancient monumental cities were city planners who imposed a cosmological design on urbanized areas to glorify the power of deified monarchies, the modern city planners have become priests whose urban designs are crassly institutional and utilitarian. Both are architects of the mythic in that they subserve the city — its human scale and its communitarian dimension — to suprahuman and nonhuman ends.

In the pages that follow, details and side developments of urban history have been deliberately sacrificed for brevity and clarity of presentation. Far too many works on the development of the city overwhelm the reader with a dense undergrowth of factual material and esthetic opinion, with the result that the reader loses all perspective of the essential trends in urban history and the making of the modern metropolis. This book tries to maintain a clear focus throughout and deals with what I regard as vital aspects of the relationship between town and country, the emergence of the modern city, and the social and civic deterioration which reaches into the very marrow of modern urbanism.

The first two chapters, “Land and City” and “The Rise of the Bourgeois City,” as well as the “Introduction” and the opening pages of “The Limits of the Bourgeois City” were written in the late 1950s and published in abbreviated form in May 1960 in the Anglo-American quarterly *Contemporary Issues*. Those chapters had an underground circulation among friends who continually urged me to publish them in full. They appear here in complete form for the first time. The analysis they contain of the relationship between town and country parallels in so many ways Mars’s more fragmentary discussion of the same subject in the new-famous *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* that I was more than pleasantly surprised to note the similarities when Mars’s work appeared in Hobsbawm’s *Marx on Pre-Capitalist Formations*. Yet Mars’s work was unavailable to me when I wrote these chapters; indeed, the *Grundrisse* was generally unknown at that time, at least in the English-speaking world. The fragmentary Hobsbawm edition was not published until 1964, more than six years after *The Limits of the City* had been written and more than four years after it appeared in its *Contemporary Issues* version,. Accordingly, readers who find Marx’s work on the relationship of the town to the countryside in the *Grundrisse* as valuable as I do will probably benefit greatly from a close reading of *The Limits of the City*. I’ve left these opening chapters untouched except for very minor stylistic changes. In the remainder of this book — which is to say, most of it — the material is entirely new and carries the analysis of the city into our own times.

Today, my own social views are more committed to a libertarian perspective than they were in the 1950s. These views are developed in considerable detail in my *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Ramparts Books, 1971) and are undergoing still further development in a work I expect to complete shortly, *The Ecology of Freedom*. Despite this shift in perspective, however, I would be the last to deny the influence Marx has had on my thinking and I would willingly regard this volume as an elaboration of the views he so brilliantly developed in the *Grundrisse*. I suspect that the opening chapters of *The Limits of the City* will be of particular interest to readers who are concerned with Marxist studies. For my part, I would call *The Limits of the City* a dialectical work that deals with cities or the past as phases or moments of a larger urban process, a process in which the potentialities of the urban development are internally unfolded, enriched, and reach their ultimate negation in the modern metropolis. The main purpose of this book is to enable the reader to see this process — the internal connections between different periods of urban history — and to recognize that urbanism must be viewed as a development that places us in a unique position to go beyond the city as such and produce a new type of community, one that combines the best features of urban and rural life in a harmonized future society. The concluding pages of *The Limits of the City* hint at what such a community might be. For a more detailed discussion, I must refer the reader to “Post-Scarcity Anarchism” and my forthcoming *The Ecology of Freedom*. But this little volume clearly stands on its own ground. Indeed, it provides the necessary over-

all perspective and many of the criteria which make the concept of a harmonized community meaningful.

March 1973

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Introduction

A well-known medieval adage has it that “city air makes people free.” Although the freedom afforded by medieval cities generally meant emancipation from serfdom, the same adage might have been repeated from slightly different viewpoints throughout the history of urban life. Cities embody the most important traditions of civilization. Owing to the size of their marketplaces and the close living quarters they render possible, cities collect those energizing Force? of social life that country life tends to dissipate over wide expanses of land and scattered populations. Seasonal renewals of nature that send hunters and food gatherers on migrations and reclothe the works of the peasant are replaced in cities by a more palpable heritage. From a cultural standpoint, the land, years ago, was regarded as fugitive, the city as permanent; the land as natural, the city as social. While this dichotomy may be greatly exaggerated, it is certainly true that the full’d!moot of individuality and intellect was the historic privilege of the urban dweller or of individuals influenced by urban life. Indeed, some kind of urban community is not only the environment of humanity! it is its destiny. Only in a complete urban environment can there be complete people; only in a rational urban situation can the human spirit advance its most vital cultural and social traditions.

What, then, is a complete urban environment?

This work will try to answer the question partly by means of a historical account of the limits of earlier cities in order to establish some standards by which urban development can be judged? partly, too, by means of a criticism of many contemporary urban characteristics, the removal of which are necessary For the emergence of a new land of human community. A historical discussion of the city seems all the more necessary because mere urban accretion these days is often a popular justification for the superiority of one city over another. The size of urban populations, the number of square miles a city occupies, the facilities it has to support these dimensions — all are treated as virtues that find their culmination in the modern city. This approach tells us that during the past century or two, cities, like the output of machines, have expanded tremendously. Cities now approximate territories rather than communities. The most vital characteristics of urban life, as these have been understood over thousands of years, generally remain unknown or unnoticed, reposing in the writings of a few urban specialists and critics. There seems lo be little widespread understanding that the quantitative changes to which I have alluded have decisively worsened the quality of urban life, supplying modern Cities with characteristics that are radically different from the best traits and traditions of urbanism.

Just as there is a point beyond which a village becomes a city, so there is a point beyond which a city negates itself, churning up a human condition that is more atomizing — and culturally or socially more desiccated — than anything attributed to rural life. Although we think of cities as autonomous entities that have a life and history of their own, they are no different from other arenas of social activity; as Marx observed, they develop with the material conditions which shape society as a whole. In time, one body of material conditions is exhausted, often leading to another that may rehabilitate a given site for city life on an entirely different social basis. The

newer city may even inherit the name of the older one, but by no means, can they be regarded as the same cities. Renaissance and modern Rome differ as fundamentally from each other as ancient and medieval Rome. They express entirely different economic, social, and cultural conditions, although they share the same name and occupy the same locale.

Modern cities occupy a unique position in urban history — a fact that I feel is not dearly understood by those who dwell in them. On the one hand, the immense development of industry over the past century has created a remarkable opportunity for bringing land and city into a rational and ecological synthesis. The two could be blended into an artistic unity that would open a new vision of the human and natural experience. On the other hand, the modern city — particularly the metropolis — develops the historic limits of city life *as such*, bringing the antagonism between land and city to a breaking point. Given its grotesquely distorted form, it is questionable whether the city is any longer the proper arena for social and cultural development. Thus, by exhausting the one-sidedness of city life based on a vast and malleable industry, the metropolis, by its own inner logic, tends to raise the issue of developing all that is desirable in urbanity into a qualitatively new human community.

The development of a rational and ecological human community is, in fact, becoming a necessity. For if in Marx's view the "whole economical history of society is summed up" in the development of the antithesis between town and country, it is fair to add that the destiny of the modern city may well summarize the future of humanity.¹ Either the limits imposed on the city by modern social life will be overcome, or forms of city life may arise that are congruent with the barbarism in store for humanity if people of this age should fail to resolve their social problems. The evidence for this tendency can be seen not only in the metropolis, choking with an alienated and atomized aggregate of human beings, but in the "well-policed" totalitarian city composed of starved black ghettos and privileged white enclaves — a city that would be a cemetery of freedom, culture, and the human spirit.

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co.), 1:387.

1. Land and City

Cities play an indisputably dominant role in modern life. They visibly decide the development of modern society. It would thus seem that once urban communities arose, they quickly achieved a leading position and, like our own cities, entered into an overbearing antagonism with the countryside.

But there was a time when urban life was either subordinated to or in balance with the countryside. The development of social relations through much of precapitalist history did not definitively depend upon the development of city life until the late Middle Ages, when cities became the precursors of an authentic bourgeois economy. It is easily forgotten that most of human history is occupied with women and men as food cultivators, and that the social wealth of the past came primarily from agricultural pursuits. Moreover, agrarian society was itself the product of a long and complex evolution, involving different forms of land tenure and social relations. From the more or less communal forms of horticulture practiced by early clans and tribes, agrarian society advanced through the Asian land system with its paramount monarchies to feudalism and to an agricultural society based on an independent peasantry. The problems of this long period were, primarily agrarian problems and the greatest economic weight lay not in cities but in the countryside, or at least among social classes based on the land.

All cities constitute an antithesis to the land. They are a break in the solidity of agrarian conditions, a germ of negation in the agrarian community. At the same time, however, rural life summons forth the city from its own inner development as a division of labor between crafts and trade on the one hand, and relatively self-sufficient agricultural communities on the other. The emerging city begins by reflecting the social relations in the countryside so that there are different cities more or less corresponding to different forms of agrarian society. In various phases of social development, the City is raised from a distinctly subordinate position to one of equilibrium with the countryside and may remain so for long periods of time or, after overstepping the limits of its rural base, finally yield to the hegemony of the land when the two become clearly incompatible. Viewed over most of precapitalist history, city life did not have as complete an urban basis as it seems to have today. Urban centers were largely the foci of surrounding agrarian relations. They were horticultural clan cities, Asian cities. Feudal cities, and even peasant and yeoman cities. Urban life could be clearly understood only by searching back to the economic relationships that prevailed in the agricultural environs. Although city life acquired social forces of its own and often entered into contradiction with the land, the agrarian economy established, the historical limits for almost every Urban development.

This can be demonstrated quite clearly by a number of examples. An illustration of the earliest cities can be drawn from descriptions of the Aztec "capital" of Tenochtitlan, encountered by Spanish *conquistadores* only three centuries ago. At first glance, the community is deceptively similar in appearance to a modern city. Although architecture and the design of life were "exotic," the dimensions of the city, the height of its structures, and the lateness of its discovery by white men seem to place it closer to the end rather than the beginning of urban history. According to

George C. Vaillant, to the Spanish invaders who first saw it, “in contrast to the drab towns and tawny hills of Spain, Tenochtitlan must have appeared a paradise, for its green gardens and white buildings were set in the midst of blue lakes, ringed by lofty mountains.”¹ Vaillant quotes Bernal Diaz, one of Cortes’s soldiers:

Gazing on such wonderful sights, we did not know what to say or whether what appeared before us was real, for on one Side in the land were great Cities and the lake itself was crowded with canoes, and in the causeway were many bridges at intervals, and in front of us stood the City of Mexico.²

But Diaz was not a provincial gazing spellbound at a cosmopolis, nor were the towns of Spain merely villages by comparison with Tenochtitlan. A closer, perhaps intellectually more ruthless view suggests that the brilliance of the Mexican city consisted largely of externals. The city’s resemblance to a modern urban center rests on its lofty religious structures, its spacious plazas for ceremonies, its palaces and administrative buildings. Looking beyond these structures, the city in many respects was very likely a grossly oversized pueblo community.

It would be difficult to understand clearly the nature of Tenochtitlan without directing attention to the clan structure and horticultural basis of Aztec society. Although the city was unusually large for such a traditional society, the horticultural activities of the clans reached directly into the urban community. Together with religious and military affairs, the coordination of clans for social and economic activities formed the major interest of the city’s governing bodies. So complete was the integration of land and city, indeed the supremacy of agrarian interests over uniquely urban ones, that the Aztecs never quite developed money. Exchange normally proceeded on a barter basis — that is to say, on a village basis — ‘equalized, by cacao beans when the value of one commodity exceeded that of another. The city dweller was born into a complex body of social relationships that essentially developed from life on the land. His position in society was defined by hereditary roots in groups of kinfolk and blood relationships. The clan formed the matrix of the Aztecs civic, social, and cultural life.

The city, to be sure, differentiated a sizeable portion of the populace from their older agrarian clan ties, creating craftsmen and traders. But these groups were also obliged to participate in the traditional social scheme, formally duplicating relationships developed in the countryside. Vaillant observes:

The opening of intertribal contact through settlement and warfare and the growth of material and ritualistic wants led to the establishment of a class, the *pochteca*, whose members travelled all over Mexico, exchanging local for foreign produce.³

The *pochteca*, however, “had their own god, and apparently lived in a special quarter” in a manner similar to other clans in the community. They held a position within the city or as part of it, not as its leaders; they did not represent the city like the burghers in the medieval towns and the modern bourgeoisie.

Although a centralized monarchical “capital,” Tenochtitlan was managed by four executive officers and a variety of nobles who adjudicated disputes between the clans and cared for military

¹ G.C. Vaillant, *Aztecs of Mexico*, rev. e.d. (New York: Penguin Books, 1962). p. 225.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 129.

affairs. Within this infrastructure, from the lowest lineages to the highest, power was a function of a very complex social stratification. Vaillant notes that the

continual election of such high officers of the same family or lineage, when democratic procedure obtained elsewhere, is harder to explain. Tradition is strong in primitive communities, and a family that produced one effective man might in the next generation produce another.⁴

More recent evidence reveals that the “democratic procedure” to which Vaillant gives so much emphasis had in fact waned to a point where the city council of Tenochtitlan, once a fairly democratic body composed of clan loaders, was appointed by the monarchy and largely controlled by the ruling stratum. By the time of the Spanish conquest, Aztec society had become a highly complex hierarchy of nobles and commoners, a hierarchy still based on kin ties and superimposed on a clan structure, but one that may have been drifting toward an increasingly territorial form of social life. How far the society might have developed in this direction — or, quite possibly, in the direction of a rigid centralized structure similar to the “state communism” of the Inca empire — will never be known. The Spanish conquest brought the Aztec development to an end and completely demolished its internal structure.

This urban society, viewed from the standpoint of its clan relationships, may have existed for centuries in Mesoamerica before it was encountered by white men. The Aztec and Inca empires seem to have marked the culmination of the Indian urban tradition in the Americas, perhaps its outermost limits. Generally, throughout Mesoamerica, as one city arose, another declined in eminence; a continual rising and falling of cities was the rule. Once the old administrative structure was demolished in a given area — perhaps owing to land exhaustion or war — the city disappeared, only to reappear elsewhere when favorable conditions for urbanism developed. These cities arose, flourished, and often vanished without abolishing the clan structure.

It is fair to say that the American Indian city up to the Spanish conquest was essentially rooted in the clan or in similar kinship structures. As time passed and as populations increased, a tendency emerged to extend the “plan of government” (to borrow Lewis H. Morgan’s phrase) from clan to tribe and from tribe to tribal federation. This tendency must be seen as a quantitative linking of clan to clan, a colonization by social affinity of relatively self-sufficient, socio-natural organisms along increasingly hierarchical lines. Attempts to relate the Aztec and Inca empires to the historical city and landed aristocracy of Europe, despite their many similarities, are often misleading. An American Indian analogue to the historical cities of Europe and the Mediterranean basin would be meaningful if clan society had so completely decomposed that it yielded a class society based on territorial rather than kinship ties and eventually on the private ownership and control of social wealth. No such qualitative transformation actually occurred in Mesoamerica before the conquest. Generally, where the pressures of scarcity and survival abated in parts of Indian America, there emerged a fairly unified community, often superficially urban in character, that tended to integrate rather than exacerbate internal divergences. “There was little to harass the individual intellectually or economically,” observes Vaillant,

Existence was subject to divine favour, and a man fared much as did his fellows. Large as some towns were — Mexico City [Tenochtitlan] had 300,000 people — the

⁴ Ibid.

sense of community was strong. Freedom of thought, individual liberty, personal Fortunes, were nonexistent, but people lived according to a code that had worked well and continuously for centuries. An Aztec would have been horrified at the marked isolation of an individual's life in our Western world.⁵

Viewed from the base of society, the clan established the limits of this type of urban life. The city was the product of the clan and was seen as the shelter of the clan's federative tendencies.

History, conceived as the account of conflicting social interests, begins when the external means for expropriating material surpluses (notably, war and pillage) are internalized as systematic modes of exploitation, restructuring the clan and transforming social life from within. Society's transcendence of the clan is the greatest and most significant development of the ancient world. Humanity is exiled from a harmonized universe to the realm of social contradiction, where the problems of material want are felt as harsh antagonisms between one stratum and another. Society becomes one-sided and incomplete, disrupting the balance within the human community and between humanity and the natural world. Mankind is propelled on a restless journey to round out social life on a higher equilibrium. It should not surprise us that the internal reworking of the clan, and later, its complete destruction, involves a more decisive technological revolution than any development known before. The division of labor expands and new strata are set apart from agricultural work, each of which crystallizes into a social class with special interests that are often in sharp opposition to the interests of other classes.

So far removed, as yet, are the early cities from the urban mainstream of history that changes in clan society arise from technological developments in the countryside rather than in the towns, notably the domestication of animals and the discovery of plow agriculture. With this new mode of agriculture, the clan ceases to be a precondition for social life. To have eliminated the clan in Indian America would have completely disrupted the material basis of society: without a highly dedicated, socially responsible labor force that alone could have provided the intensive cultivation required by maize and by a technology that had not advanced beyond the hoe and human muscle power, it is doubtful if the substantial material surpluses needed to sustain large cities would have been available in Mexico and Peru. Indian food cultivation on such a scale was possible only under social conditions in which people related to each other as kinfolk rather than isolated urban citizens. The significance of the clan structure becomes all the more evident if we bear in mind that food cultivation in areas like the Peruvian Andes depended in large part on terracing barren mountainous regions with soil painstakingly collected from distant lowlands. As Edward Hyams observes, owing to the fact that

they were forced, in the Andes ... to create their soils in order to expand, ... they were forced to retain ... the ancient structure of society, at least in so far as it related to systems of land-tenure and land working. In the absence of machinery or of an advanced slave-owning economy, large works of terracing, or reclamation and of irrigation can only be carried out by communal efforts and common labour... There has probably never been, unless under European Feudalism, a system in which agricultural practice and social organization were so locked together in a perfect artifact

⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

of the mind and spirit And nothing makes this clearer than the results which followed the imposition of the European system and religion on the Andeans. The soil was not directly attacked for the Spaniards were at first interested only in gold, but the social organism was destroyed and at once the soil itself began to die.⁶

With the discovery of the plow and the broadcast sowing of hardy grains in the Near East — as well as the general application of animal labor to the tilling of the land — agriculture became extensive rather than intensive. Food cultivation now required a fraction of the work needed to achieve corresponding outputs in the Americas. But if the clan was no longer a limit to further social changes, neither was it, at least initially, an obstacle. Indeed, it persisted as a basic form of social relationship and labor mobilization well into historical times. Here, we would do well to emphasize that humanity does not casually change its social structures, particularly if they have been sanctified by millennia of development and the weight of tradition. Retrospectively, we might comfortably entertain many alternative's to the historical development that actually occurred, perhaps to suggest more rational and humanistic lines of social evolution. But if nothing else, history teaches us that old institutions are rarely changed until their possibilities have been largely exhausted. Clan society was especially durable. Even where it exists today, it remains the most stable form of human association thus far developed. Perhaps no institution following it Fostered as deep a sense of solidarity, mutual aid, and supportive comfort to the individual. Owing to their natural basis in kinship ties, clans proved to be the most intimate and perhaps satisfying social forms devised by humanity. Accordingly, the clan tended to perpetuate itself against compelling social forces that easily overwhelmed or drastically altered other Forms of human association.

At first, the new plow and field economy did not appreciably alter the social Forms based on the hoe and gardening economy of an earlier epoch. The evolution of one system into another, in Fact, proceeded so subtly and organically that it is often difficult to delineate the social distinctions between the two. Variations occurred in communal property and in the old nature religions, but communal systems of property persisted For a long time under new forms of social administration. Even the clans lingered on vestigially, if not intact, well into advanced historical periods. Formally speaking, the successors of the traditional clan system emerged when tribal chiefs, prominent warriors, or a consolidated priestly caste succeeded in becoming the solo proprietors of the land. They seasonally allocated plots for cultivation among the clansfolk, and collected agricultural surpluses presumably for use by the community as a whole. The change from the old social forms to the new assumed the character of a shift in emphasis rather than a total rupture with the past — a change in the original communal system that seemed to consist in enlarging its social functions and dimensions.

In time, however, the clan form was so thoroughly divested of its original content as the determining factor in social Life that it became little more than a device for allocating labor and resources. Clans lost virtually all of their influence in the administration of the community. In the hands of ruthless authorities, clans often became the instruments of their self-exploitation and plunder. The change from older equalitarian relations in Egypt and Mesopotamia to new systems of exploitation and class stratification was not quite accepted passively by the oppressed; indeed, the archaeological record attests to widespread popular revolts and interregnums of social disorder in which futile attempts were made to restore the old order of things. Interestingly, apart

⁶ Edward Hyams, *Soil and Civilization* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1952), pp. 228–229

from separatist tendencies and uprisings by conquered populations, no internal social conflicts of such magnitude are known to the civilizations of Indian America, for the preoccupation of dominated tribes in this region was not with the social structure as such, notably its clan form, but with the tribute which was claimed by domineering tribes such as the Aztec rulers of Mexico.

We owe largely to Marx the term “Asian land system” as the designation of a mode of agriculture in which land is still inalienable, indeed communally worked, but its management is controlled by a powerful state apparatus.⁷ Possibly the most archaic of class societies, its elements tend to appear whenever tribal society has begun to disintegrate and the need for viable clan structures has been removed by the economic development of the community. The Asian land system appears not only in early Egypt and Mesopotamia, but in a nascent form when agrarian kingships were established over the Greek, Roman, and German tribes during the era of their settlement on the land. In all such cases, we see evidence that society is trying to formulate a compromise between a time-honored tradition that land is inalienable and belongs to the community as a whole with new tendencies toward private proprietorship in land or, at least, control of agricultural surpluses by a privileged stratum. Within these archaic parameters, exploitation of human by human emerges even before private property in land and resources has been firmly established. With the Asian land system, we encounter a society that enjoys a durability comparable to that of the clan structure: in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China, it remained the basis of social relations for thousands of years; indeed, apart from Mesopotamia, it was not substantially eroded until fairly modern times. Nor is it difficult to understand why these civilizations, largely alluvial ones, failed to advance into propertied forms of Society, Irrigation, by virtue of its technical requirements, fosters cooperative if not public forms of agricultural management.⁸ In the ancient world, a world still heir to social ownership of land and a communal organization of labor, a society based on irrigation necessarily retained elements of the archaic clan and tribal structure, albeit in a highly centralized statist framework. Insofar as the cultivation of food required the coordinated management of water resources and an extensive system of canals, any regional particularism — much less any development of private property — would have vitiated the success of agriculture. Christopher Dawson observes:

The conversion of the jungles and swamps of the prehistoric valley into the rich cornlands which made Egypt the wonder of the world was only accomplished by ages of communal coordinated effort. The prosperity of the country depends, not as in northern lands on the industry of the individual peasant and his family, but on the organized labour of the irrigation dykes, and on the fertilising waters of the annual inundation, for land in itself is valueless apart from the water which is supplied by the Nile and the irrigation canals. From the earliest times the measurement of the Nile flood and the maintenance of the irrigation works has been the primary duty of every Egyptian Government. The ancient Egyptian year began on July 19, the

⁷ Karl Marx, “Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,” *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, n.d.), 1: 357.

⁸ This viewpoint is developed in considerable detail in Karl Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957). Although Wittfogel simplifies this approach and has been criticized with good reason by Robert M. Adams and Jacques Garnet, the essential thrust of his thesis is, in my view, correct. Irrigation fostered cooperation if only on a local scale. And if centralized empires were a later development, it is hard to believe that they could have been sustained for centuries without the communication afforded by great river systems and the need for large irrigation works.

day that the inundation reached the neighborhood of the head of the Delta, and as early as the First Dynasty the annual taxation was fixed according to the level of the river, for the yield of the following harvest depends entirely on a good Nile... Hence the power which regulates and controls the inundation is the master of the life and property of the whole population, and the principle of compulsory public labor — the corvée — which elsewhere appears as a tyrannical infringement of the rights of the individual, is in Egypt the necessary condition of all economic life.⁹

Irrigation, by necessitating coordinated communal labor, fostered state centralization and bureaucratization. As early as the first Dynasty in Egypt, we learn from the historical record of the existence of a vizier, chancellor, chamberlain, master of ceremonies, royal architect, Superintendent of Inundation, and so forth, down to a Keeper of the King's Cosmetic Box — in short, a wide spectrum of office holders, selected largely from the leading families of the valley, who remind us more of royal courtiers and bureaucrats than independent feudal nobles. In Egypt, apart from claims made by the priesthood, the land belonged to the Pharaoh. It was essentially in his name that local governors collected tribute and taxes in kind, which were thereupon stored in royal warehouses. The peasantry, largely bound to the soil, was either left with a residue of its produce or rewarded in kind from the public fund. In Mesopotamia, these privileges were pre-empted by priestly corporations, later to be transferred to the person of a monarch who enjoyed an authority not dissimilar from that of the Pharaonic power. In the course of time, this highly centralized system broke down before the assault of the landed nobility, but it was almost invariably reconstituted again, depending upon the vigor of successive dynasties and usurpers. The Asian land system remained the basic social form of Near Eastern and Oriental civilizations until modern times.

These agrarian societies are the key to understanding ancient city development, for they not only advance but also limit the evolution of urban life. Agrarian interests, owing to the centralized power and wealth they command, subordinate the city to the land. Although many large and ornate cities arose in Mesopotamia (and, to a lesser extent, in Egypt), these urban communities did not come into lasting balance with the authority exercised by landed classes. Commerce, crafts, and new industrial techniques were numerous, but these were placed in the service of the agrarian strata. Urban wealth, instead of returning to a local bourgeoisie in the form of capital accumulation, was expropriated by monarchies, state bureaucracies, and local governors. Capital formation, in effect, was largely circumscribed and essentially arrested. The emergence of an independent bourgeois class was blocked by taxes, imposts, and state-owned enterprises.

The scale on which industry and commerce was plundered can be dealt with only summarily. As late as Ptolemaic times, the Egyptian economy was snarled in over two hundred taxes. The internal market of the valley was effectively limited by a 10 percent sales tax, a 5 percent tax on home rents, an inheritance tax and, except for privileged strata, a poll tax. Wealthy classes were commonly burdened by costly liturgies and by obligations to give "crowns" to the monarchy. Commodity taxes were imposed not only at ports and frontier routes, but also at the borders of provinces. Virtually all handicrafts and professions were licensed by the state. Royal monopolies were established in the production of oil, papyrus, textiles, and in mining and banking, while state enterprises competed with the private sector in industries such as dyeing, leather, cosmetics, perfumery, glass, pottery, and beer.

⁹ Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods* (London: Shred and Ward, 1934), pp. 155–156.

The economic controls exercised by the Ptolemaic pharaohs differed little in principle from the regulations and Imposts that burdened commerce and industry in nearly all the agrarian civilizations of the Near East and the Orient. The first waves of commodity production, so essential to the development of an authentic urban society, were thus scattered by the massive boulders of lightly knit, state-managed agrarian economies. Allowing for a few exceptions, City life became an ornament of agrarian kingly power and the product of agricultural superfluity, not unlike the huge monuments, temples, and mortuaries whose construction absorbed the surplus labor and resources of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Within this social arrangement, capital accumulation, which later formed the basis for an independent bourgeoisie and for an industrial economy in Europe, was virtually impossible under the Asian land system. While weathered by time, the granite structure of this system never Fractured or shattered. For thousands of years after the dawn of history, it persisted with surprising endurance — while men elsewhere picked up the main thread of social development and advanced to more promising and flexible urban forms.

After the first millennium B.C. a new agrarian system and a new mode of urban life began to emerge on the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Pastoral tribes, filtering into the Greek promontory, conquered and gradually mixed with pre-existing stable agricultural communities, rapidly developing away from tribal society. Hellenic society, allowing for its many unique qualities, in its own way recapitulates the evolution of agrarian kingships from communal relations to a loose kind of feudalism, passing through social forms not unlike the Asian land system. That this phase emerged prototypically is attested by a good deal of evidence from archaic Greek culture. The legendary figure of Theseus seems to group under a single name a number of Hellenic chieftains who organized the Greek tribes into federations somewhat reminiscent of early Nilotic society. “The first unquestionable fact which meets us in the life of this new kind community is that it was originally governed by kings,” observes William F Fowler.

The thing was expressed by various words — Basileus, Archon, Pyrtanis, [and among the Latins] Hex, Dictator — but, so far as we know, it was always I here in the childhood of the ancient State. Tradition, both in Greece and Italy, always told of a time when the essential acts of government were performed either by or under the authority of a single man; and in this case we can be sure that tradition was right. Both Thucydides and Aristotle accepted it; at conservative Sparta the king himself survived throughout her history; and at Athens and Rome kingship left traces behind it when it had vanished...¹⁰

Indeed, archaic Greek society found its esthetic inspiration in an Orientalized art so alien to the sculpture which nourished during the later classical period that it seems difficult to believe that the people who produced the rigid, overstylized Apollo of Tenea could have shared any historical relationship to those who sculpted the figures which adorned the temples of Periclean Athens.

Yet we know that the relationship existed and we must find our explanation for the differences between the two periods in the geography of southern Europe. The rugged mountain terrain of Greece made it virtually impossible to achieve the degree of political consolidation and centralism which so conspicuously distinguishes the high Asian and Near Eastern civilizations. Early Hellenic communities, like their Asian counterparts, invested land ownership in chieftains, but

¹⁰ William F. Fowler, *The City State of the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p. 64.

the centrifugal forces which episodically shaped Asian societies along feudal and particularistic lines became, in Greece, the dominant factors which guided the development of the political structure. By Homeric times, feudal vassalage rather than a highly centralized state had become the basis of Greek federation. George Thompson doubtless gives us an accurate picture of Homeric life when he notes that the Greek king

lives in a palace on some rocky eminence, surrounded by the dwellings of his vassals. The relation between king and vassal is such as we find in similar conditions among the primitive Germans 2,000 years later. In reward for military service, the vassal holds in fee the rule of some portion of the conquered territory, and in return he takes up arms for the king when called on to do so. Such was the relation of Bellerophon to the King of Lycia, of Phoenix to the father of Achilles; and we remember how Odysseus endeavoured, but in vain, to evade military service. The vassal is entitled to be consulted on matters of policy and to feed at the royal table. There are many such councils in the *Iliad*, and in the *Odyssey* the offense of the suitors lies in their abuse of a recognized privilege. Finally, each vassal stood in the relation of king to vassals of his own, Odysseus was a vassal of Agamemnon's, but to the princes of Ithaca he was king.¹¹

If the investiture of control over tribal lands in the person of agrarian monarchs tends to disintegrate into feudalism unless the kingly authority is reinforced by the social need to coordinate a complex irrigation system, so feudalism, in turn, tends to give way to independent peasant communities based on small-scale food cultivation, especially after commodity production emerges in an agrarian society. The towns, freeing themselves from the waning authority of the territorial lords, reaches back into the countryside to replicate the same economic conditions which prevail in urban marketplaces and workshops. Commodity relations and trade turn the vassal and serf into independent peasants, the agrarian analogue of the free urban craftsman and master. This basic social tendency, as we shall see later, was to be followed in late medieval Europe. In ancient Greece and Italy, the development was considerably modified by the impact of successive tribal invasions from the north and by the settlement of craftsmen and traders from the more advanced Mediterranean civilizations. The northern invaders reduced the older, pre-existing agricultural communities to the status of serfs, while the conquerors often acquired a quasi-peasant status, free in name if not in fact. Peasant and serf worked the land side by side, each shading socially into the other's position. In time, a yeoman society of landed freeholders began to crystallize from the fluid, often tumultuous conditions of a disintegrating system of feudal land-tenure. A new kind of city now emerges, a city that forms the political, cultural, and commercial center of free farmers and craftsmen — each independent and producing primarily for the other in a remarkably well-balanced economy.

By the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., a number of Greek cities already began to resemble, at least superficially, the modern image of an urban community. Athens, the Hellenic city with which we are most familiar, probably supported some 30,000 male citizens (and if we add their women and children, a total of 150,000, perhaps 100,000 slaves, and an estimated 35,000 metics, or free aliens. During Athens's classical period, the city's population may have well exceeded a quarter of a million. Generally, we must conceive of the new Greek cities as independent urban

¹¹ George Thompson, *Aeschylus and Athens* (New York] International Publishers, 1950), pp. 61–62.

entities, freed from the suzerainty of territorial lords and landed magnates. (This fact decisively distinguishes the Greek city-states or, more accurately, *poleis* from the Cities of the Near East and Orient.) Urban life now exists as an end in itself, not as a supplement to a rural society, and enjoys art autonomy that would have been inconceivable within the framework of the earlier Asian land system.

But the Hellenic cities are not truly modern cities in the political and social sense of the term. As civic structures, they differ profoundly not only from Asian cities but from the metropolises and even smaller cities of our own era. What strikes us at once about Athens, the most advanced of the Greek cities, is that civic activity involves an exceptionally high degree of public participation. All the policy decisions of the *poleis* are formulated directly by a popular assembly, or *Ecclesia*, which every male citizen from the city and its environs (Attica) is expected to attend. The execution of the *Ecclesia's* decisions falls to the authority of the Council of Five Hundred, composed of elected citizens from all parts of Attica, who, in groups of fifty, rotate their office every tenth of the year. The practical aspects of urban administration are ordinarily delegated by election or lot to public boards, not to a professional bureaucracy — notably to nine Archons, ten elected Strategoi or generals, boards of finance, education, dockyards, and so forth. Inasmuch as all the civic agencies of Athens are reconstituted every year, it would seem that a sizeable number of ordinary citizens participate in the executive bodies of the city at any given time, William Fowler estimates that in the days of Pericles, 1,900 citizens out of an adult population of 30,000 men were actively engaged in the service of the city, thereby rendering wide public participation an inherent feature of urban administration:

Now if we take this in connection with the universal right of citizens to take part in the *Ecclesia*, and of those over thirty years of age to sit as jurors in the courts, it becomes at once plain that the Athenian people did actually conduct its own government, and that the State was a true democracy. Here is no privileged class, no class of skilled politicians, no bureaucracy: no body of men, like the Roman Senate, who alone understood the secrets of State, and were looked up to and trusted as the gathered wisdom of the whole community. At Athens there was no disposition, and in fact no need, to trust the experience of any one. Each man entered intelligently into the details of his own temporary duties, and discharged them as far as we can tell, with industry and integrity. Like the players in a well-trained orchestra, all contrived to learn their parts and to be satisfied with the share allotted to them.¹²

But the administrative aspects of Athenian civic life capture only an aspect of the well-rounded, balanced, and intensely social nature of what Edith Hamilton has so aptly described as “the Greek Way.” For centuries afterward, men were to look back to Attica where, for a brief period, there flourished a community whose development was not to be excelled over the course of later history. What immediately catches the eye in a study of Hellenic society is the rich flow of Athenian life — its all-encompassing rationality and its human scale. The “Men of Marathon” take up arms against the Persian invaders of their country with the same readiness that they take up the scythe in harvesting their farms. They nourish their minds with the same fortitude that they do battle in the mountain fastnesses of their land. Hellenic mythology, unequivocally naturalistic under the bright Mediterranean sky, gracefully intertwines with the monumental

¹² Fowler. *The City State of the Greeks and Romans*. p 168.

oaks of Attic tragedy; the Hellenic mind, cultivated in the most demanding schools of speculative reason, never fails to pause — almost childishly — to marvel at the physical beauty of the land and sea, and, above all, at the supple form of man, whose destiny in Athenian literature mingles a philosophical pathos with serene dignity.

Athenian life, during its finest moments, formed a totality that was sustained by the balance and unity of the *polis* itself. To a Greek, it would have seemed preposterous that mind should be separated from body, art from society, man from nature, culture from politics. The *polis* was the man; the man, the *polis*. To be exiled from the *polis* was to suffer an extinction more horrifying even than death. The Hellenic citizen was nourished by his community like a tree by the soil. So inseparably wedded were men and society that a social sunlight permeated everything Greek. We never fail to marvel at how remarkably well the satires of Aristophanes read to this very day, how advanced they are over so much of our own contemporary literature of the same genre, how unexcelled they are in their energy; how refreshing their earthiness and realism, how generous their humanity, and how subtly philosophical their nuances. Yet these plays were political works — courageously incisive satires of the outstanding politicians of the day and savage commentaries on immediate civic problems. They owe their unexcelled position in western literature to the clear rationality of the Greek mind, to the essentiality of all relations in the *polis*, to a candor toward life (that chased away the false shadows of introspection and the shams of neurotic estheticism).

From the totality of the *polis* arose the Greek view, which Paul Landis so eloquently describes in his discussion of the Athenian drama:

An attitude toward life at once honest and so intelligent that the minds of men, however far they may be deceived by Fancy or philosophy, must always return to it at the end. By virtue of something that looks almost like racial genius the Athenians of the fifth century succeeded in looking upon life with a level gaze. They faced it neither with bravado and bluster, nor with fear and trembling; not with an ignorant assumption of power over it, nor with an equally ignorant and cowardly feeling of inferiority...

The message of the Athenian drama is

this honest intellectualism, this passion for truth, this serene and level gaze on life — and this has always been the modern spirit...It is the struggle to free the intellect, to tear from it the veils of hope and fear, so that it may look clearly and unafraid upon the face of life and know it as it is, terrible and pitiful and glorious and utterly nonsensical.¹³

That Hellenic society was scarred by slavery and by a severely patriarchal dispensation for women need hardly be emphasized. These cruel features it shared with all city states that began to duster along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea — features that were part of the general barbarism of the epoch. But they do not explain why the *polis* succeeded so admirably in transcending that barbarism, indeed, the horrors which were to follow in the wake of the *polis*'s decline, notably the emergence of the Roman Imperium and the early Middle Ages. Lest we lose

¹³ Paul Landis, Preface to *Seven Famous Greek Plays* (New York: Modern Library, Inc., 1931), p. vi.

all sense of perspective toward urban development, we must never fail to focus on the essentials which produced so advanced a society as the Athenian *polis*. The civic spirit of Athens has its source in yeoman virtues, not in slavery or patriarchal ism, Athenian internal unity stems from men of strong character who were indomitable in their social allegiances and rounded in their urbanity because they had firm ties to the soil and were independent in their economic position. Labor and land, town and country, men and society were joined in a common destiny. In bourgeois society the community dissolves into competing monads and is pervaded by spiritual mediocrity directly as the material being of man is rendered enslaved, insecure, and one-sided. In the *polis*, the community achieves unity and flourishes spiritually as the material being of man achieves relative freedom, independence, and roundedness. In bourgeois society, the commodity, which mediates all human relations, not only “unites” society in a cash nexus and minute division of labor, but at the same time separates man from the instruments of production, labor from creativity, object from subject, and eventually man from man. In the *polis*, the relative independence of the individual makes it possible to see the true dependence of man on the community, completely identifying the Athenian with his society.

Finally, precisely because in bourgeois society man has “mastered” nature without rationally coordinating his social life, consciousness has only to reflect society as it exists to yield the most catastrophic as well as the most inane results. The untutored act of thought is brought to the service of horrors that the blindest Forces of nature could never yield. The more passive thought remains in the face of conditions it can no longer comprehend, the more actively demoniacal it becomes merely by acquiescing to the status quo. In the *polis*, thought reaches sublime heights of philosophy, poetry, and art if only because of the solidarity. Freedom, and independence it affords the individual, an independence rooted not only in civic conditions but also in material ones.

Classical Athenian drama ends not with another Aeschylus, whose tragedies dwell on the consolidation of the *polis*, but with Aristophanes, whose savage mockery voices the tragic apprehension of social dissolution. The irony of Greek conditions, here, acquires its adequate form, for the very forces that produce the Hellenic yeomanry — the “Men of Marathon” — lead to their extinction. Given the limited material basis of Hellenic society, the aristocracy which emerges from tribal life cannot be replaced by the yeoman without also creating favorable conditions for a new and more pedestrian aristocracy — the aristocracy of trade, usury, and wealth.

This crisis was by no means new to Greek society. As early as the time of Hesiod, during the eighth century B.c., merchants and usurers began encroaching on the smallholding, consolidating farms into estates, and reducing many citizens to debtor-slaves. In the two centuries that separate Hesiod from Cleisthenes, Attica was torn by intense social struggles, later to be paralleled closely by similar conflicts in the early Roman Republic. In contrast to Rome, whose pillaging expeditions abroad reinforced the power and wealth of the elite classes, Attica’s crisis remained largely internalized and the *polis* was able to arrive at a more rational solution of its problems. Whereas Rome rapidly succumbed to the latifundia system (a plantation form of agriculture administered by wealthy land magnates and worked by slave gangs), Attica returned again to the small-holding. Solon, Pisistratus, and Cleisthenes divided the large estates among the dispossessed and allowed a limited margin of independence to its craftsmen and traders, Pisistratus, after his second exile, ruthlessly uprooted the big landowners. Their estates were confiscated and divided among the peasantry, dispossessed agricultural laborers, and the Athenian poor. Cleisthenes completed this immense work: he put down all attempts at an aristocratic restoration and juridically established

the Athenian democracy which was to pass into history as the political model of the classical *polis*.

Was it indeed “something that looks almost like radical genius,” as Landis would have it, or was it perhaps more mundane factors that guided the Athenians to so rational a disposition of their social problems? That the Greeks were, in Marx’s words, the “normal children” of early history can be partly accounted for by the weight of their tradition and by their geographic setting. Athenian society was not so far removed from its tribal origins, nor so muddled by the rubbish of history, that it lacked a clear, direct, and humanistic view of its social problems. The memory of its primitive democracy was strong enough to find a more secular fulfillment in the establishment of the *Ecclesia*, close to nature, situated in a hospitable climate, neither so rich as to yield oppressive standards of opulence nor so poor as to be strangled by oppressive poverty, decentralized by a mountainous terrain but repeatedly invigorated culturally by the sea, Attica remained remarkably flexible and generously susceptible to the civilizing crosscurrents of the age. Accordingly, Athenian leaders were favored by every opportunity to act with wisdom — to reconcile and fund the interests of the community into a common and harmonizing social perspective, H. D. F. Kitto is only just when he sharply contrasts the course followed by Solon, Pisistratus, and Cleisthenes with that of modern Europe: in Athens, the reconciliation of the community to new social demands occurred at a high point of social vigor, when all strata of the *polis* were able to contribute vitally to the community; in Europe, it occurred after the complete exhaustion and decay of the old society, when little remained of earlier traditions. Hellenic society resolved its problems rationally; Europe, as yet, has not freed itself from blind and demoniacal social forces.

Owing to the fact that Athenian society was based on a yeomanry and on small agricultural holdings, town and country were brought into delicate balance. In turn, the preservation of this balance depended upon the internal self-sufficiency supplied by the division of labor between urban and rural society. The *polis* flourished only as long as one did not outweigh the other. To the Greeks, this social equilibrium was summed up by the term *autarkeia*: a concept of wholeness, material self-sufficiency, and balance that is the core of the Hellenic outlook. But this outlook did not prove impervious to the powerful economic forces which were gathering in the Mediterranean basin and gradually restructuring Greek society. With the expansion of handicrafts and commercial contact with the outside world, the nascent Hellenic bourgeoisie became increasingly powerful and began to alter the balance between town and country on which the unity of the *polis* depended. Athenian interests now graduated from a local scale to encompass the Mediterranean area. The *polis* was becoming a cosmopolis, a change that brought it into conflict with the self-sufficient small-holding, not to speak of Greek communities abroad. In 434 B.C., with the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, Periclean Athens embarked upon a disastrous struggle for hegemony over other Greek cities and for a commanding position in the Mediterranean trade. The war lasted some thirty years, laying waste to Attica’s farms and exhausting her resources. “The Peloponnesian War,” observes Kitto, “virtually saw the end of the city-state as a creative force fashioning and fulfilling the lives of all its members.”¹⁴ Although the Athenian economy recovered from this conflict, Athens ceased to be a stable small-holders’ community’ designed to meet local needs. Attic agriculture now became oriented toward the Mediterranean trade. Wealth

¹⁴ H.D.F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (New York: Penguin Books. 1951), p. 152.

and property were amassed in fewer and fewer hands; political life became increasingly devitalized and corrupt until the independence of Athens was swept away by a Macedonian phalanx.

Rome is little more than an epilogue to Athens. It is easy enough to draw parallels between the Latin development and the Hellenic: Camillus for Solon, the Gracchi for the Pisistradae, Cicero for Demosthenes. But however much Latium seems to follow in the wake of Greece From tribalism to feudalism and then to a community of independent farmers, the two diverge on the issue of public control over the administrative organs of society. In contrast to the *Ecclesia* and Council of Five Hundred, the Roman Senate develops into a specialized professional body, divorced from the populace. It becomes a legislative aristocracy. Moreover, unlike Solon and Pisistratus, Camillas and the Gracchi fail to restore the small-holding as a viable economic basis for the Roman city-state. The Greek *polis*, once it declined, could no longer be duplicated by other communities within the social framework of antiquity. Its passing bears witness to the fact that the elements which produced the *polis* had been exhausted. Indeed, the complexities of Mediterranean society were already present wills the consolidation of Latium and the historic pre-eminence of the Roman city-state.

Once trade and the free cities acquired cosmopolitan proportions, two alternatives confronted the ancient world: either mercantile relations would expand to a point that would produce an authentic capitalist economy or the cities would become parasitic entities, living in vampire fashion on the agricultural wealth of the older social system in the Near East and North Africa. The realization of the first alternative was almost completely precluded by the nature of Mediterranean economic life. Trade, while growing considerably, could never reach sufficient proportions to transform Mediterranean society as a whole. There was simply not enough quantity, as it were, to produce a change in quality. Although commerce managed to undermine the small-holding, which gave way to large-scale agriculture in Latium, the free cities were too few in number and much too weak economically to dissolve the self-contained wealthy land systems of the Near East and open them as commercial markets. The Asian land system imposed the same limits on the development of capitalist production abroad which confronted its domestic commercial strata at home. Owing to its solidity, it dosed off the only potential market of sufficient dimensions that might have transformed mercantile capitalism into industrial capitalism. Ancient trade remained primarily a carrying trade, a cement between the Free cities and economically impenetrable societies based on time-honored agricultural ways.

The "Fall of Rome" can be explained by the rise of Rome, The Latin city was carried to imperial heights not by the resources of its rural environs, but by spoils acquired from the systematic looting of the Near East, Egypt, and North Africa, The very process involved in maintaining the Roman cosmopolis destroyed the cosmopolis. Every attempt on Rome's part to exact further tribute from her colonies involved increasing coercion and expenditures, which in turn required more tribute. A point was finally reached where the negative aspect of this escalating development predominated over the positive: the costs of maintaining the city began to outweigh what it received. As the needs of the city and its urban satellites began to rise far out of proportion to the flow of tribute, impoverishment and demoralization also increased; local taxation strangled domestic economic life, the urban population began to drift into the countryside, and the city's birthrates declined. Rome could no longer be maintained as a viable entity. The imperial eagles migrated from the west to the east, from the artificial center of administration to the sources of real wealth, Constantinople replaced Rome as the authentic center of the empire and Italy now

lay at the feet of the barbarians. Having passed beyond its domestic limits, Rome “fell” in the sense that the city contracted to its Own agrarian base — and declined even more as a result of the enormous urban heights from which it had fallen.

What earlier historians once described as Europe’s “dark ages” comprise a sweeping readjustment of urban life to the only agrarian possibilities which lay at hand. Under the Roman empire, town and country had entered into sharp contradiction with each other. Lacking an adequate agrarian and industrial basis of its own. Rome had swollen to enormous dimensions around a system of plunder and parasitism. The city had turned upon the Land and introduced inefficient — even destructive — forms of agricultural exploitation, such as slave-worked latifundia owned by absentee proprietors. Not surprisingly, Rome succumbed to these internal weaknesses when the parasitic system overreached itself and began to acquire less than it lost. By slowly abandoning a slave-worked agriculture for a feudal one. Italy simply returned to the only stable agrarian forms which could satisfy her needs. The “Fall of Rome” as a city, quite aside from the destiny of the empire, was a local “retrogression.” Indeed, apart from Roman Europe, no such retrogression occurred elsewhere, No drop of urban life occurred in the Near East, where agricultural resources were adequate for the development of large cities. Similarly in North Africa, In these areas, the free cities patterned themselves on pre-existing agrarian social forms and essentially became the urban creatures of the Asian land system. As to the central and northern areas of Europe, where Germanic peoples were emerging from tribalism and agrarian kingships, the development of feudalism was a logical extension of the course followed by tribal communities in early Greece and Latium. With the rise of feudal society, the European continent was thrown back upon its own mainsprings, A new relationship between land and city began to emerge, one that initiated an authentic development toward more advanced social relationships,

2. The Rise of the Bourgeois City

Only in western and central Europe, did the rise of urban life yield a lasting domination of town over country – not as a special Case in the Crevices of the ancient world, but as the general feature of a continental society, Europe's development closely recapitulates the evolution of agrarian society through the social phases we have discussed in connection with Greece and Latium; but while the development of urban life in antiquity led to a *cul de sac*, in Europe the towns developed capitalism and established the bourgeois city.

The striking social advances scored by European cities can be explained by many factors unique to the continent itself, although what stands out as the principal one is again the influence of geography on agrarian relations. Wherever the forest cover was removed, the agriculturist found large areas: of arable land – a notable contrast with the Near East and North Africa, where substantial surpluses of food could be gleaned only from narrow strips of alluvial land. While the river valleys of the Near East and North Africa were surrounded by inhospitable wastes and mountains, European rivers flowed into the depths of vast forests in which new communities could be founded without interference from an all-encompassing centralized state. Indeed, in the absence of any need for extensive irrigation works, no need existed for the elaborate bureaucratic and monarchical apparatus which drained the commercial life of the ancient world. The very extent of the land, of its mountains and forests, vitiated any tendency toward centralization that might have been a political heritage of the Mediterranean civilizations. Classical European feudalism was nourished by the geography and climate of the continent with the result that European urban communities achieved a degree of independence unknown, apart from Greece, to ancient society.

Fortunately, too, for the cities, European feudalism remained at chronic war with itself. This not only promoted further decentralization but often provided urban communities with a wide latitude for independent growth. By the tenth century, the mutual pitting of French baronies against each other had divided the country into some ten thousand political units. When European cities began to emerge, they found an agrarian society incomparably less unified and materially weaker than the domineering and wealthy Asian land systems of the Near East and North Africa. Given time and the steady settling of the continent, many medieval cities freed themselves from the control of the feudal lords and achieved a modest dominance over agrarian interests.

To understand the uniqueness of the medieval commune (as these towns and cities were called in France), it would be useful to distinguish them from their urban antecedents in Indian America, the Near East, and Asia. Although all cities emerge in varying degrees from the division of labor among food cultivation, crafts, and commerce, the extent to which they rest on this division of labor often distinguishes one city from another. Quite often, functions other than economic activities determine the nature and development of an urban entity. Tenochtitlan's size and population, for example, are not easily explained by its commercial and craft activities. In fact, as we have already seen, the city's principal functions were ceremonial, military, and administrative.

Administrative needs were important to the growth of many Near Eastern and Asian cities: in Egypt and Mesopotamia as well as in India and China. Which is not to say that crafts and trade were unimportant in these communities, but merely that they occupied an ancillary position with respect to political and religious activities.

By contrast, the medieval commune was devoted almost entirely to handicrafts and local trade. The towns of the high Middle Ages were primarily marketplaces and centers for the production of commodities. Only in a few instances in European history do we encounter cities that expanded for reasons other than economic ones — notably, Aix-la-Chapelle, a city that grew or regressed with the political fortunes of the Carolingian kings, and of course Rome, which increased owing to the tribute collected by the papacy from dioceses throughout Europe. For the most part, however, medieval communes furnished the skills and products which could not be acquired from the manorial domestic economy. Thus these towns never suffered from any confusion about their functions or about the factors which determined their destiny. They had a reasonably clear self-understanding of their commercial and craft interests. Far from being distorted like their antecedents into pliant instruments of agrarian classes, they jealously guarded their autonomy and provided a hospitable environment for independent traders and handicraft workers — the precursors of the modern bourgeoisie.

Yet the medieval commune was a feudal, not a bourgeois, city. Essentially, its economy was based on simple commodity production — a mode of production in which craftsmen use the marketplace to satisfy their needs, not to accumulate capital. Although goods were produced for exchange, that is, as commodities (to use Marx's conception of the term), the owner of the means of production remained the direct producer rather than a bourgeois "supervisor" of productive activity. To be sure, a master craftsman was aided by apprentices, but the latter could realistically aspire to become master craftsmen in their own right once they acquired the skills to do so. In typical feudal fashion, guilds regulated economic activity down to almost the smallest detail; the output, quality, and prices of goods that found their way to the marketplace were carefully supervised by craft associations of master workmen. The atomization of labor and the chaos of the marketplace that are so indelibly etched into the modern capitalist system were unknown to the medieval commune. Each individual had his secure position in the economy of the community, a position carefully defined by a system of rights and duties, and each fulfilled his responsibilities with dignity, artistry, and a deep pride of workmanship.

In so self-contained and self-fulfilling a society, then, how did it come to this that these simple commodity relations were supplanted by bourgeois ones and the beauty of the medieval commune by the blight of the bourgeois city?

Our own age tends to answer this question on its own terms, notably in technological ones — such as the advent of the steam engine and large-scale machinery — as though even an economic interpretation of historical changes does not include the totality of man's social relations. Doubtless, European feudalism was not devoid of technological achievements of its own; indeed, the traditional image of the Middle Ages as a technologically stagnant era has since undergone considerable revision in the face of recent research. Feudal society scored significant advances in agricultural technique, the development of new sources of energy, and the discovery of new mechanical devices. Yet there is a real sense in which medieval technology did not go much beyond the millennia-old domestic economy of the neolithic period — the basic arts of manual plowing, broadcast sowing, horticulture, hand construction of dwellings and small-scale weaving, pottery, and smelting. This was an economy of tools and skills, not machines and industrial

administration. To the techniques prevalent, say, in ancient Egypt, medieval Europe did not add appreciably more than the adaptations of a traditional technology to its own soils and climate. Indeed, in some respects, European skills and crafts were inferior to those of Asia, which accounts for the centuries-long attraction that Eastern goods had for medieval traders. European agricultural techniques would have been useless, even harmful, in many areas of the world. What Europe primarily achieved, during the Middle Ages, was to advance her own continental economy. The most important material step performed by feudal society was not the discovery of any single corpus of new inventions that presumably made capitalism possible, but rather the opening, clearing, and settlement of the European continent itself and adaptation of the Mediterranean technology to the heavier soils, climatic rigors, and sparser populations of the north. And the greatest social advance scored by Europe was the development of commodity production in towns founded without decisive interference by agrarian interests — that is, urban centers with their own law of life, a law of life that found its expression in the development of commodity production.

With the growth of international trade, commodity relations began to subvert the entire fabric of European feudalism, undermining traditional relations in the countryside as well as in the towns. From the thirteenth century onward, European society became the theater of social and economic developments hitherto unprecedented in history. In northern Italy, and throughout central and western Europe, the communes began to ally with each other to establish federations against local territorial lords. The first breezes of German unification wafted across the land when in 1256 the towns of the Rhine valley established the Rhenish League of Cities; and although the League soon fell apart, it found more or less permanent successors in the Hanseatic League of the Baltic region and the Swabian League. Nor was this remarkable stirring of the cities confined merely to Germany. The Swiss cantons emancipated themselves from Austria; Flemish towns rose in revolt against Count Louis in the first of a series of civil conflicts in the Lowlands; and Paris, under Etienne Marcel, took up arms against the French dauphin. Although many of the urban revolts were premature and unsuccessful, their failures were more than compensated for by the success enjoyed by the Italian cities. In northern Italy, town after town managed not only to subordinate or assimilate the territorial lords to its commercial interests but each, in almost every vital respect, was now a bourgeois city.

What is of paramount importance, here, is that urban life was developing on its own authentic mainsprings. In the past, the land had in some sense beleaguered the city — if not always by dominating or circumscribing its evolution, then at least by distorting and finally undermining it. In late medieval Europe, by contrast, the commodity system developed by the towns began to reach into the countryside itself and transform the land into a social image of the city. Trade, by creating new needs within the manor, slowly dissolved the old self-sufficient agrarian economy and even the parochialism of the medieval commune itself. Increasingly, feudal relations were replaced by exchange relations and the traditional estate system — a hierarchy ossified in a time-honored nexus of mutual rights and duties — by the mediation of commodities between independent and sovereign producers. By the fourteenth century, serfdom began to disappear from much of western Europe. The emerging free farmer and yeoman became the rural counterpart of the master craftsman in the town. Although much the same development had occurred in Greece and Latium centuries earlier, Europe's evolution was favored by the fact that its commerce was continental rather than merely local, its agrarian system weaker and more resilient with the result that its commercial development was not blocked by the great Asian land systems which had

detoured Roman society from an authentic bourgeois development into parasitic alternatives. Primarily, the European merchant princes of the late Middle Ages sought commercial wares from the East rather than tribute — although they certainly pillaged wherever they could — and they acquired these wares for continental markets rather than for local consumption. Indeed, the discovery of new wares abroad served to widen the market at home and, with the colonization of America, provided a sharp stimulus to commercial and industrial development.

To form a reasonably clear idea of how the bourgeois city emerged, we must pause, here, to cleave with the dialectic of the commodity relationship and the modes of labor it yields — a dialectic to which Marx's work forms an indispensable guide. To say that capitalism represents the most advanced Form of commodity production is now a truism, but the sense in which this statement is true requires some comment. The abstract treatment that Marx gives to the dialectic of the commodity relationship — the successive development of its potentialities from the accidental to the expanded and finally to money forms — tends to conceal a living historical process. As Marx demonstrates, the inner logic which yields these-forms is largely quantitative; given the fertile ground for expanding exchange, almost every aspect of the productive process, including labor power itself becomes a commodity, an object of exchange, and in the ancient world the expansion of trade was obstructed by the wealth and power of a strong agrarian society; indeed, so compelling were agrarian values that the merchant's social ideals centered not on capital accumulation, but rather on the ownership of landed property. In Europe, this obstacle did not exist to a significant degree. Trade increasingly became an end in itself and, by the late Middle Ages, so too did capital accumulation. Feudal society lacked the viability needed to contain the continental percolation of commodity relationships. Once the exchange process became widespread enough, it simply engulfed the older order of relationships. Exchange created new divisions in the labor process and, simply by the process of continual division and subdivision, demolished the self-contained domestic economy of the manor. From a marginal source of goods and services, the market moved to the center of economic life.

No major technological innovations were needed to achieve this profound transformation. Although the capitalist system later produced the most far-reaching technological advances known in history, the bourgeoisie initially used the tools and materials of the craftsman to promote the new mode of production. Capital simply altered the traditional labor process by hiring workmen to produce for exchange without appreciably changing the industrial practices of the time. Labor-power was converted into a commodity. All the decisive technological advances achieved by the capitalist system thenceforth centered around the adaptation of natural forces and energy to this mode of labor, technology became an extension of labor conceived not merely as a *human* activity, but as *wage* labor, a resource for economic exploitation. Economic activity began to subordinate the satisfaction of concrete human needs to the abstract goals of exchange and capital accumulation. Production, in effect, occurred for its own sake. This marked a fundamental change in all the values of previously existing societies, however exploitative their natures.

We must focus more sharply on this unique economic transformation and its social consequences. Whatever else may be the principal functions of the early city, certainly in an advanced urban society the authentic nexus of the city is the marketplace — the arena in which the necessities of life are exchanged and in which urban contact has its workaday center. The nature of the marketplace in any given period of history depends largely on the prevailing mode of labor. There is no mystery about this characteristically Marxian formulation. As we have already noted, the marketplace of Tenochtitlan was primitive by virtue of the fact that Aztec trade never developed

to the level of the money Form, Concrete labor — such as the specific skills of the food cultivator, mason, weaver, potter, or sculptor — more or less determined the way in which marketable goods were viewed in the marketplace. Although each object found its “reflection”, during the exchange process in another exchangeable object, the labor time involved in production did not reach the degree of quantification, abstraction, and generalization required for the development of money. Exchange was guided primarily by material need and by the quality of the objects to be exchanged. Labor, like the object, retained its qualitative, human, concrete features: it did not dissolve into a mere aggregate of muscular or mental energy and lose its identity as an expression of human powers. That the utility or use-value of an object retained its primacy over exchange value is demonstrated clearly enough by the fact that many use-values in primitive society were inalienable. Land in Indian America, for example, was never a “salable item”; it could not have been denatured into “real estate” until the coming of the white man.

With the development of the money form under conditions of simple commodity production, labor, to be sure, does reach a fairly high degree of abstraction, but rarely does it lend itself to the degree of quantification attained under capitalism. The alienation of commodities still retains key human features. Trade remains an individual act in which the direct producers meet face to face in order to exchange the products of their own labor. The mutual satisfaction of needs retains its pre-eminence over the mindless accumulation of commodities and capital. Concrete labor prevails, as it were, over quantified, generalized, abstract labor. A large area of human needs is still satisfied outside the marketplace — that is, by the domestic economy — and even those who may depend upon the market for their existence are not so much its victim as its creators. They have individually mastered the conditions of production and they exchange their products under conditions in which the needs of the community, the identity of producers and consumers, and the number of commodities required by the market can be determined with a fair degree of precision. However much such communities may compete with each other, there is little competition within the community itself. And there is no production for the sake of production. The value of a commodity is determined primarily by the workmanship and talent involved in its production and by factors such as its durability and quality — in short, by concrete labor, hence the extraordinary beauty of the simplest objects produced by many noncapitalist communities.

Although all trade is alienation, in the medieval commune it was also relation. Inasmuch as this was an explicit fact of daily life owing to the prevailing mode of labor, the medieval commune created remarkable forms of association not only in civic life but in the economy itself. Lewis Mumford remarks that

the workshop was a family, likewise the merchant’s counting house. The members ate together at the same table, worked in the same rooms, slept in the same dormitory, joined in family prayers, participated in common amusements.¹

The intimacy between labor and life was revealed by the fact that “The family pattern dominated industry.” Urban life was intensely, even artistically collective. The marketplace was a center not only for trade but also for

public ceremony for it is on the porch of the cathedral that the miracle plays were enacted; it was within the square that the guilds set up their stages for the perfor-

¹ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1938), p 35.

mance of their mystery plays; it was here that great tourneys would be held. It was not merely acropolis but amphitheatre.²

Yet even these remarks do not recapture for us the democratic ambience of many medieval communes, at the high point of their development. Nearly all communes were policed by their own citizens, who rotated to form the night watch and filled the ranks of the city militia. Commonly, mayors and town councils were elected by the guilds or by public-assemblies of the populace reminiscent of the Athenian *Ecclesia*. Indeed, the the *polis*, these towns Formed a complete and rounded totality. As Mumford notes:

Prayer, mass, pageant, life-ceremony, baptism, marriage, Dr funeral — the city itself was stage for these separate scenes of the drama, and the citizen himself was the actor.³

Perhaps no account of the commune more dramatically reveals the solidarity which welded this urban way of life together than Albrecht Dürer's description of a religions ceremony held in Antwerp as late as the sixteenth century:

I saw the Procession pass along the street, the people being arranged in rows, each man some distance from his neighbor, but the rows close behind the other. There were the Goldsmiths, the Painters, the Masons, the Broderers, the Sculptors, the Joiners, the Carpenters, the Sailors, the Fishermen, the Butchers, the Leatherers, the Clothmakers, the Bakers, the Tailors, the Cordwainers — indeed, workmen of all kinds and: many craftsmen and dealers who work for their livelihood...A very largo company of widows also took part in the procession. They support themselves with their own hands and observe a special rule They were ail dressed from head to foot in white linen garments made expressly for the occasion...⁴

To which Mymford adds:

Note the vast number of people arrayed in this procession. As in the church itself, the spectators were also the communicants and participants: they engaged in the spectacle, watching it from within., not from without: or rather, feeling ii from within, acting in unison, not dismembered beings, reduced to a single specialized role.⁵

During the Great French Revolution, the Parisians replaced the feudal nomenclature by the single word *citoyen* to express their newly discovered national solidarity, Later events were to reveal that beneath the apparent unity of the nation lay profoundly divergent and antagonistic social interests. The medieval commune for its part used the more organic term "brother." "*Unus subveniet alteri tamquam fratri suo* — 'let each hold the other like a brother' — says a Flemish charter of the twelfth century, and these words were actually a reality," observes Henri Pirenne,

² Ibid, p. 55.

³ Ibid, p. 64.

⁴ Quoted by Mumford, *ibid*, pp. 63–64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

As early as the twelfth century the merchants were expending a good part of their profits for the benefit of their fellow citizens — building churches, founding hospitals, buying off the market-tolls. The love of gain was allied, in them, with local patriotism. Every man was proud of his city and spontaneously devoted himself to its prosperity. This was because, in reality, each individual life depended directly upon the collective life of the municipal association. The commune of the Middle Ages had, in fact, all the essential attributes which the State exercises today. It guaranteed to all its members the security of his person and of his chattels. Outside of it he was in a hostile world, surrounded by perils and exposed to every risk. In it alone did he have a shelter, and for it he felt a gratitude which bordered on love. He was ready to devote himself to its defense, just as he was always ready to bedeck it and make it more beautiful than its neighbors. Those magnificent cathedrals which the thirteenth Century saw erected would not have been conceivable without the joyous alacrity with which the burghers contributed, by gifts, to their construction. They were not only houses of God; they also glorified the city of which they were the greatest ornament and which their majestic towers advertised afar. They were for the cities of the Middle Ages what temples were for those of antiquity.⁶

Yet, even these generous lines by Pirenne fail to do adequate justice to the attitude of the medieval urban dweller toward his city. The commune provided not only security to its populace but also a deep sense of community. It offered not only protection but the comfort of sociality and a human scale the burgher could comprehend and in which he could find a uniquely individual space. The commune was home — not merely an environment that surrounded the home. The concrete nature of the labor process, the directness, indeed, familiar character, of nearly all social relations, and the human scale of civic life which fostered a high degree of personal participation in urban affairs — all, combined to retain a natural core to social life which the cosmopolises of the ancient world had dissolved with the passing of the *polis*. One might say that the natural core of the medieval commune was not unlike the sexual division of labor which underpinned the economic life of tribal society. Marx, with considerable perception, notes that

Castes and guilds arise from the action of the same natural laws that regulate the differentiation of plants, and animals into species and varieties, except that, when a certain degree of development has been reached, the heredity of castes and exclusiveness of guilds are ordained as a law of Society.⁷

Just as the guilds speciate the commune, so commune and manor could be said to speciate feudal society. As to the commune, a natural civic nucleus mutes the externalizing and disintegrative forces latent in trade. Even the prevailing technology retains this natural or organic character. Tools are adapted to the proficiency of the craftsman, to his skills, talents, and physiology. The notion that a man is merely an adjunct of an impersonal machine that determines the tempo and nature of his work would have surely horrified members of a medieval guild.

Contrast this mentality with that of bourgeois society — a society that dissolves the natural basis of civic life by transmuting the fraternal relations of the medieval commune into harsh

⁶ “Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1948), pp. 209 — 210.

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1906), 1. 373.

commodity relations — and we are perhaps better equipped to judge the enormous psychic as well as economic changes that were to be introduced by the capitalist mode of production. The commodity, like a mysterious external force, now seems to rise above men and determine their destiny according to suprahuman autonomous laws. With the increasingly problematic abstraction of labor from its concrete forms, all relations, objects, and responsibilities acquire a monetary equivalent. Natural life shrinks from the community to the individual; the city becomes a mere aggregate of isolated human monads — a grey featureless mass, the raw materials of bureaucratic mobilisation and manipulation. The guild, which once formed the spontaneous arena of authentic human fraternity, finds its caricature in the industrial and commercial corporation, with its smoothly engineered ambience of “togetherness” and “team play.” The procession described by Dürer becomes the parade; the spiritual ceremony, the reified spectacle. With the emergence of a highly monetized economy, human beings become interchangeable with the very wares that are the result of their human powers. They too become commodities, the passive objects — whether as workers or spectators — of economic laws.

If the mere extension of commodity relations can be said to have transformed the medieval commune into the bourgeois city, the factory may be singled out as the agent which gives this city its structural form and its social purpose. By the word “factory” I mean more than an industrial enterprise: the factory is the locus of mobilised abstract labor, of labor power as a commodity, placed in the service of commerce as well as production. Accordingly, the term applies as much to an office building and a supermarket as to a mill and a plant. Once the factory becomes an element of urban life, it takes over the city almost completely. Here, a very important historic contrast must be emphasized. In the medieval commune, the workshop was a home: it was the locus not only of highly individuated technical activities, but also (as Mumford has already stressed) of complex personal and cultural responsibilities. With the emergence of the factory, home and work place are separated. The factory is a place to which the worker goes in order to expend his human powers — powers that are steadily degraded to the degree that they are abstracted and quantified as mere “work time” — in the service of increasingly anonymous owners and administrators. The factory has no personal or cultural functions; it is merely the collecting and mobilizing center for alienated depersonalized labor.

If these significant differences are viewed from a broader perspective, they reveal crucial differences between the very nature of the medieval commune and the bourgeois city. The guild, which unites homes that are also workshops, imparts a distinctly domestic character to the commune: it turns the city into a home, into an authentic human community that graduates personal affiliations and responsibilities to a social level. Conversely, the factory transforms the city into a commercial and industrial enterprise. It negates the role of the city as a personal and cultural entity, and exaggerates its economic functions to the point of urban pathology. The medieval commune was primarily a place in which to live; the bourgeois city is primarily a place in which to work. The guilds made the city into a center of human solidarity, religious communion, and cultural vitality; although work was necessary to achieve these goals, it became the medium for artistry and the expression of creative human powers, not an end in itself. The factory degrades the city to a center of production for the sake of production and consumption for the sake of consumption. That people must live in a city in order to work is obviously necessary to the existence of the factory, but the fact that they occupy dwellings is secondary to the fact that they work in office buildings, supermarkets, plants, and mills.

We will examine the unique characteristics of the bourgeois city in a later section, but at this point, we must ask how the medieval commune was transformed into the bourgeois city. The 'factory' requires the separation of the small independent producer from the means of production: the alienation of the producer's labor and the reduction of his labor power to a commodity. Generally as the market begins to expand beyond the environs of the commune, considerable differences in wealth emerge between members of the same guild and between individual members of the same community. In time, wealthy master craftsmen, traders (who are often organized into guilds of their own), and eventually the guilds themselves tend to become an exclusive stratum within the community with interests of their own that are set apart from and often opposed to those of the community as a whole. Such guilds begin to exclude apprentices and journeymen from becoming masters, turning them into authentic proletarians who must work for others in order to survive. In some areas of Europe, this process of proletarianization occurred so slowly that it did not visibly upset the stability of the commune. The Swiss cities are a case in point. There, the transformation from the guild workshop to the factory was so organic that Swiss communities, nearly to the present day, could be cited as models of civic balance, stability, and the integration of craft skills with mass production.

But in other areas, the expansion of the market from a local or regional to an international scale occurred at a tempo that gravely disrupted the harmony of the commune. As early as the thirteenth century, Flanders provides us with a not uncommon example of cities, based largely on international trade, in which the guilds developed into an oppressive hierarchical stratum that grossly exploited a large mass of dispossessed artisans. Nor did this change occur with tranquility. In 1280, nearly all the Flemish communes exploded into a bloody class war between proletarianized artisans and wealthy masters who were organized into exclusive guild monopolies. This conflict was not decisively resolved. Before either side could definitively vanquish the other, the territorial lords shrewdly used the occasion to intervene and hold both classes in check. Indeed, it may well be that, owing partly to the fact that this struggle was never fought out to its logical conclusion and partly to the later subordination of the Lowlands to English commercial hegemony, civic life in Holland and Flanders retained the medieval charm that has turned their cities into the museum pieces of the modern world.

We must turn to England to find the area in which the transformation of small producers into proletarians ran its full, perhaps most savage, course. And, ironically, this transformation first occurred in the countryside and only later in the cities. In the English countryside, the bourgeois development followed two distinct although complementary paths; more and more acreage was removed from food cultivation and village pasturage and devoted to raising sheep for the wool market of Flanders; and, capitalist entrepreneurs, blocked by guilds and merchant monopolies in the cities, turned to the villages to avail themselves of cheap unregulated labor for the domestic production of textile products. In both cases, this development was marked by the steady degradation and eventual dispossession of the English peasantry and yeomanry, a development in which the landed aristocracy and textile merchants dramatically transformed the social nature of the countryside and finally the cities.

By the sixteenth century, the English aristocracy — its appetite for riches whetted by rising world prices of wool — began ruthlessly to expropriate and enclose the traditional common pasture lands of the villages, even the private holdings of tenants whose plots had been tilled for generations. These lands were simply turned into sheep runs and their occupants dispossessed.

The story is told in a scathing manner by Thomas More in the opening pages of *Utopia*. More's principal character; Raphael Hythloday, declares:

Your sheep which are normally so gentle and need so little food ... have begun to be so ravenous and wild that they even eat up men. They devastate and destroy fields, houses and towns. For in whatever parts of the kingdom line and therefore more precious wool is produced, there the nobles and gentlemen, and also some holy abbots, are not content with the rents and annual profits that their predecessors used to get from their farms. They are not satisfied to live in luxury and idleness and be of no use to the state; they even harm it. they leave nothing for arable land, enclose everything for pasture, destroy houses, tear down towns and leave only the church to house the sheep; and as if the forests and parks lost you too little ground, those good men turn all houses and cultivated land into a desert.⁸

An increasingly capitalist form of agriculture, in effect, had become the pacesetter in England For capitalist industry.

Even more significant for the long run development of English capitalism, "free" capital, seeking escape from the fetters of guild restrictions and merchant monopolies in the towns, began to colonize the countryside along industrial lines. Again, one finds in this development no remarkably new technological advances; rather, an entrepot sort of merchant-capitalist, traveling from cottage to cottage, provides village spinners with wool, weavers and knitters with yarn, and dyers with doth. Materials and, where necessary, machines were formed out and worked for the barest subsistence wages instead of the higher guild-regulated town rates. With this putting-out system, the capitalist could easily undercut the urban standard of living and deliver his wares at such highly reduced prices that urban masters and journeymen were simply wiped out by the thousands. The entire family of the cottager, including his infant children, were put to work to meet the ravenous demands of the new economy. The factory system was born when the capitalist, finding it more profitable to mobilize rural labor and intensify its operations under close supervision, housed it in a single structure. English capitalist manufacture emerged primarily in the countryside rather than the cities and, in contrast to Flanders, essentially demolished the guild system From without rather than from within.

With the spread of capitalist manufacture, all that remained of the traditional guild structure collapsed. And with the passing of the guilds went the last integrating forces of the medieval communes and Renaissance towns. Thereafter, a new basis for city life developed in the urban centers of the industrialized western world, changing qualitatively all pre-existing social and economic relations within the towns and between town and country.

⁸ Thomas More, *Utopia* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1965), p. 14.

3. The Limits of the Bourgeois City

The early development of the bourgeois city is, in many ways, comparable to the destructive invasion of the colonial world by capitalist relations. In England, the enclosure movement dislodged thousands of families from the country and they had no recourse but to flock to the towns. The larger cities, to which much of this influx was directed, lacked the physical and administrative facilities for dealing with so many beggared families (nor were they particularly concerned with their fate), with the harsh result that large numbers of urban poor simply perished in the Streets. In many cities, entire quarters were reduced to filthy hovels, demoralized by Crime, congestion, disease, drunkenness, and prostitution. Although the enclosure movement extended over two centuries, it reached its high point in the early 1800s. From 1800 to 1920, more than three million acres of English countryside were enclosed, an area nearly as large as all the enclosures which occurred during the seventeenth century. These sweeping dispossessions of villagers and tenant farmers flooded the cities so, as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, more than half of the adult population in London and in some sixty English and Welsh towns had not been born in the cities of their residence.

During these bitter years, the demoralization of the urban population in England reached appalling proportions,¹ Nearly all the traditional moral restraints carefully reared by centuries of precapitalist social development — including the sacrosanct puritanical values introduced by the bourgeoisie itself during the Reformation era — were shattered in a single generation. In slums and working class quarters, drunkenness and profligacy rapidly became the normal condition of life. A moral blight, with its rampant debasement of family ties, sexuality, human solidarity, and dignity, followed doggedly in the wake of urban blight. Perhaps not surprisingly; the English population began to soar at a dizzying tempo despite pervasive malnourishment, appalling working conditions, and incomparably bad and unhygienic living conditions in the congested hovels. The joyless sexual promiscuity in working class quarters, so markedly irresponsible in its disregard of the newly born, reflected the conscious irresponsibility of the bourgeoisie toward the living conditions of the emerging proletariat. Although the increase in urban population can be partly accounted for by the influx of countryfolk into the cities, birthrates too began to rise. In 1800, the population of London numbered less than a million people, by 1850, it increased to two million, and at the turn of the century it reached four million, an unprecedented figure in

¹ Although by no means in England alone, as is commonly supposed. Even the supposedly benign Scandinavian countries, for example, were victimized by an enclosure movement of their own. Perhaps the most serious of these developments occurred in Sweden, where legislative challenges led to enclosures and the break-up of the traditional open-field system. This subversion of the peasant economy resulted in enormous urban congestion with a severe deterioration of Swedish cities. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, more than a million people emigrated from Sweden — mostly to the United States — and an equal number were obliged to abandon agriculture for work in crafts and in the new factories which emerged in the cities. The same development, although the product largely of agricultural mechanization and the “green revolution,” is taking place today in France, Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

urban history. Barely manageable in 1800, the capital of England had turned into a monstrous urban cancer in a single century.

To account for this urban decay with an opprobrious word like “neglect” is to conceal the fact that this very moral — or immoral — state of affairs is a fundamental social condition, or, more precisely, an inherent condition of bourgeois economic life and sedation. In precapitalist society, “neglect” might well be said to reflect an immoral state of affairs — the neglect of one’s kin, of comembers of the tribe, community, or guild — for it was a transgression of the a priori social relations (that constituted personal life, Human sociation, by its very nature, implied solidarity between individuals. Every individual belonged to a basic social unit that defined the ego and from which the ego, in turn, could claim security, solicitude, and the irreducible material means of lift. Except for very unusual circumstances and in periods of social decay, these claims were never ignored by the community or brought into question.

But once the traditional collective conditions of life, so highly charged with mythic and moral content, are dissolved by trade into monadic ones, once the clan, tribal, village, or guild nexus is dissolved into a cash nexus, the individual is denuded of any responsibility to society and to other individuals. All corporate and social ties must defer to the naked claims of egotism. Indeed, “self-preservation” and the dynamics of “social progress” are defined in terms of self-interest precluding, by definition, the time-honored ties of solidarity so integral to traditional societies. The primacy of the corporate “we” is replaced by the primacy of the self-sufficient “I.” The Leibnitzian monads which “have no windows through which something can come in or go out” become the elements of sociation — indeed, of society defined as such. Neglect other than self-neglect, now acquires the seemingly positive value of a self-interest that, according to the canons of traditional liberalism, serves the general interest by realizing its own egotistical goals. The term “self-interest” provides the rationale for what is neutrally designated as “social behavior” and “human interaction.” Traditional society, whose divisibility always stopped at some collective level of sociation, is replaced under capitalism by this fictive windowless monad, which now becomes the ultimate “social” — or more properly, asocial — entity. Having dissolved all social ties into “free” and “private” individuals, all that remains of the explicit interdependence of people in precapitalist communities is a “civic compact,” or, if you will, a “social contract,” to protect lives and property — a “contract” that colonizes such a limited terrain of sociation that it becomes a warrant for neglect beyond the contours of public order. Beyond these contours, each producer is an entity unto himself, busily engaged in the pursuit of his own private affairs. The language of physics is appropriate here: society is reduced to a mechanical Brownian movement of molecules, each bouncing against the other in the course of exchanging “goods and services.” There appears to be no social dimension and no development of relations in the traditional sense other than quantitative ones; nor is it surprising to find that social theory itself adopts this quantification of social relations as its research norms, and turns from social philosophy into sociology.

Yet, despite these appearances, a qualitative social development occurs. by reducing every relationship to a cash nexus, capital removes all the moral and esthetic restraints that held the growth of earlier cities in check. The concept of social responsibility. Once intuitive to precapitalist communities, is replaced by a single goal: plunder. Every entity and human capacity is conceived of as a resource for the acquisition of profit, the land, forests, seas, rivers, the labor of others, and ultimately all the verities of social life from those which inhere in the Family to the community itself. The new industrial and commercial classes fall upon the social body like ravenous wolves on a helpless prey, and what remains of a once vital social organism is the tom fragments and

indigestible sinews that linger more in the memory of humanity than in the realities of social intercourse, The American urban lot with its rusted cans, broken glass, and debris strewn chaotically among weeds and scrub reflects in the minuscule the ravaged remains of forests, waterways, shorelines, and communities.

Society is now ruled by competition; and qualitative changes in social relations consist in the fact that competition tends to transform the numerous small enterprises into fewer and fewer centralized industrial and commercial giants. All elements of society begin to change Civic; political, and cultural gigantism parallel industrial and commercial gigantism. Social life assumes dimensions so far removed from the human scale and human control that society ceases to appear as the shelter of humanity. Rather, it becomes a demonic force operating far above live heads of its human constituents, obeying a law of development completely alien to human goals. Cities and regions are delivered over to an autonomous national division of labor, to a scale of economic and social life that is far beyond the comprehension of the community. The city becomes an agglomeration of dispirited people scattered among cold, featureless structures.

The now corporatism of late capitalism differs profoundly from traditional corporatism. Bourgeois corporatism aggregates the monads without transforming their relations to each other; they are reconstituted into an anonymous herd, not a personalized interdependent collectivity. The individual is denied sovereignty over those conditions of life that, make for authentic individuality Without gaining the mutual support afforded by traditional corporatism. The personalized collectivity, represented by the clan, tribe, and guild, is replaced by the anonymous bureaucratic institution or agency which, insofar as it provides a social service of value, does so with cold indifference. As Don Martindale observes:

There is a continual breakdown of older traditional, social and economic structures based on family ties, local associations, culture, caste, and status with the substitution of an order resting on occupational and vocational interests. Among other things this means that the growth of the city is accomplished by a substitution of indirect “secondary” relations for direct, face-to-face “primary” relations. The church, school and family are modified. The school takes over some of the functions of the family. The church loses influence being displaced by the printed page.²

One can add that the close vocational ties fostered by the guild are displaced by the bureaucratic manipulation characteristic of the trade unions the marketplace and the personal buyer-seller relationship have given way to the impersonal supermarket and mass merchandising; and the popular forms of community decisionmaking (such as the assembly and town-hall meeting) have been replaced by a mechanical electoral process which delivers the formulation of policy into the hands of preselected “representatives” whose roots in the community are tenuous or nonexistent. In its early revolutionary phase, bourgeois society could claim with a certain degree of justification that it sought the liberation of the ego from the trammels of caste, religious superstition, and authoritarian corporatism. Today, in its late, distinctly corporate phase, the same society retains the individualism of its early period all the more to create individuals without individuality, isolated egos without personality.

Capitalism is pre-eminently an economic system, the demiurge of *homo economies* as distinguished from the traditional *homo collectivus*. Civil society is the byproduct of economic society.

² Donn: Martindale, “Prefatory Remarks” to Max Weber’s *The City* (New York: The Free Press, 1958), p. 21.

Yet even in the latter sphere, the most sacrosanct of all, economic activity loses its relationship to human needs. Production occurs for the sake of production, driven on relentlessly by competition. Almost accidentally does industry respond to the material requirements of humanity; commodities are produced for exchange. Capital is indifferent to their social destiny; the producer is unconcerned whether commodities are beautiful or ugly, durable or shoddy, safe or dangerous. All that counts is realizing a sale and making a profit — so that more sales can be realized and more profits made to survive the perils of competition. So too with the city. All pretensions aside, it matters little whether the city is ugly, whether it debases its inhabitants, whether it is esthetically, spiritually, or physically tolerable. What counts is that economic operations occur on a scale and with an effectiveness to meet the only criterion of bourgeois survival: economic growth.

We cannot ignore the devastating impact of this criterion on urban life. Precapitalist cities were limited by the countryside, not only externally in the sense that the growth of free cities inevitably came up against social, cultural, and material barriers reared by entrenched agrarian interests, but also internally, insofar as the city reflected the social relations on the land. Except for the late medieval cities, exchange relations were never completely autonomous; to one degree or another, they were placed in the service of the land. But once exchange relations begin to dominate the land and finally transform agrarian society, the city develops according to the workings of a suprasocial law, Production for the sake of production, translated into urban terms, means the growth of the city for its own sake — without any intrinsic urban or human criteria to arrest that growth. Nothing inhibits this course of development but the catastrophic results of the development itself. The “exploding metropolis,” far from posing the cliché of “urban revitalization,” now raises the more crucial historic problem of urban exhaustion. The bourgeois city has limits too, but these no longer emerge from the relationship of the city to the land. They emerge from (the expansion of the very exchange relations which are so basic to urban development as we have known it for thousands of years.

The most obvious limits of the bourgeois city are physical. The larger cities of the world are breaking down under sheer excess of size and growth. They are disintegrating administratively, institutionally, and logistically; they are increasingly unable to provide the minimal services for human habitation, personal safety, and the means for transporting people and goods to places where they are needed. Perhaps the most obvious index to the scope of these problems, viewed in numerical terms, is the data on contemporary urban population trends. According to recent data prepared by the Urban Land Institute, the United States a decade ago contained twenty-three “Great Metropolitan Areas” with populations of a million or more, roughly embracing about 40 percent of the national population. By 1970, there were twenty-nine of these urban entities, and their proportion of the population was 44 percent. With clearly voiced alarm, the Institute projects that if present trends continue (and there is no reason why they shouldn’t), by the year 2000 about 63 percent of the American population will live in overwhelmingly urbanized areas. If this projection is accurate, the number of people living in large cities — even allowing for declining fertility rates — may well exceed 180 million; indeed, it may possibly equal the present national population.³

³ Jerome P. Pickard, “US. Metropolitan Growth and Expansion. 1970–2000” (Washington, DC. Urban Land Institute, 1972), pp. 6–7.

We shall have occasion to examine the grotesque distortions this statistical picture suggests about land use, the distribution of resources, and ultimately, the very nature of human sedation under modern capitalism. For the present, it is important to emphasize that the Institute's statistics, "startling" as they may be to its compilers, do not fully convey the profound changes this growth indicts on the larger cities of the world and the historically different meaning it imparts to them as urban entities. Today, every City with a million or more people — and in the United States there are at least twelve cities and their environs whose populations exceed two million — is the nodal point for an immense urban belt that extends for scores of miles beyond its downtown district through suburbs and municipal jurisdictions that are independent only in an administrative sense. If the word "city" traditionally conveyed a clearly definable urban entity, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles — or Paris, London, Rome — are cities in name only, in reality, they are immense urban agglomerations that are steadily losing any distinctive form and quality. Indeed, what groups these cities together under a common rubric is no longer the cultural and social amenities that once distinguished the city from the countryside, but the common problems that betoken their cultural dissolution and social breakdown.

In all of these cities, transportation is a source of growing frustration because of overcrowded public transport facilities and thoroughfares; it tends to be unreliable, hazardous, and often near paralysis. Urban air is seriously polluted and urban wastes are reaching unmanageable proportions. Living quarters are in short supply and shoddy construction threatens to turn many newly built quarters into premature slums. Segregation along racial and economic lines is so much on the increase, particularly in American cities following the massive influx of blacks and Puerto Ricans into urban areas, that cities are internally divided into mutually exclusive, bitterly hostile enclaves — white against black and Latin, poor against well-to-do and wealthy. Taxes and administrative costs are uniformly on the rise; in fact, financial crises have turned from isolated episodes into a chronic fiscal condition. Crimes are multiplying to a point where, even in privileged areas, the urban dweller lives under a darkening pall of fear for his personal safety. Industries have been migrating steadily from the larger cities, leaving behind a *lazarus stratum* of the urban population that exists partly on a dole, partly on crime, partly on the sick fat of the city. Education is at the point of moral and administrative breakdown; the schools, in many areas, approximate juvenile prisons whose staffs are occupied more with the problems of order and discipline than pedagogy. Nothing more visibly reveals the overall decay of the modern city than the ubiquitous filth and garbage that gathers in its streets, the noise and massive congestion that fills its thoroughfares, the apathy of its population toward civic issues, and the ghastly indifference of the individual toward the physical violence that is publicly inflicted on other members of the community. In the meantime, the cities continue to expand — without meaning or form — despite the fact that for many urban centers the problems of growth have reached emergency proportions.

It may be useful to examine some of these problems as they apply to the two leading cities of the United States: Los Angeles and New York. Urban literature tends to view these cities as contrasts. Los Angeles as a comparatively new city without a visible tradition to mold its development; New York as a City tempered by standards from an earlier urban way of life. Yet precisely because this contrast was once valid, it is significant that today the differences between the two cities are rapidly waning. Both cities are beset not only by the same problems, but the Form of New York is slowly approximating that of Los Angeles. This convergence characterizes not only all large American cities but also cities abroad, whose traditions reach back to the classical, humanistic era of urban development.

Modern Los Angeles, in a sense, is only a few decades old. The city has grown so large so quickly that it retains only the vestiges of an urban center despite recent attempts to revitalize its ambiguous downtown district. Harsh reality compels us to view this urban entity as the very antithesis of an authentic community. The city is actually a region; a fantastic agglomerate of shoddy structures, garish neon lights, oversized supermarkets, vulgarly bedecked gas stations, and snaking freeways for motor traffic. The official city area of 404 square miles, like its official population figure of 2.3 million, is an urban fiction. Actually, Los Angeles spreads out for almost five thousand square miles, from the coast to the Santa Monica mountains, engulfing scores of “independent communities” and county areas. It seemed, for a time, that the mountain ranges would offer a natural barrier to urban expansion. In recent years, however, new tentacles of Los Angeles have reached out in almost every direction, probing into the Mojave Desert seventy-five miles away and even encroaching upon the Palm Springs area and the Coachella Valley. Over seven million people occupy the Los Angeles-Long Beach Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area — an urban cancer three times the size of Rhode Island.

The enormity of this metropolitan area yields a characteristic result: the city proper is not used in any human sense. It is merely a place in which to work. People neither stroll along its main street nor do they congregate in its squares. Los Angeles is normally seen through a windshield. Because of the city’s enormous size, the car is the essential and unavoidable means of transportation: about 95 percent of travel in the metropolitan area is done by car. It is estimated that there is one automobile for every 2.5 people, compared with 3.5 in Detroit, the automotive capital of the United States. And these cars are in daily use, bringing wage earners to their jobs, children to schools, and shoppers to local stores. Roughly 60 percent of the central city’s land is devoted to parking lots, roads, and garages, in addition to the considerable area that is occupied by its multitude of gasoline and service stations.

It is not enough to say that Los Angeles is an overgrown suburb made possible by motor vehicles and freeways, for this suggests certain natural amenities — trees, shrubs, and open fields — that are a secondary value to the southern California metropolis. In Los Angeles, the automobile is not only a means of transportation, but a state of mind that shapes the citizen’s sensibility toward his environment, life style, and concept of space and time. So committed is the psyche of the Angelino to the motor vehicle that a proposal to build a mass transit system for the city was resoundingly defeated in a popular referendum. To travel fifty or sixty miles to a choice restaurant — possibly, driving two hours in order to while away one — is often no more debatable an issue than to travel a smaller distance to and from work daily. The four wheels of a car, the din of freeway traffic, the space enclosed between a windshield and a back window become the essential elements of an urban space that finds its counterpart in the home that is an extension of the garage. This mechanized, plastic, and tacky world blunts the Angelino’s taste for nature; the semblance of the organic tends to suffice for the real thing. Not surprisingly, one finds that Los Angeles city authorities arrayed plastic “vegetation” along a stretch of freeway to replace shrubs that were perishing from air pollution. The reason for this inspired experiment was net lower costs, indeed, it would have been more expensive to vacuum-clean the synthetic product than periodically restore the real vegetation. Hard as it may be to believe, the civic authorities thought that the plastic “plants” were more “attractive” than real ones.

Gasoline exhausts from millions of motor vehicles produce air pollution problems in Los Angeles — a city that is notoriously burdened by temperature inversions and photochemical smog. In the celluloid world of southern California, dealing with this problem assumes the qualities of a

technocratic nightmare. The only administrative institution around which Los Angeles coheres is its district-wide Air Pollution Control Board — an agency formed to deal with a potentially lethal environment. Los Angeles's municipal apparatus may sprawl like the metropolis itself, its culture may be as diffuse as its urban center, but the city acquires civic coherence and energy when it is compelled to cope with the environmental results of its unique form of urban blight. This board has enormous powers. Its three-stage “smog alert” system stipulates that it can bring all traffic, industrial activity, and even power generation to a virtual halt. Presumably, if the final alert — a “general emergency” — failed to cope with a pollution crisis, Angelinos might use their motor vehicles to flee to the mountains or else, as one anonymous *Time* magazine writer acidly suggested, a squadron of planes could “sweep over the city and dust it with Miltown.”

In a metropolis of such enormous dimensions as Los Angeles, it would be preposterous to speak of a meaningful municipal government. More appropriately, one might describe the administrative apparatus of the city as an impersonal state power, as removed in many respects from civic immediacy as the national government thousands of miles away. Little exists to bridge the chasm between the average citizen, pursuing his private interests, and a massive governing bureaucracy following its own law of life. Hardly anyone loves this city, except perhaps those who profit from it, like real estate operators, politicians, and businessmen. And even they often prefer not to live in it. Paeans to California's climate, mountains, forests, and agriculture — even to a number of California's cities — often exclude Los Angeles. The metropolis is brash rather than vital, nervous rather than energetic, and above all, disastrously big — big in the sense that it has been mass manufactured, put together cheaply and shoddily; its human qualities stifled by spiritual and civic poverty.

By contrast, New York evokes a measure of civic loyalty, if Los Angeles is metropolitan, New York is cosmopolitan. The eastern city preserves a uniquely European flavor that reflects its greater age, stability, and cultural heterogeneity. Until the rising incidence of street crimes began to drive people indoors after dark, New Yorkers did more walking — spiritually, as well physically. The city had its own charms; its distinctive ethnic neighborhoods, its varied diet of visual experiences. Central and lower Manhattan, in sharp contrast to downtown Los Angeles, collected local inhabitants as well as tourists on a cultural and shopping spree. Despite its waning reputation, New York is still the publishing, theatrical, and literary center of the United States, a product of its worldly outlook, it has a multitude of bookstores, a large number of universities, and many niches that are occupied by sophisticated professionals and creative eccentrics. With each passing year, however, the cultural reputation of the city is declining; and as an urban entity, New York is facing the same civic, logistical, and structural problems that confront Los Angeles. Queens, the most recently colonized of New York's bed room boroughs, already reproduces some of the most repellent features of the more densely occupied areas of Los Angeles; the long, wide, featureless avenues designed primarily for motor car traffic, the architecturally tasteless high-rise apartment houses, the side streets lined by uniform two-story dwellings, the dull vistas that reach toward the distant spires of Manhattan in one direction and the vacuity of Jamaica Bay in the other.

The increasing approximation of New York to Los Angeles occurred by stages. As recently as the Second World War, New York still preserved a vital relationship between its cultural centers in Manhattan and its outlying residential districts. The boroughs retained their colorful ethnic neighborhoods and yet these were linked by a highly serviceable public transportation system to downtown areas. The periphery of the city, where the subways and elevated lines terminated,

formed a green open area which clearly demarcated the city proper from the towns to the north and rural Long Island. These were the delightful picnic and recreation spots which attracted urban dwellers from all parts of the City on Weekends, a refreshing preserve of countryside that offered a delightful contrast to more densely occupied districts. Within little more than a decade, these lovely areas were filled in by shabbily built suburban developments at densities averaging seven houses to an acre. Here, as the developments spread out still further for miles, merging with the towns around the city, urban heterogeneity was replaced by suburban homogeneity, the subway by the commuter railroads, and the motor car became an increasingly significant feature of residential life. By the mid-1950s, a mere 30,000 acres of unused land remained within the 319 square miles of the official boundaries of New York City, more than half of which were located in Staten Island,

The sixties opened another stage; the region beyond the city's suburban fringe was occupied less densely. A more expensive kind of home appeared on land zoned in lots of a half acre or more. This development, which is still going on, has produced an entirely new social geography; a culture based on the automobile, the suburban shopping center, and a high-income population that depends upon the city economically but is completely severed from it culturally. Here, twenty or thirty miles away from Times Square, "is evolving a type of urban area without parallel in eastern North America: an importation from the universal sprawl of Los Angeles," observes Peter Hall.

It depends almost wholly on the automobile, for a finely developed railroad net, or even adequate express bus transportation, is no longer economic. The commuter bound for Manhattan must drive long distances to a suburban railhead; his wife needs a second car for the long journey to the shopping centre. The early developments are tending to cluster around the infrequent junctions on the freeways; but this will be possible only for a privileged few. And losing the traditional advantages of urban life, the new suburbanites will not gain complete rural seclusion either. True, they will not usually be able to glimpse their neighbours' houses through trees; but they will still live at ten times rural densities. This new type of suburbia needs a new name. Some Americans call it "exurbia." The Regional Plan Association have christened it "spread city."⁴

To the inhabitants of "spread city," New York is an object of active hostility. Although they depend upon the city for their means of life, they are oblivious to its civic problems, impatient with its inconveniences, disloyal to its political interests, and desperately fearful of its encroachment on their enclaves. They are New Yorkers in fact and depend upon the city for their well-being, but their hatred of New York is as parochial and chauvinistic as the hostility that the rural dweller feels toward all large cities. Divorced by residence from the tax base that supports the city's essential services, they provide only a minimal contribution to its revenues. The bad conscience they — and suburbanites generally — feel toward the city finds a perverted expression in the representatives they send to the state legislature: reactionaries who are responsible for the most vindictive measures against New York.

Yet these suburbanites and exurbanites dog the city's streets with their cars; they flood its subways, adding enormously to the congestion of its public transportation system, and they place

⁴ Peter Hall. *The World Cities* (New York: McGraw-Hill World University Library, 1966), pp. 198–100.

a staggering burden on its services. By the ten[?] of thousands they enter the city in automobiles, filling its streets and overtaxing its parking facilities; over 150,000 arrive each day in its downtown area by commuter railroad, and immense numbers fill its subways at terminal stations or for short rides from bus and railroad terminals. They flow into the immense throng of more than 1.6 million who people the city's office buildings, manufacturing places, and retail outlets south of 61st Street, perhaps the most compact and dense business district in the world. In a city whose transportation system is already congested and overtaxed to inhuman proportions, they add the critical increment that reduces it to a chronic crisis.

They are strangers to this city not only because of their active disloyalty to its interests but, perhaps most significantly, because of their oblivion to its agony. The commuter trains, buses, and automobiles that swoop past New York's proliferating ghettos are enclaves of an alien culture that is in mutual war with the urban environment. To the ghetto dweller, these conveyances are not means of transportation, nor are the people who occupy them mere strangers; they are the self-enclosed strangers as enemies, The archaic hatred and fear of the Outsider, of the non-belonger who is necessarily a foe until his friendship has been validated by ritual, wed up like a primordial myth from the urban environment that traditionally was the solvent of all such myths — the city that replaced kinship ties with civil ties, the world of parochial ignorance by the world of civic culture. Now there is no ritual to dissolve this archaic estrangement, for the stranger offers no friendship — merely the ancestral odor of fear and panic when black faces meet white, well-nourished bodies, malnourished ones, even if only through the window' panes of a train or motor vehicle. The distance must be maintained like the no-man's-land between opposing armies. The vehicle that conveys the suburbanite and exurbanite into tire city is not a cultural enclave, but a fortress.

Are the outsiders within the urban milieu to be blamed for more than the common run of insensitivities that permeate bourgeois society? This tragic inhuman world is not of their making, and their treasured privileges are dubious possessions. The capitalist market, by an inexorable logic that would colonize the entire universe if it could, merely graduates estrangement from the individual level of the buyer-seller relationship to the Civic level of the ghetto relationship. A true community cannot grow out of monads, and insofar as monadic relationships invade all other relationships and transform them, they merely reproduce themselves agglomerations of monads. The word "ghetto," which increasingly defines the internal limits of the bourgeois city, must be given a broader meaning than it has today. The outward radiation of urban society from its civic nuclei reads like a spectrum of increasingly deprived or seemingly privileged ghettos; the materially denied black and Puerto Rican ghettos in the central parts of the city (marbled by well-policed enclaves of fearful whites); the materially more affluent but spiritually denied, suburbanite fringe, united by its aversion far the city proper; and finally that pathetic caricature of all privilege in bourgeois society, the beleaguered exurbanite fringe, inwardly paralyzed by a suspicion of invaders from the central city and suburbs, Just as the bourgeois marketplace makes each individual a stranger to another, so the bourgeois city estranges these central and fringe areas from each other. The paradox of the bourgeois city is that it unites these areas internally not in the felicitous heterogeneity of unity in diversity that marked the medieval commune — a heterogeneity unified by mutual aid and a common municipal tradition — but rather in the suspicions, anxieties, and hatreds of the stranger from the "other" ghetto. The city, once the shelter of the stranger from rural parochialism, is now the primary source of estrangement. Ghetto boundaries comprise the unseen internal walls within the city that once, as real walls, secured

the city and separated it from the countryside. The bourgeois city assimilates rural parochialism as a permanent and festering urban condition. No longer are the elements of the city cemented by mutual aid, a shared culture, and a sense of community; rather, they are cemented by a social dynamite that threatens to explode the urban tradition into its very antithesis.

The integrity of the individual ego depends upon its ability to integrate the many different aspects of human life — work and play, reason and emotion, mental and sensuous, the private and the social — into a coherent and creative whole. By no means³⁵ this process of integration a strictly private and personal activity; indeed, for most individuals, the possibility of integrating one's ego depends enormously upon the extent to which society itself is integrated existentially in the course of everyday life. The clan, village, and medieval commune were humanly scaled and personally comprehensible totalities in which the individual satisfied all facets of life. Within these km groups and civic entities, one found one's mate, reared one's children, worked and played, thought and dreamed, worshipped and participated in the administration of social life — all of this without feeling that any one of these facets was divorced from or opposed to others. Here, one could truly say that the individual microcosm reflected the social macrocosm; the particular, the general. Separated from the clan, village, or commune, the individual withered; but this is not to say that the individual ego was "subordinated" to the collectivity. Rather, the ego was, in itself, the whole as it was manifested in the particular, for each individual embodied the unity and multifaceted nature of the life of the whole. In contrast to totalitarian societies that subordinate the individual to a larger social mechanism and supra individual ends, the clan, village, and commune — and most eminently, the polis — nourished the integrity of the ego by recrystallizing its many-sided social goals and possibilities as individual ones.

The bourgeois city separates these facets of life and delivers them, one by one, to institutions, denuding the ego of the rich content of life. Work is removed from the home and assimilated by giant organizations in offices and industrial factories. It loses its comprehensibility to the individual not only as a result of the minute division of labor, but owing also to the scale of commercial and industrial operations. Play becomes organized and the imaginative faculties of the individual are pre-empted by mass media that define the very daydreams of the ego. The individual is reduced to a vicarious spectator of his own fancies and pleasures. Reason and intellect are brought under the technical sovereignty of the academy and the specialist. Political life is taken over by immense bureaucratic institutions that manipulate people as "masses" and insidiously try to engineer public consent. The most private domains of the individual — the home, child-rearing functions, sexuality, and the quiet moments reserved for personal reflection and meditation — become the fair game of the agencies and instruments of mass culture which dictate the norms of education, parental love, physical beauty, personal dress, home furnishings, and the most intimate aspects of human interrelationships, social life, as embodied by the massified city, rears itself above personal life, reducing the individual from a microcosm of the whole to merely one of its parts. The particularity of the individual is preserved, but its many-faceted content is active, like a fragment of a jigsaw puzzle, the individual is separable from the whole — in fact, he is compelled by the market relationship to fend for himself — but his particularity and separability are meaningless unless, to use a revealing colloquial expression, he "fits himself into the picture." The urban ego, which once celebrated its many-faceted nature owing to the wealth of experience provided by the city, emerges with the bourgeois city as the most impoverished ego to appear in the course of urban development.

Almost every aspect of urban life today, particularly in the metropolis, fosters this ego impoverishment. Metropolitan space produces neither the active feeling of awe, which sweeping avenues in Baroque cities like Paris inspire, nor the domestic feeling of hominess evoked by the medieval quarters of towns like Nuremberg. It creates a feeling of insignificance. The towering skyscrapers of New York, which are invading the downtown districts of nearly all American cities, diminish one's sense of uniqueness and personal sovereignty. The gigantism of the structures dwarfs the sense of individuality in those who walk in their shadows and the less fortunate ones who occupy their cubicles. It matters little whether this effect is calculated or not; the important point is that it is not accidental.

It is no longer a new concept that urban space can be hierarchical or egalitarian; esthetic qualities aside, a revealing history of architecture and city planning can be written within the framework of this perspective. Often, in the old cities of Europe, the convergence of wide processional avenues on bulky palaces in the Baroque districts contrasts sharply with the narrow winding streets in the medieval quarters, lined with small dwellings and shops; the first is scaled to overpower and awe, the second imparts a sense of warmth, intimacy, and community. The eye tells us at a glance that urban space has been organized to express two different political and civic principles. But such a perspective alone does not suffice to explain the full psychic impact of the unique structural monumentalism that is pervading the metropolis. Obviously, structural monumentalism is not new to the city — or, as the great megalithic ensembles of archaic society reveal, to the countryside. But the monumentalism of the precapitalist city differed in certain fundamental respects from the monumentalism of the metropolis. In the ancient cities of the Near East and Asia — and later in Rome and the Baroque capitals of European absolute monarchs — the size of a public structure was a function of power. Urban space was undisguisedly hierarchical: it monumentalized authority and inspired awe of the dominant social classes. This power, however, was rarely abstract power. Deified Pharaoh and emperor, or temporal ruler and monarch — power was the attribute of a living personage, of a human being, whose authority was comprehensible, whose wisdom and fallibility could be weighed and tested, and, when necessary, whose status could be altered,

The organic nature of this power found expression in the organic dimension that was added to public structures, however geometric their overall design. Ornamentation — its forms borrowed from the natural world or the human body — remained an inseparable feature of the structure. Indeed, if authority did not transfix rulership in commonly recognizable forms, it was meaningless to the beholder. For most precapitalist communities, abstract power had yet to be created — even *mana*, the archaic version of abstract power, exists only insofar as it manifests itself in the world of everyday beings and objects. Only among the ancient Jews, whose nameless god portends the abstract nature of social power, do we find stringent injunctions against graven images, although not against ornamentation.

Viewed against this historic tableau, the modern metropolis constitutes a sharp rupture with traditional expressions of authority and urban space. It retains hierarchical space by virtue of its structural gigantism — but hierarchical space of a very special kind. Power is utterly abstracted by transferring it from persons to institutions, from definable individuals to faceless bureaucracies. Although power — and powerlessness — are felt like a twitching nerve in every sphere of life, the locus of these feelings and forces becomes diffuse. To an increasing extent, the urban dweller can no longer clearly identify the source of his problems and misfortunes; perhaps more significantly, he can find no one against whom he can assert his own power and thereby retain

a sense of control over the forces that seem to guide his destiny. The personified powers that once administered society evaporate from the social terrain. They are replaced by “the system,” the vague anonymous apparatus that lacks definite boundaries and forms.

The immense canyons of skyscrapers that envelop the urban dweller in the large cities of the world both reflect and foster the anonymity of metropolitan society. The soaring structures are no longer named after individuals; they normally bear the name of the bureaucratic corporations that erected them. They are the featureless megaliths of an institutionalized society — immense, ornamentless, geometric slabs that offer no grip on which the imagination can fasten. Hermetically sealed from weather and climate, artificially illuminated throughout the day, odorless, sanitized, and self-contained to a point where many of these structures are linked to each other by a labyrinth of underground passageways, their most demonic effect is the sense of powerlessness they inculcate in those who live and work in their midst. If history tells us that the divine city once competed with the earthly city for ascendancy over the human spirit, today it can be reasonably said that both have been pre-empted by the institutionalized and depersonalized city; for the metropolis is no work of man or god, but rather of the faceless bureaucracies that have acquired control over society and denature the human spirit.

The sense of powerlessness that the soaring structural slabs impart to the modern urbanite is deepened by the anonymous crowds in which he is immersed. The bodies that touch each other in the subways, in the elevators of the great buildings, and in the streets are surrounded by a psychic field of indifference. Herded together, they exude an active force of mutual unconcern, indeed, of latent hostility, and reinforce rather than allay the ubiquitous lack of human solidarity. To break this field of indifference is regarded as an eccentricity at best and a hostile act at worst. Paradoxically, each individual recognizes the other’s personal sovereignty by acts of non-recognition. Any desire to communicate is muted by the unspoken understanding — a psychic equivalent of the “social contract” — that the urbanite’s personality can only retain its integrity in a mass society by a sullen inwardness, by a dumb impregnability to contact with the mass. The segmented roles that bureaucratization imposes on the ego are resisted by the myth that a blasé indifference to the world at large is a mode of withdrawal from a homogenized society; the anomie that pervades the crowd can only be exorcised by clinging to one’s sense of privacy and by tending to one’s own affairs.

But this unarticulated stance of exclusivity, social withdrawal, and isolation actually deepens massification and reinforces the sovereignty of suprasocial forces over society, of supraindividual forces over the individual. As Max Horkheimer observes, true individuality

is impaired when each man decides to shift for himself. As the ordinary man withdraws from participation in political affairs, society tends to revert to the law of the jungle, which crushes all vestiges of individuality. The absolutely isolated individual has always been an illusion. The most esteemed personal qualities, such as independence, will to freedom, sympathy, and the sense of justice, are social as well as individual virtues. The fully developed individual is the consummation of a fully developed society. The emancipation of the individual is not an emancipation from society, but the deliverance of society from atomization, an atomization that may reach its peak in periods of collectivization and mass culture.⁵

⁵ Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 135.

In retiring from arenas and facets of life that were once constitutive factors in the formation of individuality, the ego merely enlarges the space for the very forces that mutilate the ego itself. The individual who withdraws into himself and his private concerns, who fortifies himself with social neutrality and civic indifference, all the more delivers his privacy to the invasive social forces from which he tries to escape. Once this process goes far enough, it is not he who decides his destiny, but an increasingly bureaucratic and authoritarian apparatus whose interests are inimical to his own.

Perhaps in no area of life is this regressive process more pathetically revealed than in that ultimate refuge for privacy and intimacy — the home. The high-rise apartment building, by virtue of its very structure, forms the residential counterpart of the office skyscraper. Here, private life is consciously massified and publicly administered. The need to compact thousands of people into minimal acreage without paying the toll in disease and overt misery demanded by the slum yields its own psychic toll in physical gigantism and bureaucratic manipulation. Structural monumentalism, in the form of residential skyscrapers and shopping complexes, with their odious homogeneity and hermetic environments, invades the neighborhood and destroys it. Aside from their featureless gigantism, these residential areas allow for no spontaneous sedation and novel life style?. In a housing development whose beehive apartment dwellers number in the thousands and whose tile-lined corridors divide into immense wings, neighborliness is often exhausted by a nod of the head. The standardization of the dwellings foster? a standardization of private life that subverts the physical and personal heterogeneity so vital to the give-and-take of meaningful communication. One can only put a limited amount of one's authentic personality into these strictly functional apartment cubicles — and quite often, very little of that personality will be tolerated by the bureaucracies which administer the structures. That the architecture of these developments is featureless the corridors of the buildings institutional, and the apartments themselves nothing more than a suite of offices is not accidental; the developments are bureaucratic institutions for self-reproduction and self-maintenance just as the office skyscrapers are bureaucratic institutions for commerce and administration.

The standardization of private life in these high-rise developments may reach appalling proportions. The immensely long queues before supermarket cash registers as the dinner hour approaches remind the observer that everyone shops and eats very much the same thing at the same time. A walk through the corridors of a high-rise building is revealing. From door to door the rattle of dishes interrupts the din of similar television programs; the noises reveal a turgid uniformity of life rhythms and personal interrelationships. The entire structure is simply one immense apartment, almost needlessly divided by thinly partitioned walls. At an administratively ordained hour, the knob of the television set is turned off — and so is this way of life. An eerie silence prevails, occasionally broken by a domestic quarrel or the sounds of a displaced eccentric whose muted record player or musical instrument reminds one that the human spirit still flickers in the darkness of a mass society.

Suburbia is no different, merely more affluent. In the costlier private dwellings that fringe the city proper, everyday life remains as standardized — and hence as socialized — as the more directly administered and regulated life of the superblock, but now it can be shared with a dog, a car, a lawn, or perhaps a flower bed. Nevertheless the retreat from the social totality is as illusory in the suburbs as it is in the less privileged superblock districts of the city proper. For everything that the individual surrenders to the society at large is turned into a lever for opening another monadic window to the invasion of that society. Through the medium of the culture industry, the

social totality assimilates even the amusement of the individual to the work process from which he is seeking a refuge. Mechanization exercises “such power over a man’s leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably after-images of the work process itself,” observe Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno.

The ostensible content is merely a faded foreground; what sinks in is the automatic succession of standardized operations. What happens at work, in the factory, or in the office can only be escaped from by approximation to it in one’s leisure time. All amusement suffers from this incurable malady. Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association. No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction; not by its natural Structure (which collapses under reflection), but by signals,⁶

Yet, after all has been said about the privatization of social life, it is not a given that the urban dweller desires the alternative of withdrawal from civic affair; he is scarcely given more than the semblance of a choice. Rarely is he permitted to participate in the decisions that affect where he will live, the kind of dwelling he will occupy, the taxes he will pay, and the destiny of the overall urban environment. In the last analysis, these decisions are made by institutions over which he exercises little or no control. At most he is permitted to choose between alternatives that these institutions present, a sly procedure which provides the form of autonomy and popular control, but makes a mockery of its content. Accordingly, his civic duties are defined by initiatives from above; whether he will resist a proposed highway that threatens to divide his neighborhood and pollute it with gasoline exhausts and noise, a proposed unclear power plant, a proposed redevelopment scheme that will replace old neighborhood dwellings by monster high-rise superblocks, and so forth. It is not he who exercises these initiatives; rather, they come from agencies which he never constituted, business interests which have no roots in his community, and political figures who are unresponsive to his needs.

The past century bears witness to a steady erosion of the urban dweller’s participation in the social decisionmaking process, American Federalist mythology notwithstanding, popular control over municipal policy is in rapid decay. And the larger the municipality — the more incomprehensible its dimensions and the more “complex” its problems — the more complete this decomposition. Almost every civic problem is resolved not by action that goes to its social roots, but by legislation that further restricts the rights of the citizen as an autonomous being and enhances the power of supraindividual agencies. Crime is dealt with by conferring stronger powers on the police; transportation difficulties, by vesting more control in non-elected bureaucracies and commissions; neighborhood problems, by strengthening the authority of city planning agencies; urban administrative problems, by creating city managers who are beyond the reach of public influence or by extending the executive powers of the mayors. Instead of decentralizing municipal power by rescaling it to neighborhood dimensions so that civic problems can become more comprehensible to the urban dweller and open new avenues to his participation, the trend is overwhelmingly in the very opposite direction. Adjacent cities are merged or clustered together into

⁶ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 137.

regions that reduce the urban dweller to the totally passive object of super-agencies, agencies which orchestrate the drama of civic life on an epic scale.

Although the urban dweller may be permitted to voice his opinions at public hearings and, less directly, in the electoral process, experience eventually teaches him that decisions which intimately affect his life are made behind his back, with little regard to his interests. Gradually, he succumbs to the reality principle of municipal life. Inured to deceit, corruption, fragmentation, and powerlessness, he sinks into cynical indifference. This state of mind has a quixotically active dimension: the modern urban dweller responds to the wanton disregard of his own interests by disregarding the interests of the powers that rule his life. Almost unconsciously, he takes revenge on these powers by ignoring their admonitions and regulations. The massive growth of misdemeanors in all the great cities of the world — from the wholesale nonpayment of traffic tickets and littering of streets to vandalism against all forms of “public property” — is the product not of popular indifference, but of popular hostility. Swelling this tide of petty crimes is the enormous increase, of major crimes — burglaries, muggings, rapes, and murders — that reduce entire districts of the city to urban jungles.

One must go back to the draft riots in New York a century ago or the Gordon riots in London two centuries ago to find periods that match the erosion of urban morale today. The rot within the cities is now so palpable that, however much attempts are made to conceal it with cosmetic schemes for urban revitalisation, the stench of decay rises from beneath the slick drawings and the blueprints to fill the nostrils. An urban totality that has lost all meaning to the great majority who dwell in it is already spiritually dead. The ordinary urbanite, to be sure, can try to relate to his job, his home and Family, and his immediate associates and friends; but when the overall city environment that forms the framework of these interrelationships is totally meaningless to him — indeed, the object of his active hostility — then its civic metabolism has come to a virtual halt. From a consciously thriving entity, the city passes into a comatose state it may technically exhibit all the overt functions of life under the ministrations of its super-agencies and executive bodies, but for all practical purposes it is in a terminal condition.

That modern urban entities can continue to grow despite their spiritual and physical decay is evidence of the unique pathology of the bourgeois city; the breakdown of the self-constitutive restraints that traditionally gave the city its definability and cultural vitality. Mumford's paradoxical description of the metropolis as the “anti-city” is unerring; limitless expansion is itself a limit, a self-devouring process in which content is surrendered to form and reality to appearance. Accordingly, even as the urban sprawl continues, it deurbanizes the urban dweller by restoring in him all the parochial qualities of the rural dweller without the compensations of a community life; even as urban densities increase — particularly in the bourgeois city's historic Locus, the commercial and manufacturing district — they diminish the cultural effects of contiguity by substituting atomization for communication. The colonization of space by modern urban entities, far from producing the heterogeneity that made the traditional city a feast of visual and cultural stimuli yields a devastating homogeneity and standardization that impoverishes the human spirit. Modern urban entities are no longer sources of individuation; they are the arenas *par excellence* of psychic and physical massification — the aggregation of the individual into a herd. This massification isolates rather than relates; it produces no “common mind” in Gustav LeBon's sense, but mindlessness and apathy. The bourgeois city, if city it can still be called, is a place where one finds not human contiguity and association, but anonymity and isolation. The limits

of the bourgeois city can be summed up in tire fact that the more there is of urbanism, the less there is of urbanity.

Here, the factory, as both source and model of the bourgeois city, acquires a multifaceted meaning. As the embodiment of capital accumulation, of production for the sake of production, it becomes the genie that effectuates unlimited economic growth as well as providing the main components of unlimited urban growth. To the bourgeois mind, moreover, there is a sense in which it forms the structural model for society as a whole. In the United States, perhaps more than elsewhere in the world, the national division of labor tends to pattern itself on the factory division of labor, not only conceptually but also as economic reality. To capital, in fact, the entire continent is nothing but a huge Industrial enterprise — its regions departmentalized according to resources and favorable locales for commercial and manufacturing operations. This mentality is betrayed in almost every speech at business gatherings. Ecological considerations are given only token acknowledgments soil. Forests, minerals, and waterways are merely “natural resources” whose exploitation requires no justification except when an ideological veneer of “environmental concern” is required to allay the feelings of an aroused public.

This factory mentality finds its most telling expression in the man-made world of the city. Every esthetic urban pattern inherited from the past tends to be sacrificed to the grid system (in modern times, the factory pattern *par excellence*), which facilitates the most efficient transportation of good? and people. Streams are obliterated, variations in the landscape effaced without the least sensitivity to natural beauty, magnificent stands of trees removed, even treasured architectural and historical monuments demolished, and, wherever possible, the terrain is leveled to resemble a factory floor, The angular and curved streets of the medieval commune, which at every turn delighted the eye with a new and unexpected scenic tableau, are replaced by straight monotonous vistas of the same featureless buildings and shops. Lovely squares inherited from the past are reduced to nodal points for traffic, and highways are wantonly carved into vital neighborhoods, dividing and Anally subverting them. The bourgeois city, more than any other in history, purges the past and replaces its redemption, an essential notion in Hegel’s concept of freedom, with an eternity that consists in a mindless contemporaneity. History, as a visible fact in the monuments it leaves behind, may be retained, but only as an archeological curiosity; capitalism is eternal only in its capacity to accelerate the production and circulation of commodities. To the ancients, the razing of a captured city was the token of the enemy’s total extinction; for as long as the city stood, the enemy was still unconquered. Even after its capture, the city provided him with historical visibility. To the modern bourgeois, who demolishes his own city daily in a restless frenzy of construction and destruction, all that deserves eternity is the swelling flow of transient commodities. The past is a reminder that eternity his a qualitative dimension that is alien to the production of evanescent exchange values.

Like every factory, the bourgeois city not only devours men but its own raw material — land. In the United States, this occurs at the rate of some three thousand acres a day. Since the end of the Second World War, more than thirty million acres have been buried under concrete and steel, much of it agriculturally productive land. To feed the immense populations that are absorbed by the cities, agriculture too must be industrialized, that is, reduced to a factory operation. This is achieved by spraying crops with harmful chemicals, saturating the soil with inorganic fertilizers, compacting it with huge harvesting equipment, and levelling the terrain in the countryside. Viewed in terms of population and land use, appalling dislocations develop between town and country. The majority of Americans collect along the highly urbanized seaboard areas of the

continent and in the formless urban belts of the midwest, while rural communities languish and die. One in three rural counties shows a loss of population, but the cities continue to grow inexorably and blight the last semi-rural refuges from urban congestion. Roughly a quarter to a third of the American population now resides in the coastal belt between southern New Hampshire and northern Virginia, the urban-suburban region which Jean Gottmann has aptly named "megalopolis." In this area, between thirty and forty million people occupy only ten thousand square miles, or three to four thousand people to a square mile of urban and suburban land. The densities soar as one approaches the major urban areas until they reach an average of eighty thousand people per square mile in Manhattan and substantially more in the older slum areas of the borough.

The ecological burden the bourgeois city places on the natural environment is staggering. The city is not only a victim of air and water pollution, but a grave pollutant in its own right. Its demand for water upsets the hydrologic cycle of the entire region surrounding it, and the solid wastes it produces are growing beyond rational control. New York alone generates 30,000 tons of garbage daily, aside from the sewage effluent that flows into its rivers and bays. In the meantime the bourgeois city continues to grow. Daily, it spreads over the court, try side like a rampant cancer and destroys waterways and masses of land whose preservation may well provide the indispensable agricultural margin of survival for humanity in the ages that lie ahead. The thought that there is no limit to this urban growth reminds us, in fact, that the natural world raises a decisive ecological limit of its own — but one, perhaps, that may not be felt until the damage has been irreparable and the recovery of a balanced ecology irreversible.

4. Community and City Planning

Can the bourgeois city be rescued from itself? Or, to ask a more basic question, can the high traditions of urbanism be instilled in the modern metropolis? In the United States, where science acquires the aura that the archaic world once reserved for magic, the answer tends to be biased toward technical expertise. The problems of the modern city can (and presumably will) be resolved by those who have the greatest urban “know-how” — the city planners. Not that these specialists are beloved by people, particularly those in the older urban areas whose neighborhoods are being savagely revitalised. But the prestige of American know-how, of professional technique, mystifies the minds of its victims even as it disillusiones them in practice. As to the widening gap between ideal and real, the city plan and its grotesque actuality, this is comfortably explained as the work of the self-seeking, the greedy, and the indifferent. These villainous traits are bestowed not only on land speculators, construction barons, government bureaucrats, landlords, and corporate interests, who eminently possess them, but rather flippantly, on the general public. People, we are told, don’t care enough about their urban environment to do anything for it. An abstract “we” is distilled from the medley of conflicting social interests, a target of insidious propaganda that demands concern, but denies the power of action to those who are most victimized — the ordinary urban dweller who must endure the metropolis not only as a place of work but also as a way of life.

In urbanism the counterpart of this abstract “we” is the abstract design: the architectural sketch that will resolve the gravest urban problems with the most sophisticated know-how. Frank Fisher observes:

One question about city planning must have come to the mind of anyone who has fingered the magnificent volumes in which the proposals of planners are generally presented. Why do those green spaces, those carefully placed skyscrapers, those pleasant residential districts, and equally pleasant factory and working areas, still remain dreams for the most part? Why are our cities hardly any less ugly and unpleasant than they were the at the height of the nineteenth century’s Industrial Revolution?¹

Fisher’s reply, as we shall see, is more reasonable than most, but the question itself is commonplace and it normally contains loaded presuppositions. The most important of these is that a rational city is primarily a product of good designing. Will “green spaces,” “pleasant residential districts,” “equally pleasant factory and working areas” — not to mention “carefully placed skyscrapers” — in themselves produce human, rational, or even viable cities?

As a distinctive discipline, city planning arose in the nineteenth century not only because the great cities of the world had deteriorated appallingly, but because planning and more precisely design had become mystically reified. The central notion that the city was essentially a man-made arrangement of space imputed to the Organization of space problems that basically inhere

¹ “Frank Fisher, “Where City Planning Stands Today,” *Commentary* (January 1954), p. 75.

in society. This cunning operational approach begs the very questions it proposes to resolve. The external attributes of an entity, the obvious fact that the entity is located in “space” and “time/’ arc made into its essence. The far more important fact that cities embody modes of social relations — that those relations may be hierarchical or egalitarian, based on domination or liberation, promote conflict or harmony, governed by the market or by people — are evaded by a perspective that focuses on socially neutral categories.

The spatial criteria of city planning do not provide us with an index For judging |be viability of urban entities. Indeed, some of the most socially and culturally vital cities in history were spatially chaotic by modern standards. The residential quarters of classical Athens, for example, have been described by Mumford as a “rubble of houses... built of unbaked brick, with tiled roofs, or even mud and wattle.”² A maddening disorderly maze, the streets were often no wider than the span required For a man and a donkey. To find one’s way through this confusion, one, in typical Greek fashion, had to know the city intimately. Dicaearchus, in his description of Athens around the second century B.C., complains that the “streets are nothing but miserable lanes, the houses mean, with a few better ones among them. On his first arrival a stranger would hardly believe that this is the Athens of which lie lias heard sa much.”³

But Athenian life was not meant to be lived indoors in resplendent privacy, for to do so would have vitiated the *polis* as a community. Life was to be spent in the *agora*, the large square in which citizens gathered daily to transact their affairs, gossip, argue politics, and sell their wares. To fulfill this function, the *polis* had to be scaled to human dimensions — in Aristotle’s words, a city that could be “taken in at a single view.”⁴ Urban space evolved spontaneously out of the desire for intimate sociation, not out of a priori considerations of trade, religion, or a geometry of formal urban esthetics. Since the *agora* was the authentic arena of Athenian life, the “street was not treated as the principal design element but as the minimal leftover space for circulation,” notes Paul Spreiregen — the *agora*, that is, and the Acropolis, which served as fortress and religious center Seen from an aerial view, the structures of the Acropolis lack any orderly arrangement; indeed, to later observers, “the component buildings were once thought to lack visible design relations,” Spreiregen observes. The Hellenic mind, however, concerned itself little with a design that is meant to please a cosmic suprahuman deity that views man’s works from the skies, or, for that matter, an Olympian architect who places geometric symmetry above the mundane experiences of everyday life, The Acropolis’s Structures “were conceived, built, and rebuilt over a long period of observation and reflection — to be seen by the human eye and experienced by people moving on foot. Their design principle was not the abstract plan: it was the real experience of people.”⁵

The medieval commune retained this spirit of spontaneous human design and human scale — not From any knowledge of the *polis*, but as a natural actualization of the social relations that formed the basis of urban life. One must be blind to urban charm and beauty to dismiss these early European towns as “chaotic,” although this term has been used repeatedly an accounts of the commune. Close to nature and to the land, the medieval town as a matter of course followed the contours of the terrain, and in serpentine fashion formed those twisting lanes, delightful cul-

² Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), p. 163.

³ Quoted by Slumlord, *ibid.*

⁴ Aristotle, “Politica,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York; Random House, 1941). p. 1284.

⁵ Pau! D. Spreiregen, *Urban Design: The Architecture of Towns and Cities* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), p. 3.

de-sacs, and narrow curving streets that still charm the modern visitor. Mumford has captured the commune's beauty and visual variety with unmatched descriptive passages:

One awoke in the medieval town to the crowing of a cock, the chirping of birds nesting under the eaves, or to the tolling of the hours in the monastery on the outskirts, perhaps to the chime of bells in the new bell tower in the market square, to announce the beginning of the working day, or the opening of the market.⁶

In walking down the streets of the medieval town, one finds "no static architecture," but a dynamic heterogeneity.

The masses suddenly expand and vanish, as one approaches them or draws away; a dozen paces may alter the relation of the foreground and background, or the lower and upper range of the line of vision. The profiles of the buildings, with their steep gables, their sharp roof lines, their pinnacles, their towers, their tracteries, ripple and how, break and solidify, rise and fall, with no less vitality than the structures themselves.⁷

From an esthetic viewpoint, Mumford notes:

a medieval town is like a medieval tapestry: the eye, challenged by the rich intricacy of the design, roams back and forth over the entire fabric, captivated by a dower, an animal, a head, lingering where it pleases, retracing its path, taking the whole only by the assimilating of its parts, not commanding the design at a single glance.⁸

This is the space of a leisurely craft society that looks not only to quality but to detail. The totality acquires its unity by an interweaving of unique particulars. We see in this design pattern the civic evidence of an awakening individuality that, aside from the Greek *polis* was the western world's claim to freedom and personality — that is, until this claim was debased by massification and egotism. It was also an egalitarian space of modest houses and shared responsibilities. Contrast this civic tapestry with Baroque hierarchy and absolutism, and the change introduced by the courtly cities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries becomes painfully evident. Mumford adds perceptively:

For the baroque eye, that medieval form is torturous and the effort to encompass it is tedious; for the medieval eye, on the other hand, the baroque form would be brutally direct and over-unified. There is no one "right" way to approach a medieval building: the finest face of the Chartres cathedral is the southern one; and though perhaps the best view of Notre Dame is from across the Seine, in the rear, that view, with its engirdling green was not opened up till the nineteenth century.⁹

In a sense the same is true of the Acropolis, despite, its seemingly classical coldness. Viewed from almost any angle and distance, it presents the ascending planes that invite the eye to move step by step from each structure to the Parthenon.

⁶ Mumford, *The City in History*, p. 297.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁹ *Ibid.*

This spontaneous artistic achievement flows from a complete integration of esthetic sensibility with workaday life. Accordingly, it would have been difficult for the Greeks and medieval burghers to exclude shops and vendors from their public squares, to reduce these squares merely to the visual object of passive loiterers. One did not merely linger in these squares during the afterhours of work; one lived in them and often conducted the main business of life there. The people who built the *polis* and medieval commune were independent, civically dedicated smallholders — farmers and craftsmen — for whom esthetic sensibility fused with work, trade, and politics. This sensibility was not reserved for religion and the more abstract realms of life. Indeed, art itself was a craft, the “extraordinary” rendered ordinary. In this context, where good taste inhered in the social relations themselves, these relations could be trusted to spontaneously evolve the city as a vital civic entity and a work of art.

City planning, on the other hand, is an expression of mistrust in the spontaneity of contemporary social relations, and for good reason. Bourgeois society divides virtually all spheres of life against each other; it universalizes competition, profit, and the primacy of exchange value over mutual aid, art, and utility. Esthetic sensibility, if it can be called that in this context, becomes a merchandisable device; art, even the city itself, a marketable commodity. The damage and dislocations that “free enterprise” inflicted on the cities of the western world over the past two centuries remind us that bourgeois social relations, if left unchecked, would ravage beyond redemption every esthetic treasure that the past has left to the present. City planning finds its validation in the intuitive recognition that a burgeoning market society cannot not be trusted to produce spontaneously a habitable, sanitary, or even efficient city, much less a beautiful one.

But the critical self-consciousness of city planning did not go far enough. Rarely could city planning transcend the destructive social conditions to which it was a response. To the degree that it turned in upon itself as a specialized profession — the activity of architects, engineers, and sociologists — it too fell within the narrow division of labor of the very society it was meant to control. Not surprisingly, some of the most humanistic notions of urbanism come from amateurs who retain contact with the authentic experiences of people and the mundane agonies of metropolitan life. Furthermore, the overwhelming pragmatic mentality of bourgeois society muted city planning’s visionary outlook, one had to deal with the “facts of life” to get anything done, not with “utopian schemes.” To get anything done, in effect, meant to do one’s city planning within the parameters established by the social system. But the system is inherently irrational to begin with, so that city planning found itself in the impossible situation of trying to render rational a social organism whose very essence is irrationality — production for the sake of production and the subservience of human goals to economic ones. Insofar as city planning did not make bourgeois social relations as such the valid subject of critical analysis — a work that was done by the radical Utopians, the anarchists, and by Marx — it was rapidly assimilated (aside from “eccentric” who fringe every discipline) into the prevailing social order. The hypostatization of design and technique is simply the shadow that planners cast on the harsh outlines of dehumanizing social relations — relations that debase not only the urban dweller but the city itself. The outlines, in effect, are both softened and obscured. As Leonardo Benevolo observes, “town-planning technique. Invariably lags behind the events it is supposedly controlling and it retains a strictly remedial character.”¹⁰ Even this statement has ideological elements: the problem

¹⁰ Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Town Planning* (Cambridge, Mass; MIT Press, 1971), p. xi.

is not one of “technique” keeping up with events; city planning plays not a “remedial” role but an exacerbating one.

A critical summary of the city-planning movement’s development lends compelling support to Benevolo’s verdict. Until the late Middle Ages, city planning was rarely centered on the city as an autonomous entity, nor could it be called “planning” in the modern sense of the word. Conceptually, the pre-Hellenic ancient city was seen as a temple or a fortress, whatever additional functions it acquired along the way or however significant they became at a later point. Its “planners” were priests and warriors, not the general populace or specialists in urbanism. The layout of the city, when it was more than a military bastion situated in a defensible terrain, was defined by religious considerations. These considerations had an urban value in themselves, for they gave the city a formal unity that resisted the corrosive effects of trade and commercial self-interest.

E.A. Gutkind, drawing upon the example of precapitalist cities in India, gives us a glimpse of the factors that guided this formal unity.

The old towns of India were limited in size. They reflected the ground plan of the world as devised by the Jainas, a religious group of North India related to the Buddhists. The innermost circle is occupied by the Earth, which is surrounded by a circular ocean. In the center rises Meru, the world mountain, from which issue four rivers separating four continents. Beyond the circular ocean is another circular continent with its mountain, followed by another ocean and another continent. The bounding of the town by a wall, the situation of the temple or the palace in the center, the principle of walled-in quarters, the symbolism of figures as seen. For instance, in the number of gates (twelve gates corresponding to the twelve signs of the Zodiac), the symbolism of colors — all these factors were a direct transposition of the world concept into architecture, even though the cities were mostly rectangular, and only very occasionally, as in the case of the old town of Crikshatra in Burma, circular.¹¹

Significantly, early cities were not only economically dependent upon the land, but they often included space for food cultivation within the urban perimeter. Tenochtitlan, for example, contained many of the famous “floating gardens” that the Aztecs created in Lake Texcoco by anchoring mud with osier reinforcements, adding trees whose roots fed the entire ensemble to the lake bottom. The Mesopotamian cities, Gutkind points out, “included large open spaces that were used as fields, gardens and orchards, contributing to the food supply of the population.”¹² Until the medieval towns became overcrowded toward the end of the Middle Ages, gardening and dairying were a normal part of family life. Plots were reserved for growing food and each family retained some pigs, chickens, and a cow or two which could be postured on common land. And if open space was in short supply, the countryside was easily accessible to the urban dweller. “Even ancient Rome, with its million inhabitants” observe Lynch and Rodwin, “was in visible relation to its surrounding countryside. One could easily walk from one district to another or from the central to the rural area.”¹³

¹¹ E.A. Gutkind, *The Twilight of Cities* (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³ Kevin Lynch and Lloyd Rodwin, “A World of Cities,” in *The Future Metropolis*, ed. Lloyd Rodwin (New York: George Braziller 1961) p. 9.

The striking feature of precapitalist urban design is that it is conditioned by extraurban factors. Limited by a metaphysical or human focus, it subserves trade and material production to ends other than themselves. In the Asian cities, this focus may be the gods, a religious cosmology, or the deified monarch and state bureaucracy; in the *polis* the Focus shifts strikingly to the human community and finds expression in the centrality that is given to the *agora*; and in the medieval town the urban focus is directed toward the home, despite the growing Importance of the marketplace. Until late medieval times, not only is urban development physically and socially limited by the land, but its design criteria are guided by religious, political, or distinctly human considerations. One may find these criteria oppressively monumental owing to the supremacy they give to political and ecclesiastical authority; but rarely are the precapitalist cities ugly in the notable absence of esthetic values. However oppressive the monumentality of such urban environments may be, they clearly engaged the emotions of the urban dweller — in the *polis* and in the free medieval town. Its direct civic participation as well — and imposed distinct esthetic limits on the rampant egotism that was later to be generated by the bourgeois marketplace.

Planning of sorts surety existed, initially, as we have noted, by priests and warriors; later, by architects and engineers, But in the ease of the latter, we encounter — no less than among the priests — a strong emphasis on religious or metaphysical considerations which Alexander Tzonis rather un felicitously describes as “irrational planning” as distinguished from modern “rationalist” urban design. Yet, in all fairness, it could be said that the “planner” of the precapitalist city followed a rationality of his own. His goals were defined not merely by functional considerations, but by canons of balance, harmony, and beauty derived from cosmological or philosophical speculations. From what little we know of Hippodamus, perhaps the earliest professional “city planner” of antiquity, to whom Aristotle erroneously imputed the discovery of the rectilinear gridiron layout, he strikes us as more of a Pythagorean-type mystic than the functionalist designer we encounter so commonly in our own time. Hippodamus was obsessed, with the coherence provided by triads. The land is divided as Aristotle tells us

into three parts, one sacred, one public, the third private: the first was set apart to maintain the customary worship of the gods, the second was to support the warriors, the third was the property of the husbandmen.¹⁴

Apart from the practically-minded Romans, this order of thinking guides city planning well into the Renaissance.

Increasingly, this thinking centered on specific structures and districts, rather than on the city as a whole, reflecting the particularizing process and individuation that marked the transition to the modern era, But religious and cosmological canons of architecture temper this development block the reduction of the city to a mere arena for trade and commodity production. As Tzonis observes:

Many Renaissance and Medieval architects shared the belief that churches and other buildings of specialized functions should be designed according to rules dictated by a “divine model.” ... Both periods required certain buildings to be formed according to absolute rules created and determined by God. As God was considered in Medieval times the Architect of the Universe, “*elegans architectus*,” whose rules man as

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politico*, p. 1161.

designer had to obey, so in the Renaissance the architect was valued “like a demigod (*‘come semidei’*) when he complied with God’s creations.” Accordingly, architectural rules “were expected to establish the link between the design product audits divine model” Therefore architectural investigations were aimed toward accomplishing two tasks; the identification of the structure of the divine model, and the invention of means for implementing it in the architectural products. A design product is “true” or “harmonic” or “perfect” if it is “according to measure,” if it complies with the sacred prototype.¹⁵

In a sense, this approach spontaneously guided the development of the city as a whole. To found a city was a sacred act and insofar as the city was built around the temple, it was initially sacred territory. Not that urbanism lacked secular dimensions, indeed the gradual divorce of the sacred from the secular (already reflected consciously in the pragmatic features of Hippodamus’s triad) is an important guide to the steady assimilation of the city to commercial ends. Yet even in its secular aspect, the early city revealed the influence of the land on the towns, of rural pursuits on urbanism – not only in terms of the gardens that craftsmen cultivated, but also in the contours and layout of the city. The rectilinear pattern of the gridiron city followed the “logic of the plow”; the circular form of settlement, the logic of pasturage, for the circle is “an ideal form for fencing in cattle” by enclosing “a maximum of land with a minimum of fence.”¹⁶ Roman towns were laid out ceremoniously by priestly guidance. The plow that described the perimeter for the walls and the city’s system of four quarters, with major and minor streets at rectangles to each other, had an agrarian religions significance, The secularisation of these techniques and their transmutation into economic, military, and administrative criteria for city planning is a later development. This development reflects the increasing separation of the social from the sacred, of separate and growing antagonistic social interests from an internally coherent community life.

In Europe, from the late Renaissance onward, the process of secularization quickened as an echo of the growing expansion, of capitalism. As wealth and social power became increasingly privatized, the architect’s vision shifted, in Tzonis’s excellent formulation, from that of “mirroring the secret map of the ‘Celestial City’ to that of creating the concrete reality of a ‘Pleasing Object.’” Lacking any guidance

from a superhuman formula of cosmic order, the designer had to search into the desires of the individual. If the desires of the individual recommended disorder, then disorder was acceptable to guide the organization of the design product.¹⁷

In architects like Perrault, structural design acquired an increasingly psychological bias, a matter of courtly taste and manners. A century later, in the work of Lodoli, the emphasis shifted to structural efficiency, which marked a continuation of the late Renaissance development rather than a break with it, Characteristically (and to the horror of the eighteenth-century Romans), Lodoli expressed a greater admiration for the sewers of Rome than the sacristy of St. Peter, which he regards as the worst building in the city, In fact, Lodoli, as Tzonis observes,

¹⁵ Alexander Tzonis, *Towards a Non-Oppressive Environment* (Boston: i Press, 1972), pp. 19–20.

¹⁶ Spreiregen, *Urban Design*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Tzonis, *Towards a Non-Oppressive Environment*, p. 49.

marks not only the beginning of the period of rationalization in architecture, but also the end of the period of the “Speculative mind,” the end of the brief period when the individual was thought to be emancipated from authority. Lodoli also marks the end of the period when theories of architecture considered the design of a building to be determined by a set of *independent* objectives, whether the Vitruvian triad (“Accommodation, Handsomeness and Lastingness”) or Perrault’s dichotomy between “Positive” and “Arbitrary” values.¹⁸

Thereafter, architecture and its theoretical offspring, city planning, was to be dominated by structural efficiency and by functionalism. “Handsomeness” inhered in the capacity of the design product to facilitate the goals that society, specifically the bourgeois market economy, assigned to a structure or a city. We may bypass the various phases of architectural history since the Enlightenment, from the “rationalism” of the utilitarian era to that of the Modernists, to validate these goals. The romantic periods, inspired by Rousseau and Buskin, were interludes in a much broader development that debased ends into means, the speculative mind into the pragmatic, the metaphysical into the instrumental. To the precapitalist or metaphysical mind, design was the servant of cosmic or human goals; fundamentally, it was the means to express and reinforce the coherence of the community. In the archaic (Tzonis’s “prerational era”) efficiency and function are not ends in themselves:

Given the insecurity, the grave danger, the intellectual capacity and the love; of man, combined with the fact that the means of affecting production are poor, the means of conservation of products are elementary, and means of transporting products are very ineffectual, prerational man *does not* economize. He creates conditions under which the fluctuation of available goods do not permit hostility, aggression, or oppression between human beings of the same social group. Thus the order of the man-made environment is the projection of the non-oppressive social organization which has to be maintained at any cost.¹⁹

With the development of capitalist industry, particularly in the present century, efficiency, reduced costs, and stark functional utility in the interests of the marketplace become the all-important criteria for gauging the success of any enterprise, whether economic or esthetic. Modern architecture and city planning translate these instrumentalist criteria into canons of beauty and civic integrity, Le Corbusier’s description of the city as a “tool” and Frank Lloyd Wright’s view of it as “the only possible ideal machine” are a perfect fit, despite the expressed opposition of Wright to Le Corbusier’s work. Whether consciously or not, design is hypostatized all the more as a means of neglecting the social relations that vitiate its most rational goals, this by programming the irrationality of the society into the design product. Accordingly, the most well-intentioned designs are subverted by the very social relations whose ill-effects they are meant to mitigate. As garnish, these design products function like a lid over a sewer. Tzonis’s pessimism about the Future of modernism in an inherently oppressive society is unerring:

The rationalistic acrobatics of the Modernistic Movement collapse. The contradictions between efficiency of production and expansion of the market are irreconcilable. Therefore, visual form assumes the force to consume as a value in *itself* and not

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

for the sake of the acquisition of utilities. The so-called Pop Movement which is created (I am referring to architecture, in art the phenomenon is more complex) reflects neither the values of the *consumer* nor his style. It carries the values of consumption, consumption as a utility. In other words, once more it expresses the characteristics of the present organization of power.²⁰

Or stated in bald terms: Modernism and the Pop movement become commodities.

In the case of city planning, this debasement of community and human values to commodities assumes the dimensions of an immense environmental tragedy. Unlike architecture, which deals with a single structure or complex of structures, city planning tends to affect the general surroundings of the urban dweller. Until the late nineteenth century, attempts to reconstruct systematically old cities or lay out new ones were largely isolated projects or, at most, utopian visions whose actualization rarely went beyond experimental endeavors, L'Enfant's plans for Washington and Haussmann's remodeling of Paris stand out, for better or worse, as rare programs for dealing with cities as a whole. Most of the cities in Europe and America were simply left to the tender mercies of the new "free enterprise" system with the results we have already described.

Generally, the first steps toward city planning consisted of legislation and regulations to deal with the terrible hygienic conditions that the Industrial Revolution had produced during the first half of the nineteenth century. Increasing epidemics of cholera threatened not only the poorer quarters of the city but also the wealthy ones, and these could be brought under control only by conscientious efforts to improve urban Sanitation and living conditions. The 1840s reminded the European bourgeoisie that it had a restive, increasingly class-conscious proletariat on its hands; accordingly, the middle part of the century opened a period of bourgeois paternalism; toward working class dwellings, as witnessed by the construction of Louis Napoleon's *cités ouvrières* state-subsidized "model villages" for English workers, and the Krupp settlements in the Ruhr. These programs did not appreciably affect the established cities, nor did they greatly alter the urban landscape of Europe. As for the United States, Mel Scott not unjustly observes that as late as

that painful decade now ironically called the Gay Nineties there were few urban Americans who would have subscribed to the belief, or hope, that entire cities and metropolitan regions can be developed and renewed by a continuous process of decision-making based on long-range planning.²¹

Not that such plans were absent or lacked a certain amount of support among sectors of the English and French working classes, which were most victimized by the reckless urbanization of the early nineteenth century. These plans, formulated primarily by such so-called utopian socialists as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, envisioned a total restructuring of urban life along lines that merged town with country and industry with agriculture. Owen's ideal village was spelled out in great details "squares of buildings" were to be erected "to accommodate about 1,200 persons each; and surrounded by a quantity of land, from 1,000 to 1,500 acres." The village was to have a central building with a public kitchen, an infant school and lecture room, a place of

²⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

²¹ Mel Scott, *American City Planning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p 1.

worship, “lodging houses, chiefly For the married,” “dormitories for all the children exceeding two in a family, or above three years of age,” and so forth. The Owenite village allowed for gardens in which workers could cultivate their own food, and beyond these, “buildings for mechanical and manufacturing purposes.” A stern moralist, Owen provisioned for the instruction of the young to prevent “children from acquiring bad habits,” and for the population generally, a program of training, labor, and education “as shall remove them from unnecessary temptations, and closely unite their interest and duty.”²²

Fourier, by contrast, envisioned new communities that would remove restrictions on hedonistic behavior and, almost embarrassingly to his disciples, sought to harmonize social relations on the basis of pleasure. His famous “phalansteries,” like the Owenite scheme, were meant to combine agriculture and industry, but Fourier emphasized cooperative living under a single roof. This roof was ample enough. “A Phalanx is really a miniature town,” observed its designer,

but without open streets, exposed to all the inclemencies of nature; all parts of the building can be reached by a wide street-gallery on the first floor at the ends of this “street” excellently designed corridors, supported on pillars or not as the case may be, heated and ventilated at all times of the year, provide protected, warm and elegant communication with all parts of the building and its dependencies.²³

The emphasis in Fourier’s work is on elegance, pleasure, and comfort. Every detail of life is clearly specified: the number of inhabitants in each Phalanx (1,6201), based on Fourier’s notion of a “complete scale of characters”: the ratio of sexes; the division of profits; the layout of rooms, dining-halls, libraries, workshops, etc. Fourier, as a child of the Enlightenment, was in his own way a meticulous scientist, a veritable social Newton, who formulated a complete cosmology to replace the order of his era. Among the Utopians, he is unequalled in his imaginative scope, in the coherence he tried to provide to Iris schemes, and in the remarkably liberatory concepts he advanced in nearly all spheres of social and personal activity.

Such reconstructive notions began to wane in significance as labor unions acquired official recognition in the latter part of the nineteenth century and increasingly assimilated the working classes to the social order. Economic and political struggles, largely contained within the established framework, began to gain eminence over ideas for fundamental social change, despite the lip service which labor parties gave to the dream of a new society. Moreover, these reconstructive notions suffered a telling theoretical setback with the spread of Marxism on the European continent. As a system of “scientific socialism,” the Marxian critique scrupulously distinguished itself from its “utopian” antecedents. The issue of urbanism began to fall by the wayside. Friedrich Engels, in *The Housing Question* (1872) firmly devalued my attempts to formulate new schemes for the city and for working class housing until after a socialist revolution. Based on German material, Engels’s work made a number of incisive and relevant critiques of attempts to immobilize the German workers with stable housing sites and to reduce wages by providing them with gardens for cultivating food. Creditably, he links his views with the most vital concepts of Owen and Fourier; to resolve the housing problem — and, one may add, the urban problem as a whole — Engels argues that the big cities must be decentralized and the antithesis between town

²² Robert Owen, “Report to the County of Lanark,” in *A New View of Society and Other Writings* (London: Everyman Editions, 1927), pp. 274–276.

²³ Charles Fourier, *Selections*. London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1901, p. 138.

and country overcome.²⁴ But with the vulgarization of Marxism and its transformation into a powerful political ideology, even this tradition receded to the background. After the publication of Engels's work, the problems of urbanism did not become a major theme in Marxian theory and (the notion of decentralization), even when taken up by Marxists, has been dismissed as a "utopian" absurdity.

Benevolo, with considerable justification, marks the 1848 revolution in Europe as a crossroads in the separation of reconstructive technical design from its roots in a larger popular movement for social change. Owenites, the Fourierists, and other utopian socialists had not merely confined their notions of ideal cities to paper; they were activists, who agitated for the practical realization of their views. During the first half of the nineteenth century, design united theory with praxis. The 1848 revolution exploded any myth that the urban crisis could be resolved merely by good will, moral suasion, and ruling class benevolence. The future of design, as an integral part of social analysis, depended heavily upon how deeply reconstructive ideals could become integrally wedded to the revolutionary movement of the period. The influence of Marxian ideology largely foreclosed this development. As Benevolo observes,

Marxist Socialism, intent on explaining the 1848 Revolution and its failure in strictly political terms, stressed the contradictions of the earlier movement but completely lost sight of the link between tendencies in politics and in town-planning which, even if formulated in over-simplified terms, had previously been firmly maintained. Marx's overwhelming economic emphasis on the struggle between wage-labor and capital almost completely blanketed any civic issues.

From that time onward political theory almost always tended to disparage specialist research and experiment, and attempted to assimilate proposals for partial reform within the reform of society generally. Town-planning, on the other hand, cut adrift from political discussion, tended to become increasingly a purely technical matter at the service of the established powers. This did not mean, however, that it became politically neutral!; on the contrary, it fell within the sphere of influence of the new conservative ideology which was evolving during these years, of Bonapartism in France, of the reforming Tory groups in England and of Bismarckian imperialism in Germany.²⁵

Thus, from the outset, the modern city-planning movement — which has its authentic inception with Ebenezer Howard's "garden city" scheme of the 1890s — turned to design as a substitute for

²⁴ Engels's essential argument, in my view, is well worth repeating:

"The housing question can be solved only when society has been sufficiently transformed for a start to be made towards abolishing the contrast between town and country, which has been brought to its extreme point by present-day capitalist society. Far from being able to abolish this antithesis, capitalist society on the contrary is compelled to intensify it day by day. On the other hand, already the first modern utopian socialists, Owen and Fourier, correctly recognized this. In their model structures the contrast between town and country no longer exists.

... To want to solve the housing question while at the same time desiring to maintain the modern big cities is all absurdity. The modern big cities, however, will be abolished only by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, and when this is once set going there will be quite other issues than supplying each worker with a little house of his own." (Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question* [Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1970], p. 49).

Unfortunately, many "Marxists" have yet to be reminded that these views were expressed by one of the "founders of scientific socialism" and were emphatically repealed, again, in Engels's later work, *Anti-Duhring*.

²⁵ Benevolo, *Origins of Town Planning*, pp. xii-xiii.

radical social analysis and action, for both of these arenas had been largely monopolized by Marxian socialism. As Frank Fisher observes, Howard

was less concerned than the socialists with the social, economic, or political causes of urban misery. Frankly utopian, he combined certain ideas of his time in a specific and creative conception that has guided most of the thinking of city planners ever since. The garden city, or the notion of the balanced urban environment, was his original idea. Instead of letting industrial cities grow planlessly and depopulate the countryside, he proposed to build cities that would combine the social and cultural facilities of the city with the closeness to nature of the village. The “idiocy of rural life” and the slumminess of city life would both be obviated. “Town and country,” wrote Howard, “must be married, and out of this union will spring a new life, a new hope, a new civilization.”²⁶

Howard, in fact, had been strongly influenced by socialist ideas, particularly Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and the work of Peter Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist theoretician. But as a pragmatic man, Howard essentially divested his scheme for the “marriage” of town and country of its socialist and anarchist elements. Fisher’s judgment of Howard’s social horizon is not inaccurate. It is worth noting, however, that the socialists were as lacking in reconstructive vision as Howard was in social and economic insight. Even so mild a group as the Fabian Society initially denigrated the garden city proposal in terms so shallow and pragmatic as to reveal more about the British socialist mentality at the turn of the century than the feasibility of Howard’s project. With smug satisfaction the *Fabian News* of December 1898 noted:

His plans would have been in time if they had been submitted to the Romans when they conquered Britain. They set about laying-out cities, and our forefathers have dwelt in them to this day. Now Mr. Howard proposes to pull them all down and substitute garden cities, each duly built according to pretty coloured plans, nicely designed with a ruler and compass. The author has read many learned and interesting writers, and the extracts he makes from their books are like plums in the unpalatable dough of his Utopian scheming. We have got to make the best of our existing cities, and proposals for building new ones are about as useful as would be arrangements for protection against visits from Mr. Wells’s Martians.

Yet, these inane comments must not deter us from recognizing the limits of the garden cities’ proposal. In Howard’s work, design is assigned the task of achieving sweeping goals that actually involve revolutionary changes in the entire economic, social, and cultural fabric of bourgeois society. Compared to the metropolis, Howard’s garden city is attractive enough: a compact urban entity of about thirty thousand people, scaled to human dimensions, and surrounded by a green belt to limit growth and provide open land for recreational and agricultural purposes. Suitable areas of the green belt are to be occupied by farmers (Howard limited this agricultural population to two thousand), the larger urban population of thirty thousand will engage in manufacturing, commerce, and services. All land is to be held in trust and leased to occupants on a rental basis,

²⁶ Fisher. “Where City Planning Stands Today” p. 76,

Howard spelled out many design and fiscal details, of his proposal, but he was careful to emphasize at the very outset of his book, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, that these were “merely suggestive, and will probably be much departed from,”²⁷

But even, the most generous modifications of Howard’s garden city do not alter the fact that the project is a structural design — and, as such, is limited in what it can offer. Doubtless, even a structural design, if it is good enough, has a value of its own, but for all practical purposes it falls within the framework of the “pleasing object.” It may provide the basis for greater human contiguity, the structural instruments for community, a measure of contact with nature, possibly tasteful architecture, and easy access with places of work, shopping centers, and service enterprises. Nevertheless, it leaves undefined the nature of human contiguity, community, and the relationship between the urban dweller and the natural world. Most important, it leaves undefined the nature of work, the control of the means of production, the problem of distributing goods and services equitably, and the conflicting social interests that collect around these issues. Actually, Howard’s scheme does provide an orientation toward all of these problems — namely, a system of benevolent capitalism that presumably avoids the “extremes” of communism and “individualism.” Howard’s *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* is permeated by an underlying assumption, so typically British, that a compromise can be struck between an intrinsically irrational material reality and a moral ideology of high-minded conciliation.

Yet the offices, industrial factories, and shopping centers that are intended to provide the garden city with the means of life are themselves battlegrounds of conflicting social interests. Within these arenas we find the sources of alienated labor, of income differentials, and of disparities between work-time and free-time. By itself, no structural design can reconcile the conflicting interests and social differences that gather beneath the surface of the garden city. These interests and differences must be dealt with largely on their own terms — by far-reaching changes in social and economic relations. Which is not to say that a social resolution of the problems created by the bourgeois factory, office, and shopping center obviates the need for a structural design that will promote community and a balance between town and country; rather, that one without the other is a truncated solution, and hence, no solution at all.

Howard’s garden city, it is worth noting, falls far short of utopias and historical experiences that advanced highly progressive criteria in dealing with problems of social management and modes of work. In contrast to the Greek *polis*, which administered its affairs on the basis of a face-to-face democracy, Howard merely proposes a Central Council and a departmental structure based on elections. The garden city has no mechanism for recalling political representatives of the sort that was established by the Paris Commune of 1871. Unlike More’s Utopia, there is no proposal for rotating agricultural and industrial work. In the garden city, the mode of social labor is decided by the needs of capital. Inasmuch as Howard’s economic horizon is not substantially broader than that of any benevolent bourgeois of his day, notions of industrial self-management are absent from his work, Mumford’s encomiums to Howard’s “statesmanship” notwithstanding, *Garden Cities for Tomorrow* is not overly burdened by great insights into the social and economic problems of the day: its superficiality on this score reveals that Howard was more of a designer than the perceptive social analyst Mumford makes him out to be.

The intrinsic limits of Howard’s garden city, indeed, of the thirty-odd “new towns” that have been constructed in England and those that are emerging in the United States, are that these com-

²⁷ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1963), p. 51.

munities do not encompass the full range and possibilities of human experience. Neighborliness is mistaken for organic social intercourse and mutual aid; well-manicured parks for the harmonization of humanity with nature; the proximity of work places for the development of a new meaning for work and its integration with play; an eclectic mix of ranch-houses, slab-like apartment buildings, and bachelor-type flats for spontaneous architectural variety; shopping-mart plazas and a vast expanse of lawn for the *agora*; lecture halls for cultural centers; hobby classes for vocational variety; benevolent trusts or municipal councils for self-administration. One can add endlessly to this list of misplaced criteria for community that serve to obfuscate rather than clarify the high attainments of the urban tradition. Although people may earn their incomes without leaving these communities — and a substantial portion must travel for considerable distances to the central city to do so — the nature of their work and the income-differentials that group them into alien social classes are not a matter of serious community concern. A vast area of life is thus removed from the community and delivered to a socio-economic system that exists apart from it. Indeed, the appearance of community serves the ideological function of concealing the incompleteness of an intimate and shared social life. Key elements of the self are formed outside the parameters of the design — by forces that stem from economic competition, class antagonisms, social hierarchy, domination, and economic exploitation. Although people are brought together to enjoy certain conveniences and pleasantries, they remain as truncated and culturally impoverished as they were in the metropolis, with the difference that the stark reality of urban decay in the big cities removes any veil of appearances from, the incompleteness and contradictions of social life.

These internal contradictions have not been faced with candor by either the supporters or opponents of the garden city concept. That the “new towns” of England, the United States, and other countries modeled on the garden city design have not awakened “the soft notes brotherliness and goodwill” Howard described as their essential goal; that they have not placed “in strong hands implements of peace and construction” so that implements of war and destruction may drop uselessly down” — all of this is painfully obvious fact.²⁸ Nor is there any promise that they will approximate such far-reaching goals. In the best of cases, the new towns differ from suburbs primarily because job-commuting is short and most services can be supplied within the community itself. In the worst of cases, they are essentially bedroom suburbs of the metropolis and add enormously to its congestion during working hours.

Nor has reality been any kinder to the devotees of the metropolis. The old cities keep growing even as the number of new towns multiply, each urban form slowly encroaching on the other and creating urban belts that threaten to undermine the integrity of both. Jane Jacobs’s spirited defense of traditional neighborhoods shares all the unrealities that mar Frederic J. Osborn’s defense of Howard’s vision. This neighborhood world is dying: the same forces that truncate the inhabitant of the new town are delivering the small shop over to the supermarket and the old tenement complex to the aseptic high-rise superblock. Doubtless enclaves of neighborhood life will continue to exist but they will remain merely enclaves — in contemporary society the counterpart of the existing medieval and Renaissance towns that attract the tourist to Europe for visual respite from the urban monotony that is rapidly prevailing in most cities of the world.

Modern city planning offers no solution to this dismal tendency, for it presupposes the very social factors that are producing the present urban blight. Even the social goals that Howard

²⁸ Ibid., p. 150.

hoped to achieve primarily by means of design are giving way to an acknowledgment that the city, as we know it today, is here to stay — and the sooner we accept this fact, the better. This acquiescence to the urban status quo (doubtless subject to new design elements) is fatal. To Fisher, the failure of city planning today stems from the need For planners “to think more deeply about the kind of life for which they are planning, and understand its ideals and its meaning, and the variety of forms in which it may express itself,”²⁹ In a sense, modern city planning, by unconsciously assimilating commodity relations as social ideals, has lived up to Fisher’s demand with a vengeance. It has helped to produce designs that debase the city to a marketplace and raised structures that have turned it into she home of concentrated bureaucratic power. Here, the tack of consciousness becomes a form of consciousness, and the opportunism of technical success as a goal in itself degrades urban life precisely to the degree that technique celebrates its power to control the city’s destiny.

But Fisher’s demand is obviously not designed to validate the ideals of the status quo. And insofar as he sees the city as a way of life, his words might well have been taken from Aristotle’s *Politics*. To the Greeks, the city was more than a product of designing technique or of rationally placed structures, These considerations were secondary to the vision that the city was the domain of freedom and the “good life,” an arena in which people formed an organic totality without losing the individuality so essential to diversity and creativity.

Modern city planning offers us functional urban designs without human values and rationally organized space without civic content, To relieve congestion without providing for intimate communication — or even to open new lines of communication without creating the social soil for meaningful human contact — is a parody of the high traditions of urbanism. Historically, the basis for a vital urban entity consisted not primarily of its design elements but of the nuclear relations between people that produced these elements. Human scale was more than a design on a drawing board; it emerged from the intimate association provided by the clan, the guild, and the civic union of free, independent farmers and craftsmen. Knitted together at the base of a civic entity, people created a city that formally and structurally sheltered their most essential and meaningful social relations. If these relations were balanced and harmonious, so too were the design elements of the city. If, on the other hand, they were distorted and antagonistic, the design elements of the city revealed this in its monumentalism and extravagant growth. Hierarchical social relations produced hierarchical apace; egalitarian relations, egalitarian space. Until city planning addresses itself to the need for a radical critique of the prevailing society and draws its design elements from a revolutionary transformation of existing social relations, it wilt remain mere ideology — the servant of the very society that is producing the urban crisis of our time.

The 1960s opened an entirely new era in the modern definition of the city, or, more precisely, of a humanistic community. It is a noteworthy fact that this era acquired little of value from the work of the professional city planners, who continued to sink deeper into shallow problems of design and technical expertise; rather, its inspiration came from the countercultural values and institutions formulated almost intuitively by young people who were breaking away from suburbia and the regimentation of the multiversity. In the communes of dropout youth and in activist upsurges such as People’s Park in Berkeley, far more than design criteria were formulated. However naively, new values for human sociation were posed that often Involved a total break

²⁹ Fisher, “Where City Planning Stands Today,” p. 82.

with the commodity system as a whole. The full implications of this movement — a movement that has yet to find its own confidence and its way through the maze of mod and pop culture — have not received the attention they deserve from the “urbanists.” For the values of this culture, carried to their logical conclusion, pose the problem of developing entirely new communities in a harmonized, ecologically balanced society.

The young people of the sixties who tried to formulate new values of sociation — values that have since been grouped under the rubric of the “counterculture” — unquestionably comprised a privileged social stratum. They came, for the most part, from affluent, white, middle-class suburbs and the better universities of the United States, the enclaves and training grounds of the new American technocracy. To adduce their privileged status as evidence of the trifling nature of the movement itself and casually dismiss it, as so many writers have done, sidesteps a key question: why did privilege lead to a rejection of the social and material values that had produced these very privileges in the first place? Why didn’t these young people, like so many before them in previous generations, take up the basic values of their parents and expand the arena of privilege they had inherited?

These questions reveal a basic change in the material premises for radical social movements in the advanced capitalist countries of the world. By the sixties, the so-called First World had undergone sweeping technological changes — changes which opened a new social perspective for the era that lay ahead. Technology had advanced to a point where the values spawned by material scarcity, particularly those values fostered by the bourgeois era, no longer seemed morally or culturally relevant. The work ethic, the moral authority imputed to material denial, parsimony, and sensual renunciation, the high social valuation placed on competition and “free enterprise,” the emphasis on a privatization and individuation based on egotism, seemed obsolete in the light of technological achievements that offered alternatives entirely contrary to the prevailing human condition — a lifetime free from toil and a materially secure social disposition oriented toward community and the full expression of individual human powers. The new alternatives opened by technological advances made the cherished values of the past seem not only obsolete and unjust but grotesque. As I have pointed out elsewhere, there is no paradox, in the fact that the weakest link in the old society turned out to be that very stratum which enjoyed the real privilege of rejecting false privilege.³⁰

Which is not to say that the technological contest of the “counterculture” was consciously grasped and elaborated into a larger perspective for society as a whole. Indeed, the outlook of most middle-class dropout youth and students remained largely intuitive and often fell prey to the faddism nurtured by the established society. The erratic features of the new movement, its feverish metabolism and its quixotic oscillations, can be partly explained by this lack of adequate consciousness. Quite often, many young people were victims of cheap exploitation by commercial interests. Large numbers of them, exultant in their newly discovered sense of liberation, lacked a significant awareness that complete freedom, is impossible in a prevailing system of unfreedom insofar as they aspired to rapidly to replace the dominant culture by their own example and by moral suasion, they failed. But insofar as they began to see themselves as the most advanced sector of a larger movement to revolutionize society as a whole, they succeeded in keeping the counterculture alive, and it lives today in alternating ebbs and flows as the mainstream of a historic enlightenment that may eventually change every aspect of social life.

³⁰ Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (San Francisco Ramparts Press, 1971), p. 25.

The most striking feature of the new movement is the emphasis it places on personal relations as the locus of seemingly abstract social ideals — the attempt it makes to translate freedom and love into existential realities of everyday life. If freedom in its fullest sense is a society based on self-activity and self-management, a society in which every individual has control over her or his daily life, then the counterculture may be justly described as the attempt to produce that self, free of the values spawned by hierarchy and domination, that will yield liberated social forms of management and activity. We have already emphasized that this degree of freedom can be definitively achieved only after sweeping revolutionary changes in society; but young people were quite right in sensing that existential personal goals must be defined and striven for even today, within the realm of unfreedom, if future revolutionary changes are to be sweeping enough and not bog down in bureaucratic modes of social management. This focus added an essential psychological element to abstract social doctrines that were formulated by traditional radical theorists. Accordingly, in its most advanced and theoretically conscious forms, the counterculture reached directly into and sought to change radically the lived relationships between people as sexual beings and as members of families, educational institutions, and work places. One must return to the Writings of the early anarchists, whose appeal was often limited, to recover the moral and psychological dimensions this approach added to socialist theories of the sixties, most of which had become so denuded of humanistic qualities that they were little more than economic strategies for social change.

This personalistic yet socially involved approach yielded not only an increasingly explicit critique of doctrinaire socialist theory, but also of design-oriented city planning. Much has been written about the “retreat” of dropout youth to rural communes. Far less known is the extent to which ecologically-minded countercultural youth began to subject city planning to a devastating review, often advancing alternative proposals to dehumanizing urban “revitalization” and “rehabilitation” projects. Generally, these alternatives stemmed from a perspective toward design that was radically different from that of conventional city planners. For the countercultural planners, the point of departure for any design was not “the pleasing object” or the “efficiency” with which it expedited traffic, communications, and economic activities. Rather, these new planners concerned themselves primarily with the relationship of design to the fostering of personal intimacy, many-sided social relationships, nonhierarchical modes of organization, communistic living arrangements, and material independence from the market economy. Design, here, took its point of departure not from abstract concepts of space or a functional endeavor to improve the status quo, but from an explicit critique of the status quo and a conception of the free human relationships that were to replace it. The design elements of a plan followed from radically new social alternatives. The attempt was made to replace hierarchical space by “liberated space.”

Among the many similar plans to be developed in the late sixties and early seventies, perhaps the most impressive was formulated by an ad hoc group in Berkeley from People’s Architecture, the local Tenants Union, and members of the local food cooperative or “Food Conspiracy.” The plan (erroneously attributed by Theodore Roszak in his excellent work *Sources* to the Berkeley *Tribe*, an “underground” newspaper) shows a remarkably high degree of radical social consciousness. It draws its inspiration from the “People’s Park” episode in May 1969, when dropout youth, students, and later ordinary citizens of Berkeley fought for more than a week with police to retain a lovely park and playground which they had spontaneously created out of a neglected, garbage-strewn lot owned by the University of California. The park, eventually reclaimed by its university proprietors at the cost of a young man’s life, many severe injuries, and massive arrests,

is at this writing a parking lot and paved soccer field. But the memory of the episode has waned slowly. To the young Berkeley planners, "People's Park was the beginning of the Revolutionary Ecology Movement." And the plan, entitled a *Blueprint for a Communal Environment* is radically "countercultural." "The revolutionary culture," declares the *Blueprint*, "gives us new, communal, eco-viable ways of organizing our lives, while people's politics gives us the means to resist the System."³¹ The *Blueprint* is not only a project for reconstruction but for struggle on a wide social terrain against the established order.

The plan aims at more than the structural redesigning of an existing community; it avows and explores a new way of life at the most elementary level of human intercourse. This new way of life is communal and economically divorced as much as possible from commodity relationships. The design gives expression to a basic goal; "Communal ways of organizing our lives help to cut down on consumption, to provide for basic human needs more efficiently, to resist the system, to support ourselves and overcome the misery of atomized living." In this single sentence, the social and private are thoroughly fused. Design is assigned the function of articulating a new life style that stands opposed to the repressive organization of society.³²

Shelter in the *Blueprint* is redesigned to "overcome the fragmentation of our lives ... to encourage communication and break down privatization." The plan observes that with "women's liberation, and a new communal morality the nuclear family is becoming obsolete." Accordingly, floor plans are proposed which allow for larger multipurpose rooms which promote more interaction — "such as communal dining rooms, meeting spaces, and work areas." Methods are suggested for turning roofs and exterior upper walls into communicating links with neighboring houses as well as between rooms and upper stories.³³

"All land in Berkeley is treated purely as a marketable commodity," observes the *Blueprint*. "Space is parcelled into neat consumer packages. In between rows of land parcels are transportation 'corridors' to keep people flowing from workplace to market." The *Blueprint* proposes the dismantling of backyard and sideyard fences to open land as interior parks and gardens. Platform "bridgeways" between houses are suggested to break down the strict division between indoor and outdoor space. The purpose of these suggestions is not merely to bring nature into the urban dweller's horizon, but to open intimate avenues of communication between people. The concern of the plan is not merely with public plazas and parks, but the immediate neighborhoods where people live their daily lives. With magnificent insouciance, the plan tosses all considerations of private property to the winds by suggesting that vacant lots be appropriated by neighborhoods and turned into communal space.³⁴

Half the streets of Berkeley, the plan notes, could be easily closed off to stimulate collective transportation experiments and reduce traffic congestion in residential areas. This would "free *ten times* more land area for public use than we now have in park acreage. Intersections could become parks, gardens, plazas, with paving material recovered and used to make artificial hills." The plan recommends that Berkeley residents should walk or bicycle to places whenever feasible. If motor vehicles must be used, they should be pooled and maintained on a communal basis. People should drive together to common destinations in order to reduce the number of vehicles.

³¹ "Blueprint for a Communal Environment" in *Sources*, ed. Theodore Roszak (New York: Harper Row, 1972) p. 393.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 394.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 399, 400.

Community services will make a “quantum leap” when “small groups of neighbors mobilize resources and energy in order to cement fragmented neighborhoods back together and begin to take care of business (from child care to education) on a local level and in an integrated way.” In this connection, the *Blueprint* suggests that men and women should rotate the use of their homes for child care centers. First-aid skills and knowledge of more advanced medical techniques should be mobilized on a neighborhood basis. Finally, wastes should be collectively recycled to avoid pollution and waste of resources.³⁵

At its core, the plan advances a refreshingly imaginative program for ruralizing the city and fostering the material independence of its inhabitants. Communally worked backyard gardens could be created and food cultivated organically. Here, the plan enters into the specifics of composting, mulching, and the preparation of seedlings. A “People’s Market” could be established “which will receive the organic products of rural communes and small farmers, and distribute them to the neighborhood [food] conspiracies. Such a market place will have other uses — craftspeople can sell their wares there.” The plan sees the People’s Market as a “solid example of Creative thinking about communal use of space. Its structure will be portable, and will be built in such a way as to serve neighborhood kids; as play equipment on non-market days.”³⁶

The *Blueprint* creates no illusion that this ensemble of reconstructive ideas will “liberate” Berkeley or other communities. It sees in the realization of these concepts the first steps toward reorienting the individual self from a passive acceptance of isolation, egotism, and dependence on bureaucratic institutions to initiatives from below that will recover communal contacts and face-to-face networks of mutual aid. Ultimately, society itself will have to be reorganized by the great majority who are now forced into hierarchical subservience to the Few. But until these sweeping changes are achieved, a new state of mind, buttressed by working community ties, must be fashioned so that people will be able to fuse their deeply personal desires with higher social ideals. Unless this fusion is achieved, these ideals will remain abstractions and will never be realized at all.

Many of the *Blueprint*’s technical suggestions are not new. The notion of roof openings to link houses together is borrowed from Pueblo Indian villages, the urban gardens from medieval communes and precapitalist towns generally, the pedestrian streets and plazas from the Renaissance cities and earlier urban forms. In the contest of an increasingly bureaucratic society, however, the *Blueprint* is unique in deriving its concepts from radically new life styles and reinforcing them in a single ensemble with many details of traditional design. Doubtless, quite a few of the design proposals in the plan can be assimilated piecemeal to new construction projects without having a significant impact on conventional ways of life. This has been the fate of many radical ideas and art forms in the past. But the *Blueprint* is true to itself insofar as it is not merely a structural plan. The authentic content of its proposals is the kind of life in which its design elements are rooted. The premise of the plan, in advance of any design, is a culture counter to the prevailing one — a culture that emphasizes community rather than isolation, the sharing of resources and skills rather than their privatized possession and accumulation, independence from rather than dependence upon the bourgeois marketplace, loving relations and mutual aid rather than egotism and competition. The planners, whether or not they were conscious of their historic antecedents, were presenting their vision of urban life in Hellenic terms. The truly human city, to them, is

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 411–412.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 405.

a way of life that fosters the integration of individual and society, of town and country, of personal and social needs within a framework that retains the integrity of each. A new synthesis is to be achieved which makes the fulfillment of individual and urban needs complementary to the fulfillment of social and ecological needs.

The countercultural movement has since subsided from the highpoint it reached in the sixties. The beautiful hopes which young people so enthusiastically advanced in dropout and radical student communities have been diluted by the harsh and often brutal hostility of an adult public that, owing to its own conditioning and insecurities, has entrenched itself in the status quo and sought respite from any challenges to traditional values. A Neanderthal state power, by characterizing creativity as “permissiveness” and enthusiasm as “licence,” has added its own telling weight to the thrust against innovation and social change. Where the counterculture has managed to hold its own against overtly hostile social forces, it has had to contend with a political mode of dope-peddling in the form of sectarian Marxism and “Third World” voyeurism. Archaic ideologies and modes of organization assume the semblance of radicalism and fester like toxic germs in the wounds opened by public malaise and political repression.

Yet even this ebbing phase of a much larger development could be valuable, perhaps even indispensable, as a sobering period of maturation. A new world will not be gained merely by strewn the pathway to the future with flowers. The intuitive impulses that exploded with such naive enthusiasm in the sixties, only to become harsh and dehumanizing in the pseudoradicalism that closed the decade, were never adequate to the long-range historic project of developing a wider public consciousness of the need for social change. By the late sixties, the counterculture ceased to speak to America with understanding and in relevant terms. Its politicization took the worst possible form — arrogance and a senselessly violent rhetoric. Far more than the flowers of the mid-sixties, the angry clenched fists of the late sixties were irrelevant in trying to reach an increasingly alarmed and uncomprehending public. It has finally become evident that a crude commitment to muscle power by self-appointed political “vanguards” will no more effectuate radical change than an intuitive commitment to flower power. Only a unity of intuition with reason, of hopeful enthusiasm with patient wisdom, of emotional sensibility with a coherent consciousness can hope to make the counterculture an influential force, perhaps the paramount force, in reshaping American life and carrying it beyond the crests reached in the sixties.

Certain demands raised by the counterculture movement are imperishable. No matter how far the movement itself may recede from its earlier eminence, these demands must be recovered and advanced if there is to be any future for society at all. In calling for a melding of the abstract ideals of social liberation with those of personal liberation, in seeking to form the nuclear libertarian communistic relationships so necessary to rear a truly emancipated society, in trying to subvert the influence of the commodity nexus on the individual self and its relationship with other selves, in emphasizing the need for a spontaneous expression of sexuality, sensuality, and a humanistic sensibility, in challenging hierarchy and domination in all its forms and manifestations, and finally, in trying to synthesize new, decentralized communities based on an ecological outlook that unites the most advanced features of urban and rural life — in raising all of these demands as a single ensemble, the counterculture gave a modern expression to a historic mainstream of human dreams and aspirations. And it did so not from a hopelessly visionary utopianism, but based on the real technological and material possibilities at hand in the advanced capitalist countries of the world. Those demands can never be fully submerged by political or psychic

repression. They are the voice of self-conscious reason that, once articulated theoretically and reinforced by material conditions that render them possible, are sedimented into the collective unconscious of humanity. The responsibility of the counterculture, when it matures to the level of theoretical self-consciousness and self-disciplined rationality, is to help make this collective unconscious acutely conscious. To fulfill this responsibility, the conscious nuclei that crystallize within the undefined countercultural matrix formed in the sixties require patience, wisdom, and an unflagging awareness that they are rooted in the mainstream of history that leads to the future, however much their efforts to promote consciousness may suffer periodic setbacks.

This project is strongly favored by the harsh fact that few choices are left today for the existing society. The city has completed its historic evolution. Its dialectic from the village, temple area, fortress, or administrative center, each dominated by agrarian interests, to the *polis* and medieval commune during an era when town and country were in some kind of equilibrium, to the bourgeois city which completely dominates the countryside, now culminates in the emergence of the megalopolis, the absolute negation of the city. No longer can we speak of a clearly defined urban entity with an authentically collective interest or outlook of its own. Just as each phase or moment of the city has its own internal limits, the megalopolis represents the limits of the city as such — of *civitas* as distinguished from *communitat*. The political principle, in the form of the state, dissolves the last vestiges of the social principle, replacing all community ties by bureaucratic ones. Personified space and the human scale disintegrate into institutional space and urban gigantism, hierarchically grounded in the impersonal domination of one human by another and the destruction of nature by a rapacious society motivated by production for the sake of production. This “anti-city,” neither urban nor rural in any traditional sense, affords no arena for community and genuine sociation. At most, the megalopolis is a patchwork of mutually hostile enclaves or ghettos, each of which is internally “united” not by a positive harmony of creative impulses but rather by a negative hostility toward the stranger on its perimeter. Physically, morally, and logistically, this urban cancer is in rapid decay. It does not function on its own terms as an arena for the efficient production and marketing of commodities. To say that this creature is breaking down is an understatement: the megalopolis is an active force in social dissociation and psychic dissolution. It is the negation of the city as an arena of close human proximity and palpable cultural tradition, and as a means of collecting creative human energies.

To restore urbanity as a meaningful terrain for sociation, culture, and community, the megalopolis must be ruthlessly dissolved and replaced by new decentralized eco-communities, each carefully tailored to the natural ecosystem in which it is located. One might reasonably say that these ecocommunities will possess the best features of the *polis* and medieval commune, supported by rounded eco-technologies that rescale the most advanced elements of modern technology — including such energy sources as solar and wind power — to local dimensions. The equilibrium between town and country will be restored — not as a sprawling suburb that mistakes a lawn or patch of strategically placed trees for nature, but as an interactive functional eco-community that unites industry with agriculture, mental work with physical, individuality with community. Nature will not be reduced to a mere symbol of the natural, a spectatorial object to be seen from a window or during a stroll, it will become an integral part of all aspects of human experience, from work to play. Only in this Form can the needs of nature become integrated with the needs of humanity and yield an authentic ecological consciousness that transcends the instrumentalist “environmental” outlook of the social and sanitary engineer.

Our place in the history of the city is unique. Precapitalist cities either stagnated within their limits or destructively exploded beyond them as a result of the incomplete technological development that perpetuated material scarcity. If the city was not frozen as in Asia and the Near East by hereditary castes and agrarian hierarchies, its unity was dissolved by the commodity and marketplace. Modern technology has now reached so advanced a level of development that it permits humanity to reconstruct urban life along lines that could foster a balanced, well-rounded, and harmonious community of Interests among people and between humanity and nature. This ecocommunity, which would be more than a city, would have no limits other than those consciously fashioned by human creativity, reason, and ecological considerations. The ecocommunity, supported by a rational eotechnology, would be an organic urban entity respirationized by a new sensibility and reinforced by a new security in material life — an authentic arena for the harmonization and fulfillment of humanity's deepest and most creative impulses.

The alternative to this development can only be the horrifying disintegration of urban life into a condition of chronic social war, personal violence, and bureaucratic mobilization. If the archaic hieroglyph of the city was a wall intersected by two roads, the symbol of the megalopolis is rapidly becoming the police badge superimposed by a gun. In this kind of city, social irrationality will take its toll as the absolute division of human from human until a final harvest is reaped in the revenge of nature on humanity. The limits of the megalopolis can be formulated as nothing less than the limits of society itself as an instrument of hierarchy and domination. Left to their own development, these underlying elements of the megalopolis spell the doom not only of the city as such but of human sociation. For in such a "world, technology, subserved to irrational forces, becomes the instrument not of harmony and security, but the systematic plundering of the human spirit and the natural world.

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Murray Bookchin
The Limits of the City
1974

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