

An Introduction to Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of American Cities*

for use by MFA Students
in Graphic Design,

The Maryland Institute College of Art

February, 2008

Jane Jacobs in 6 words:



Jacobs loves sidewalks ...

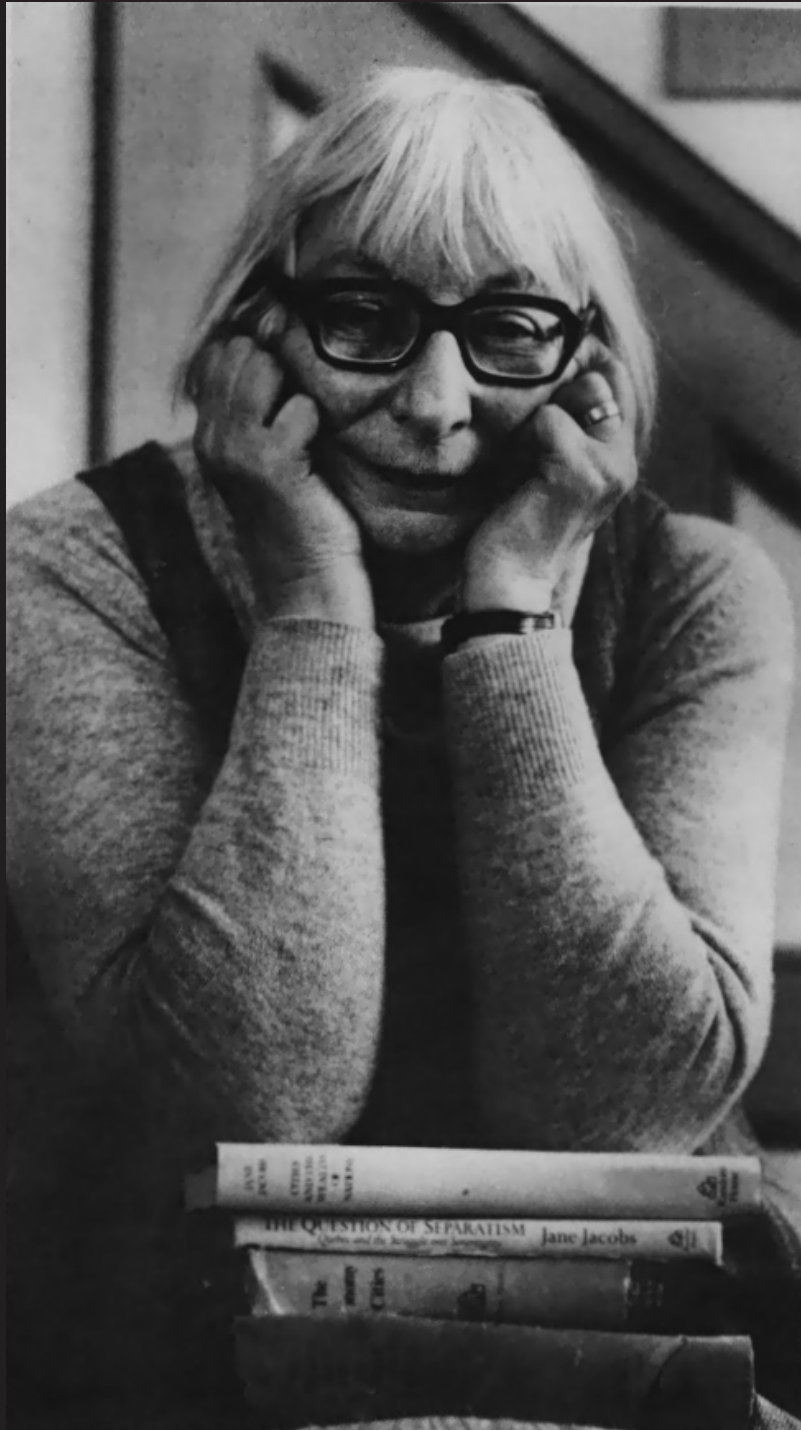


... and hates parks.

Let's try that again:

Jane Jacobs wants to restore dignity to streets and sidewalks by understanding the kinds of activity and relationships they support,

while re-evaluating parks and open space, including their dependence on streets and sidewalks for their vitality, interest, and safety.



JANE JACOBS

:: Born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, 1916

:: Moved to Greenwich Village in New York City, 1928

:: Associate editor of *Architectural Forum*, 1952

:: She wrote *The Death and Life of American Cities*, 1961

:: In 1962, she was Chairperson of the Joint Committee to Stop the Lower Manhattan Expressway.

:: Protesting the Vietnam War, she and her family emigrated to Toronto, Canada in 1968, where she continued to work as an urban activist.

:: She died in Toronto, in 2006 at the age of 90.



**THE RADIANT GARDEN CITY BEAUTIFUL:
OR, WHAT JANE JACOBS HATES ABOUT
URBAN PLANNING**

In the opening sentence of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs declares war on the major schools of urban planning:

“This book is an attack on current city planning and rebuilding. It is also, and mostly, an attempt to introduce new principles of city planning and rebuilding, different and even opposite from those now taught in everything from schools of architecture and planning to the Sunday supplements and women’s magazines.

She names three major targets of urban planning.

- :: the Garden City
- :: the Radiant City
- :: the City Beautiful.

Learn about each one on the slides that follow.

THE GARDEN CITY

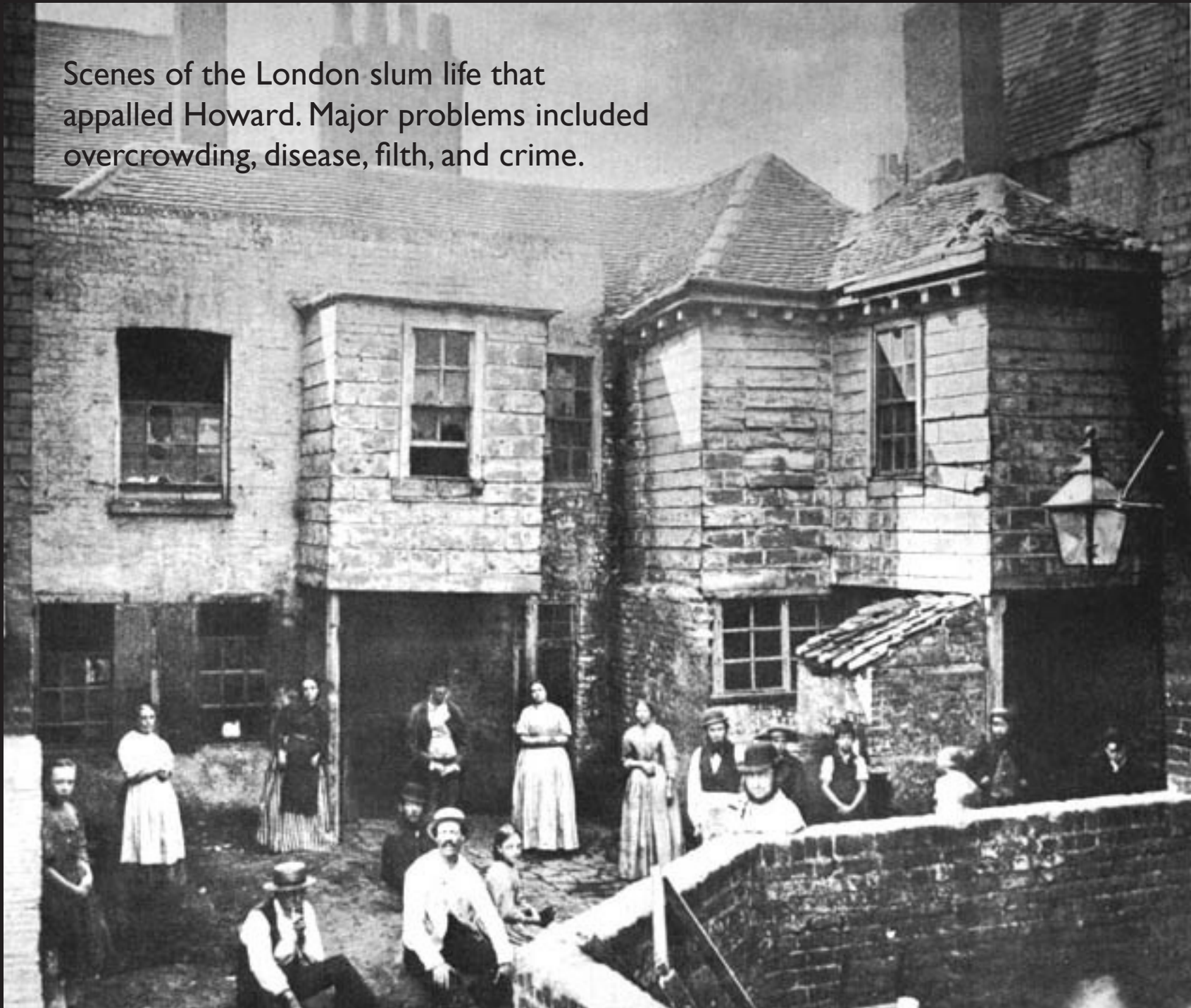


Ebenezer Howard, 1850-1928

:: traveled in America

:: a reformer appalled by the living conditions of London's poor

Scenes of the London slum life that appalled Howard. Major problems included overcrowding, disease, filth, and crime.



LONDON "SLUM": Market Court, Kensington. Demolished late 1860s.
<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/london/56.html>



LONDON SLUM: c. 1901?

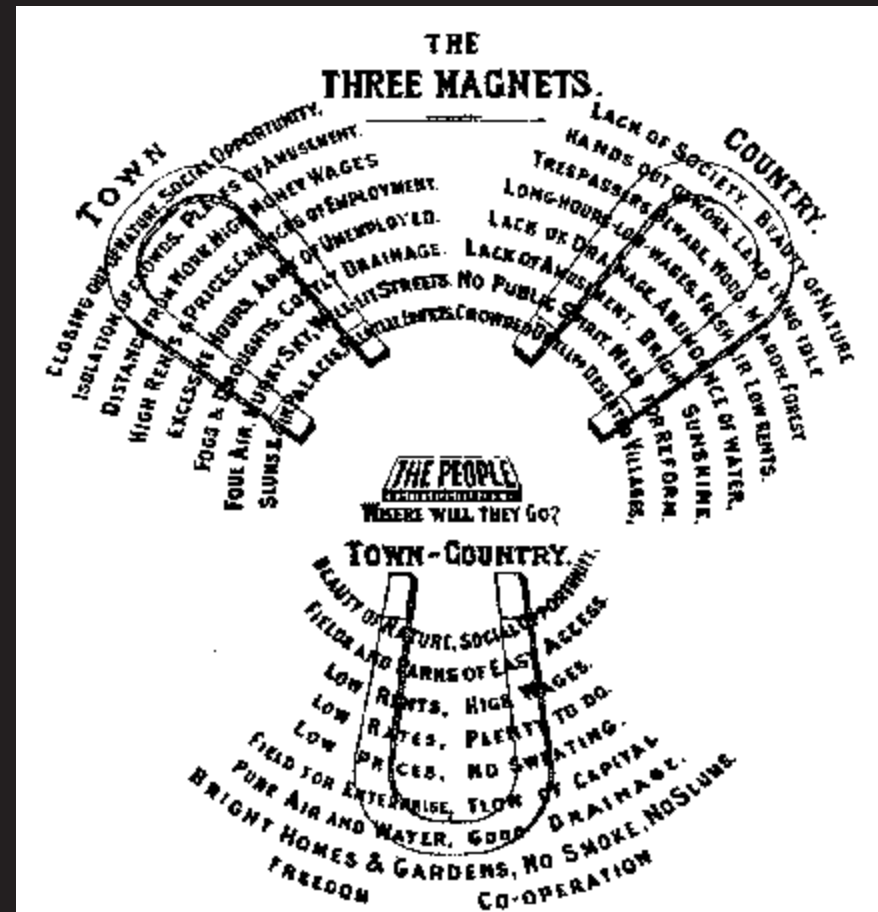
<http://www.victorianlondon.org/houses/slums.htm>

Ebenezer Howard *The Three Magnets*

Howard's "magnet" compares the attractions of town and country, and suggests a synthesis in the ideal of a Garden City.

Jacobs writes,

"Howard set spinning powerful and city-destroying ideas. He conceived that the way to deal with the city's functions was to sort and sift out of the whole certain simple uses, and to arrange each of these in relative self-containment. He focused on the provision of wholesome housing as the central problem, to which everything else was subsidiary; furthermore he defined wholesome housing in terms only of suburban physical qualities and small-town social qualities... He conceived of good planning as a series of static acts; in each case, the plan must anticipate all that is needed and be protected, after it is built, against any but the most minor subsequent changes."



Letchworth Garden City, north of London, is the “first planned city.”



Letchworth Garden City, built in order to demonstrate Howard’s ideas, became the model for a bunch of “New Towns” and “Garden Cities” in England and the United States, including:

Chatham Village (Pittsburgh)

Garden City, New York

Baldwin Hills Village, Los Angeles



REMEMBER LEWISH MUMFORD



LEWIS MUMFORD
1895-1990

LEWIS MUMFORD: *New School for Social Research*
AMENIA; NEW YORK *Jacobs*

1 August 1958

<i>CG</i>	<i>AUG - 5 '58</i>	<i>CG</i>	<i>no R</i>

Dear Mr Gilpatrick:

SEP 16 1958

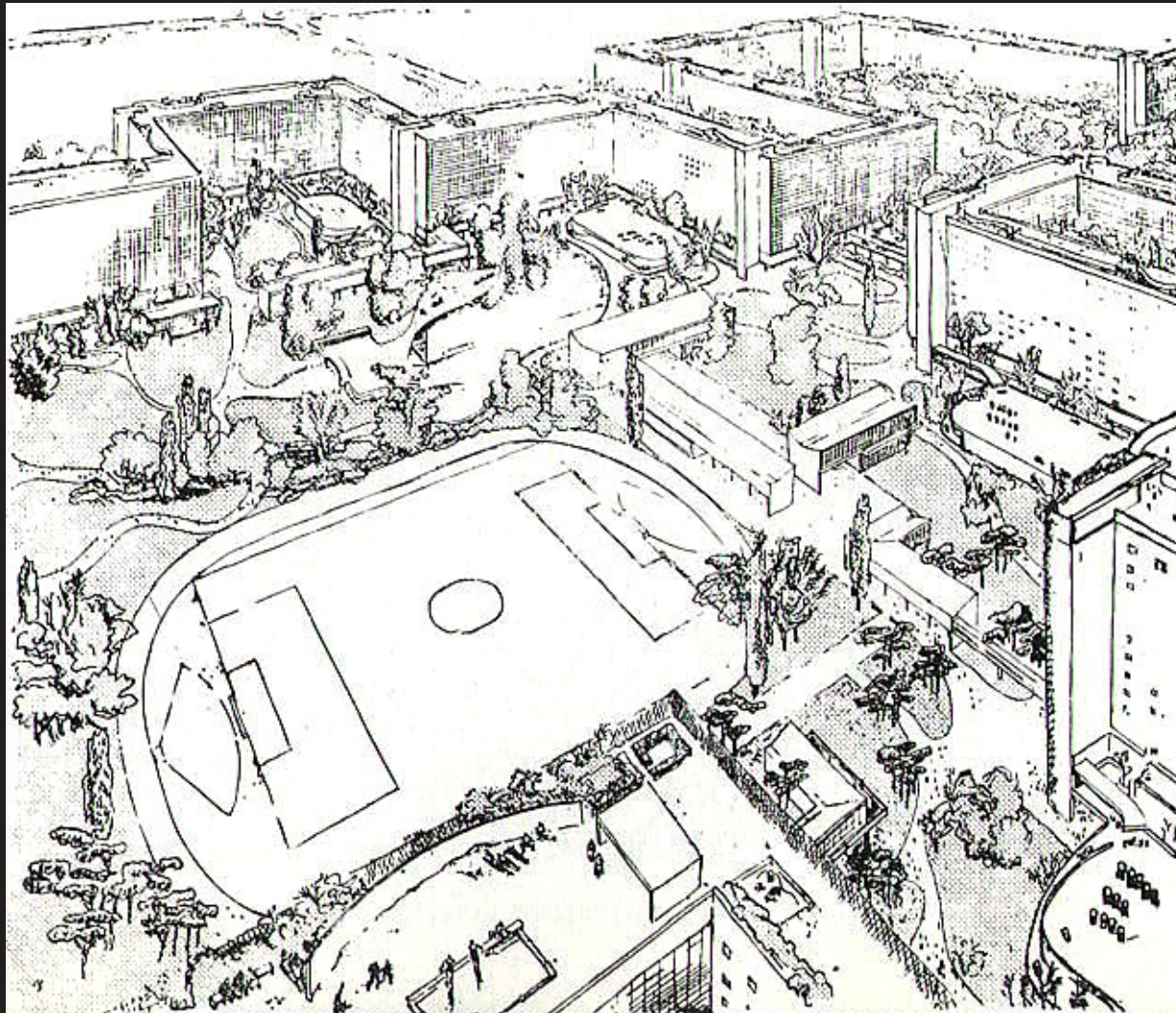
Your inquiry about Mrs Jacobs' project evokes a very willing response from me: for there is no one among the younger ~~generation whose work~~ in housing and planning, seems to me more promising. Indeed, she has already opened various fresh lines of investigation on matters that have been singularly ignored or misinterpreted by both planners and urban sociologists

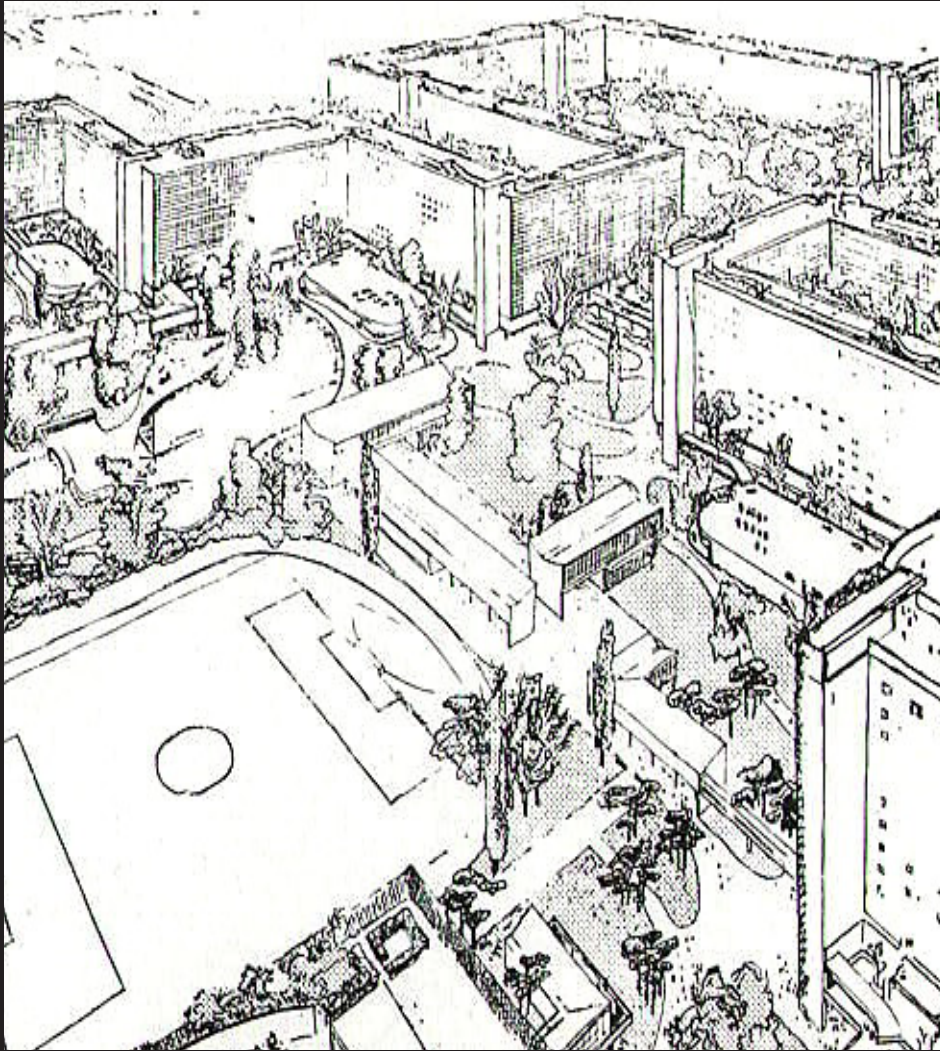
Like a construction gang bulldozing a site clean of all habitations, she bulldozes out of existence every desirable innovation in urban planning during the last century and every competing idea, without even a pretense of critical evaluation. ..*The Death and Life of American Cities* is a mingling of sense and sensibility, of mature judgments and school girl howlers.

-- Lewis Mumford, from review of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961

THE RADIANT CITY

Le Corbusier, 1887-1965





“Suppose we are entering the city by way of the Great Park. Our fast car takes the special elevated motor track between the majestic sky scrapers; as we approach nearer, there is seen the repetition against the sky of the 24 skyscrapers; to our left and right on the outskirts of each particular area are the municipal and administrative buildings; and enclosing the space are the museums and university buildings. The whole city is a Park.”

-- Le Corbusier on the Radiant City, cited by Jane Jacobs, p. 21.

CORBU:
not just
buildings



“cushion basket” designed by
Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, and
Pierre Jeanneret, 1928

*frame of
furniture
outside*



chaise lounge, 1928



sling chair, 1928



http://www.queensmuseum.org/qmail/2007_02/images/rmoses.jpg

ROBERT MOSES, 1888-1981

Robert Moses brought the Radiant City to New York. His vision of the modernized city included expressways that encouraged a car culture of commuting in and out of New York. His highways disrupted many traditional working class neighborhoods. Jacobs was one of his fiercest opponents.

ROBERT MOSES
ONE GRACIE SQUARE
NEW YORK 26, N. Y.

November 15, 1961

PERSONAL

Mr. Bennett Cerf
Random House, Inc.
457 Madison Avenue
New York 22, N. Y.

Dear Bennett:

I am returning the book you sent me. Aside from the fact that it is intemperate and inaccurate, it is also libelous. I call your attention, for example, to page 131.

Sell this junk to someone else.

Cordially,



Attach.

Robert Moses returns Jacobs' book to Random House.

I found it at <http://www.blog.sethroberts.net/2008/02/15/introductions-to-jane-jacobs-cccibcontinued/#comments>



JANE JACOBS MEETS ROBERT MOSES
(or, a little Photoshop is a dangerous thing.)



CITY BEAUTIFUL:
The World's Fair
Approach
to Urban Planning

World's Fair, Chicago 1893

JANE JACOBS ON THE WORLD'S FAIR

“One heavy, grandiose monument after another was arranged in the exposition park, like frosted pastries on a tray, in a sort of squat, decorative forecast of Le Corbusier’s later repetitive ranks of towers in a park. This orgiastic assemblage of the rich and monumental captured the imagination of both planners and public. It gave impetus to a movement called the City Beautiful ... The aim of the City Beautiful was the City Monumental, modeled on the fair. City after city built its civic center or its cultural center. ... However they were arranged, the important part was that the monuments had been sorted out from the rest of the city, and assembled into the grandest effect thought possible, the whole being treated as a unit, in a separate and well-defined way.”



FANCY PASTRIES

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| No. 1.—MERINGUE FANCY. | No. 2.—POURRI DE TERRE. | No. 3.—MALVERNIAN. |
| No. 4.—MERINGUE FANCY. | No. 5.—CROISSANT BISMARCK. | No. 6.—MERINGUE FANCY. |
| No. 7.—FLORENTINE SPONGE FANCY. | No. 8.—HARLEQUIN MERINGUE GENSÉE. | No. 9.—GRAND VICTORIAN. |
| No. 10.—PÉROUSE. | No. 11.—ESGLANDRE. | No. 12.—VIENNESE STRIPS. |
| No. 13.—CHERRY STRIPS. | No. 14.—CAFÉ CAKE. | No. 15.—ALMOND STRIPS. |

PLATE XXII.

DIVISION VIII.

(*Death and Life*, p. 24)



THE MALL, Washington, DC

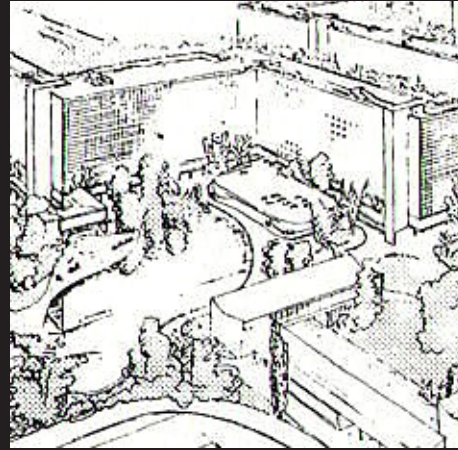
http://www.som.com/content.cfm/washington_mall_and_constitution_gardens
Bicentennial renovations, by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, 1976.



THE MALL, take two:

.... at LEGOLAND.

Can you find the spectators at the edges of this “model city”?



VERY DIFFERENT MODELS

:: garden suburbs

:: modernist
skylines

:: theme park
down-towns

“The Decentrists ... were aghast at Le Corbusier’s city of towers in the park... And yet, ironically, the Radiant City comes directly out of the Garden City. Le Corbusier accepted the Garden City’s fundamental image, superficially at least, and worked to make it practical for high densities. “The solution will be found in the ‘vertical garden city.’”

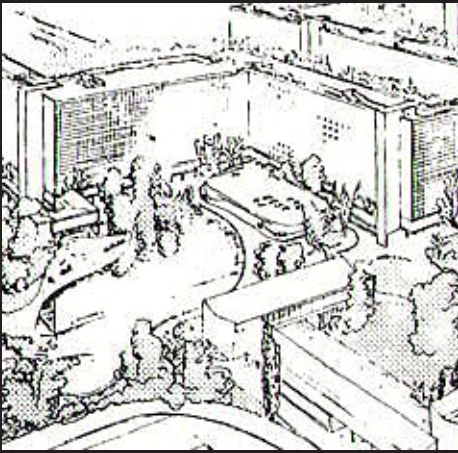
(JJ, 22)



What they share:

:: dislike of traditional urban density and diversity

:: desire to sort out urban functions



:: transfer of park and town model to city living

:: well-intentioned reformers and intellectuals



What Jane proposes:

:: to counter the myth of the city (city as garden)

:: with the reality of cities (“how cities work in real life,” p. 4)

ubiquitous: from Latin
ubique, everywhere

“One principle emerges ubiquitously... This ubiquitous principle is the need of cities for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially... Unsuccessful city areas are areas which lack this kind of intricate mutual support.” (p. 14)

Note J.J.'s attention to patterns, contexts, and systems of use and meaning.

Relationships:
~ sidewalk
~ buildings
~ street

“A sidewalk by itself is nothing. It is an abstraction. It means something only in conjunction with the buildings and other uses that border it, or border other sidewalks very near it.” (p. 29)



SIDEWALKS AND SAFETY

In Chapter Two, Jacobs argues that a properly functioning sidewalk is a deterrent against crime. A busy sidewalk, used day and night by different populations on their way to work, home or leisure, checks crime. Meanwhile, proprietors and neighbors, situated close to the ground, provide “eyes upon the street,” a citizen surveillance system that builds trust, not destroys it.



Turning. Photo by Markus Hartel.

<http://www.markushartel.com/blog/about/about-street-photography.html>

THE PROBLEM WITH PROJECTS



Dearborn Homes, Chicago.

<http://tiger.uic.edu/depts/ahaa/imagebase/maclean/aerials3/089.JPG>

Projects are turned inward onto courtyards, away from streets and sidewalks.

There is little commerce or street life to keep “eyes on the street.”

The lack of sidewalks leads to “Turf”:

- :: gang warfare by the poor
- :: fortressing by the wealthy

SIDEWALK BALLET

Chapter Two ends with Jacob's account of a day on Hudson Street, staged as "an intricate sidewalk ballet." These pages constitute the most quoted and anthologized section of the book. Jacobs writes,

"It is a complex order. Its essence is intricacy of sidewalk use, bringing to it a constant succession of eyes. This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance ..." (50-54).



Period of Time. Photo by Markus Hartel.
<http://www.markushartel.com/blog/sidewalk/period-of-time.html>



Summer, the Lower East Side. Photo by Weegee, 1937.

<http://museum.icp.org/museum/collections/special/weegee/>

SIDEWALK BALLET

an invitation to OBSERVE

(the practice of urban photography)

SIDEWALK BALLET

an invitation to DANCE

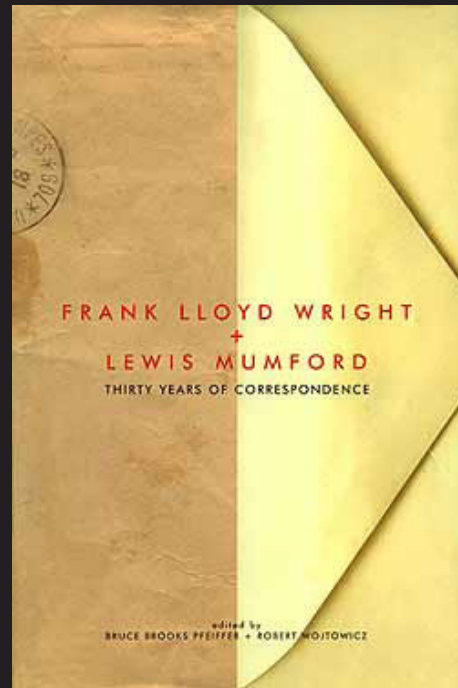
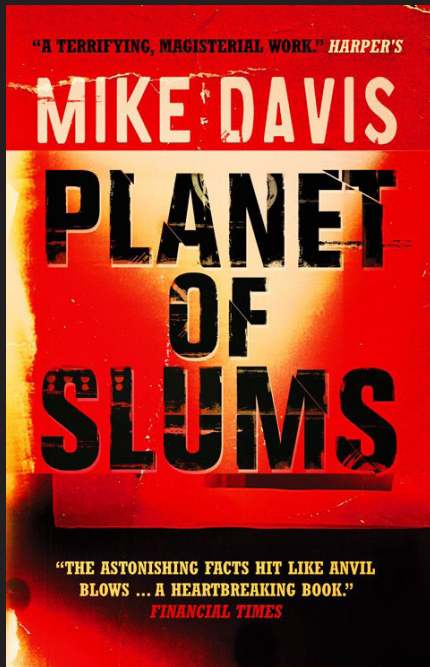
(urban ballet, street dancing,
percussion musicals)



SIDEWALK BALLET

an invitation to READ AND WRITE

(books and blogs about urbanism,
urban fiction written from the
streets)



The screenshot shows the homepage of Triple Crown Publications. At the top, a purple banner reads: WELCOME TO TRIPLE CROWN PUBLICATIONS INTERNATIONAL LEADER OF THE URBAN FICTION RENAISSANCE. The main content area features a large image of a woman's face with the text: Triple Crown Publications Mistress of the GAME AVAILABLE NOW!!! by Sherrie Walker. To the right, a 'MAIN FEATURES' section contains four tiles: 'Vickie Stringer's Blog' (What's on Vickie's mind?), 'Wholesale' (Learn how to buy in bulk), 'Chat' (Visit our message board), and 'Crown TV' (View our latest videos). A sidebar on the right lists navigation links: HOME, BUY BOOKS, AUTHORS, PUBLICITY, CROWN TV, BOOK CLUB, MESSAGE BOARD, DOWNLOADS, ABOUT US, CONTACT US, and SITE MAP. At the bottom of the sidebar is a search bar with the text 'Search the Site:' and a 'Search' button.

SIDEWALK BALLET

an invitation to ART AND DESIGN



Banksey, the Albert Pub, Brighton.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/southerncounties/content/image_galleries/brighton_graffiti_gallery.shtml?28

CHAPTER FIVE

The Uses of Neighborhood Parks

Jacobs opens her chapter on parks by turning common planning wisdom upside down:

“Conventionally, neighborhood parks or parklike open spaces are considered boons conferred on the deprived populations of cities.

Let us turn this thought around, and consider city parks deprived places that need the boon of life and appreciation conferred on them.”
(p. 88)



Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia

“Rittenhouse Square possesses a diverse rim and diverse neighborhood hinterland. ... This mixture of uses of buildings directly produces for the park a mixture of users who enter and leave the park at different times ... The park thus possesses an intricate sequence of uses and users.” (p. 96)

A thesis is born: Jane Jacobs on Making

Jane Jacobs is not herself a maker.
In fact, she maps the *limits of making*
-- the limits, that is, of our ability to
engineer our environments in order
to shape human behavior.

She is not, however, telling us
to abandon our designs. Rather,
she leaves us with the following
challenge:

**How can our acts of making become more effective
by working *with* rather than *against* human patterns
of use and interaction, elaborating forms of life and
knowledge embedded in urban environments ?**

SUMMARY

One of the truisms of orthodox planning is the idea that parks and open space are in and of themselves healthy, positive additions to urban and suburban life – genuine and inarguable improvements over the asphalt and concrete of urban streets and sidewalks.

Jacobs “turns this idea around” by suggesting that it is cities (their activity, their density, the interest that they bring in the form of foot traffic, the enclosure they provide by way of buildings and streets) that make parks successful. The lack of sufficient city life renders parks both dull and dangerous.

It is not quite fair to say that “Jane Jacobs loves sidewalks and hates parks,” but it’s a good place to start. Read her book with the tension between *sidewalks* (traditional cities) and *parks* (garden cities) in mind. And think about its resonances for design. Where’s the sidewalk? Where’s the park?